

IRAN went through its fourth COVID-19 wave in April 2021, with over 2.4 million cases and 71,000 deaths by the end of the month. **Based on refugees contacting UNHCR directly and information received from the local authorities, it is understood that 2,474 refugees had contracted COVID-19 by the end of April 2021, with 183 deaths reported both in settlements and urban areas.** Health measures, such as movement restrictions and business closures, continued to be implemented in some parts of the country. Iran, as one of the self-financing participant countries of the COVAX Facility, received the first batch of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine (700,800 doses) on 5 April. By end April, Iran had inoculated only 0.4% of its population, with many health and essential workers still waiting their turn. Working closely with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant's Affairs (BAFIA), UNHCR continued to provide emergency support to the Government of Iran's COVID-19 response.



UNHCR and the Government of Iran continued to provide **ESSENTIAL MEDICINES AND PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT** to help bolster Iran's health system. As part of the government's inclusive policy, refugees and foreign nationals are being included in the COVID-19 National Deployment and Vaccination Plan (NDVP). However, due to challenges with international procurement of vaccines linked to sanctions, the government is facing constraints in operationalizing the NDVP. As such, UNHCR (in collaboration with WHO and UNICEF) will support the government in the formulation of a request for the supply of vaccines for 20% of the mentioned population through the **COVAX Humanitarian Buffer**.

In March, UNHCR began coordination with the government on the application submission in collaboration with other members of the on behalf of the UN country team in Iran - which is expected to be finished in July.

In April, the Government of the Republic of Korea donated **one million N95 masks** to Iran via UNHCR to be utilized at the Ministry of Health affiliated medical facilities, including primary health centres and health posts located in refugee-hosting provinces.



In 2021, in order to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 and reduce the risk of refugees adopting negative coping mechanisms, UNHCR in coordination with BAFIA, is providing cash assistance to some **13,000 vulnerable refugees** to help them meet their basic needs with choice and dignity.



Thanks to the Government of Iran's inclusive health policies, refugees continued to have access to free COVID-19 testing in designated Ministry of Health affiliated centers. **If refugees are enrolled in the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI), they can also access to subsidized treatment and hospitalization** and only pay the franchise fee of 10%. However, UNHCR continued to receive reports of uninsured refugees facing challenges in affording COVID-19 treatment costs. By April 2021, a total of 54,115 refugees had enrolled in the UPHI, out of which 53,380 (45% out of 120,000) refugees were vulnerable and special disease cases (and thus received a free UPHI booklet, supported by UNHCR).



UNHCR and BAFIA continued to communicate with communities to share information on hygiene and health practices through refugee focal points,

UNHCR-hired lawyers, psycho-social counsellors and other partners. Remote community engagement continued to take place via virtual focus group discussions, online awareness raising sessions, and key informant interviews over the phone.



By end of April 2021, UNHCR has supported **527 refugees** to return to their countries of origin from Iran. Additionally, 364,000 undocumented Afghans have returned to Afghanistan since the beginning of 2021, an increase of more than 35% compared to the same period in 2020, potentially due to losses in livelihoods linked with COVID-19 in Iran.



UNHCR has increased its hotline capacity so that refugees to continue accessing **protection services** such as counselling, referrals or inclusion into relevant programmes. In April 2021, **2,356 refugees approached UNHCR, with health being one of the main topics of concerns of refugees.**

The mental health situation of refugees has also noticeably deteriorated due to the pandemic. UNHCR offices continued to provide refugees with virtual one-on-one sessions with **psychosocial counsellors**, and some are referred to specialized mental health services. UNHCR-Hired Lawyers also continued to provide assistance via phone.



**10.05 M** needed in 2021 for COVID-19 measures in Iran

**With your support, we can help prevent the virus from spreading.**

In 2021, UNHCR is seeking USD 10.05 million for its COVID-19 response in Iran, which has been mainstreamed into its wider programmes. This is part of UNHCR's global funding needs and feeds into the wider UN appeal.

In Iran, strengthening and promoting the inclusion of refugees in national systems can help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable.

Support for UNHCR's regular activities, as part of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), further complements the emergency response to COVID-19, by strengthening inclusive national systems, notably for health, and mitigating the virus' socio-economic impact.