

# IRAN

January – February 2021

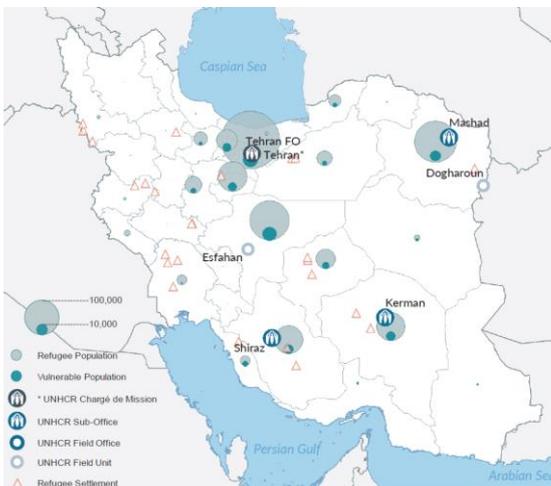
## OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

In February, Iran was on the verge of entering its fourth wave of COVID-19. Movement restrictions, closures of non-essential businesses and health protocols continued to be enforced throughout the country. The Statistical Centre of Iran announced the projected inflation rate in 2021 to be around 30%, a decrease of 0.5 percent from 2020, while Iran’s unemployment rate stood at 9.4% in the third quarter of 2020, a 1.2% decline compared with the same period of last year. In February, UNHCR and its partners BAFIA and IHIO signed the partnership agreement for the 7th cycle of the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI) scheme, allowing 120,000 of the most vulnerable refugees to see their premium costs covered for 12 months.



\* Based on the data received from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in October 2020, on which consultations are ongoing. The Afghan/Iraqi breakdown is based on UNHCR’s estimations.

-  **96%** of refugees live in urban areas side by side with the local community
-  **4%** of refugees live in 20 refugee settlements in Iran



## POPULATION MOVEMENTS

### VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION

In 2021, **253** individuals, all Afghans had returned from Iran to their country of origin by the end of February, as part of UNHCR’s voluntary repatriation programme. Due to COVID-19, UNHCR is currently only carrying out voluntary repatriations from its Dogharoun Field Unit.

Additionally, **160,000** undocumented Afghans have returned to Afghanistan since the beginning of 2021, an increase of more than **150%** compared to the same period in 2020, potentially due to losses in livelihoods linked with COVID-19

### RESETTLEMENT

By the end of February 2021, **6** individuals had departed for resettlement to Sweden. The outbreak of COVID-19 significantly affected resettlement departures. By the end of February 2021, **4** resettlement cases (8 individuals) had been submitted to two countries, namely Sweden and Norway and awaited a decision.

### SECONDARY MOVEMENT

As of January 2021, Afghans were the **second most common** citizenship to claim asylum in Europe (3,900 claims), after Syrians (10,400 claims).

Afghans made up **6%** of all arrivals to Europe through the Mediterranean from 2020 to February 2021.

According to the Mixed Migration Centre (June 2020), **25%** of Afghans interviewed in Turkey started their journey from Iran, 4% from Pakistan, and 71% from Afghanistan.

**1,530** unaccompanied Afghan children were reported to be in Greece as of January 2021. Afghan children make up **38%** of all unaccompanied children in Greece.

## PROTECTION

As part of plans to **regularize working children** in Kerman, UNHCR, the provincial Government and partner NGOs started an identification process, with the aim of providing children and their families with needed support and services. Given the involvement of different organizations, the plan has the potential to make positive changes in the lives of hundreds of working children. In January, **transportation services for persons with disabilities** became functional in the city of Shiraz. Foreigners with a valid residency document, including refugees, can benefit from this service at an affordable cost, in the same way as Iranian nationals.

## REGISTRATION/DOCUMENTATION

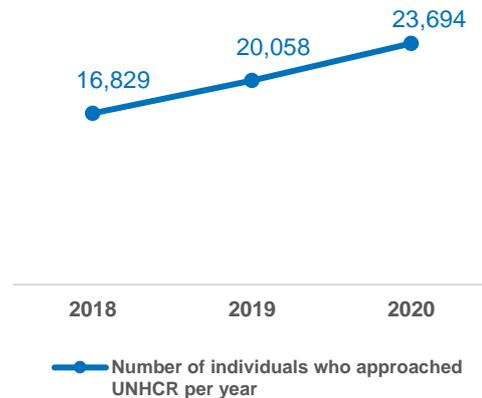
The process to extend Afghan refugees' **Amayesh cards** (the equivalent of refugee ID cards for Afghan refugees) started in June 2020 and was completed at the end of February 2021. Some refugees continued to face difficulties to afford the extension fees, yet the Government of Iran showed flexibility by providing discounts to extremely vulnerable refugees.

As of the end of January, **one e-Tazkira center**, for the biometric registration of all Afghan nationals in Iran, was set up in Kerman province and will carry out similar activities as e-Tazkira centers in Mashhad and Zahedan where Afghanistan has consulates. In Mashhad, the center is currently registering 300-400 families per day. The fee for the issuance of e-Tazkira documents is of **USD 10** per individual. Some Afghan refugees and passport holders have approached UNHCR seeking cash assistance, to be able to pay for the **issuance fee**, as many reported having had to cut down some basic expenses to pay the fees.

By early February, 86,558 cases (53,761 below the age of 18 and 32,797 above the age of 18) had applied to obtain the **Iranian nationality**, since the recently-amended law started allowing children born to Iranian mothers and non-Iranian fathers, to apply for Iranian nationality. Since the amendment of the law, 570 have successfully received their *Shenasnameh*, the Iranian national ID. The amended law was promulgated for implementation on 2 June 2020 by the Cabinet of Ministers, and started being implemented in October 2020. UNHCR continues to provide support to refugees through **legal consultation** and **advocacy** with the Government.

## CASE MANAGEMENT

In February, UNHCR was approached **2,002** times via its receptions and hotlines. The main reasons for the approaches were to receive assistance (1,458 approaches), for resettlement (205 approaches) and for health reasons (122). In Mashhad, challenges with medical expenses and inability to purchase household items have been the major reasons for approaching UNHCR.



In Tehran, UNHCR continued its efforts to reach out to local NGOs and charities that may provide protection and assistance to refugees during the pandemic. In February 2021, a total of **126 cases were referred to and assisted** by various NGOs/INGOs and charities. Livelihoods, health and legal assistance were recorded as the three main reasons for these referrals.

In Tehran, as part of continuing efforts to expand and enhance its networking and referral system, UNHCR established a **virtual partnership** with a charity called "Nour". The charity is mandated to support and help improve living conditions for cancer patients aged over 16, through information sharing and training on the prevention and eradication of cancer.

As UNHCR's in-person receptions remained closed due to COVID-19, groups of refugees have continued to **request to meet with UNHCR in person**, instead of remotely, on the grounds that remote sessions do not offer the same quality as face-to-face interview sessions, where refugees said they can better express their problems. Nonetheless, as this is not an option for all, a guidance for staff on remote case management for child protection and gender-based violence cases has been developed in order to remotely yet adequately address at-risk cases when required.

## LEGAL ASSISTANCE

As of the end of February 2021, **204** individuals had had their cases examined by 16 Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs), as part of a joint UNHCR-BAFIA initiative to provide legal assistance to refugees in Iran, to resolve disagreements through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. A total of **671** individuals were also assisted by UNHCR-Hired Lawyers (UHLs) in 2021. Due to the COVID-19 situation, UHLs mostly provided legal counselling remotely.

## EDUCATION

Some **500,000** students (including 470,000 Afghans) have been enrolled in the 2020-2021 academic year in Iran, including some 138,000 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 January, UNHCR participated in the inaugural ceremony of a **primary school newly built** by UNHCR and the Ministry of Education in Borazjan, Bushehr province, benefitting 360 students (80 Afghan students) for the 2021-2022 scholastic year.

A total of 3,844 children and adolescents continued to receive literacy training at both literacy and transition levels provided by the UNHCR Government partner Literacy Movement Organization.

UNHCR offices across the country continued to report that refugee students face **challenges in accessing remote lessons** due to a lack of internet connectivity and of smartphones/tablets, as schools remain closed due to COVID-19. Remote learning during the pandemic has put more refugee children at risk of school dropout and child labor. There have been instances of children sharing the same device or going to the residence of their fellow students to access remote classes, which increased the risk of them contracting COVID-19.

## HEALTH

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

In February, UNHCR, BAFIA and IHIO signed a partnership agreement to cover the **Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI)** premium fee for **120,000** of the most vulnerable refugees for a 12-month period (7<sup>th</sup> cycle of UPHI). UNHCR covered the insurance costs for some **100,000** vulnerable refugees last year, however with the COVID-19 pandemic and the prevailing economic downturn in Iran, leading to increasing vulnerabilities amongst refugees, UNHCR has agreed to temporarily increase the number of refugees covered by the scheme.

As UPHI enrolments have started countrywide, all refugees are being informed by BAFIA and UNHCR to approach enrolment centers (Pishkan centers) to access their insurance scheme. Upon receiving their UPHI booklet, refugees have access to secondary and tertiary healthcare via more than **1,000 public hospitals** countrywide, in the same way as Iranian nationals.

In January, UNHCR delivered one **haemodialysis machine** to a dialysis centre in Shiraz, which provides services to refugees with special diseases. Additionally, in Bushehr, Lorestan, Ilam and the majority of Fars province, hygiene items (diapers) were distributed to support refugees with specific needs.

## LIVELIHOODS

**2,286** refugees were benefiting from UNHCR-supported livelihood interventions as of the end of February 2021. The projects, either implemented directly by UNHCR or

through partnership agreements, include technical and vocational training, income-generating activities in workshops and the establishment of home-based enterprises.

As a result of the pandemic and of the fear of the disease being transmitted, many families in Iran have stopped hiring domestic help. This has affected **female refugees' source of income**, as many usually rely on domestic employment as a source of regular income.

As of the end of February, **448** vulnerable households (2,126 individuals) had received multipurpose cash from UNHCR, out of a total of 3,635 refugee households (18,175 individuals) who will benefit from multipurpose cash support from UNHCR in 2021. The multipurpose cash assistance helps households to meet their basic needs with choice and dignity.

## SHELTER

Paying for rent has been one of the major difficulties faced by refugees in Iran. Given losses of income linked to the pandemic and the absence of job opportunities, many refugees had to compensate the monthly rent by borrowing money, which ultimately causes an increase in the rent price, or them being obliged **to move to remote, cheaper areas**.

In Kerman province, UNHCR and BAFIA visited two refugee settlements in the province, one in Rafsanjan and another in Bardsir, to monitor the implementation of projects and **engage with refugees for a needs assessment**. The areas visited included the health post, temporary isolation centre and sewage treatment system.

## **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 3 March, UNHCR and BAFIA hosted a Friends of SSAR meeting with participation from various donor embassies, governmental counterparts, UN agencies and national and international NGOs. **Voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration** and **resettlement** to third countries were amongst key areas of discussion. The need for increased international support and responsibility-sharing was reiterated with regards to the Afghan refugee situation, with a special emphasis on the inclusion of refugees into the Government of Iran's national COVID-19 response – namely vaccination plans and the provision of tablets to facilitate refugee students' access to remote education.

# FUNDING UPDATE

As of 23 February 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 **5.2 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 unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions.

**Norway** 80 million | **Sweden** 66.9 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Germany** 22.1 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million

Algeria | Armenia | Canada | Estonia | Finland | Iceland | Luxembourg | Malta | Monaco | Montenegro | New Zealand | Portugal | Republic of Korea | Saudi Arabia | Singapore | Thailand | Turkey | Uruguay | Private donors

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