

# IRAN

May – June 2021

## OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

In June, Iran was battling with its fifth wave of COVID-19. Movement restrictions, closures of non-essential businesses and health protocols continued to be enforced throughout the country. On 19 June, the Iranian Ministry of Interior announced Ebrahim Raisi as the President-elect, with 61.95% of the votes in his favour and a voter turnout of 48.8%, the lowest recorded to date. In April 2021, the US announced a plan to withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan by 11 September 2021, and by 22 June, 50% of the troops had already withdrawn. The Taliban thereafter made considerable gains in the country. UNHCR stepped up its contingency planning and preparations amid political developments in Afghanistan and the related expected increase in (internal and potentially cross-border) displacement.



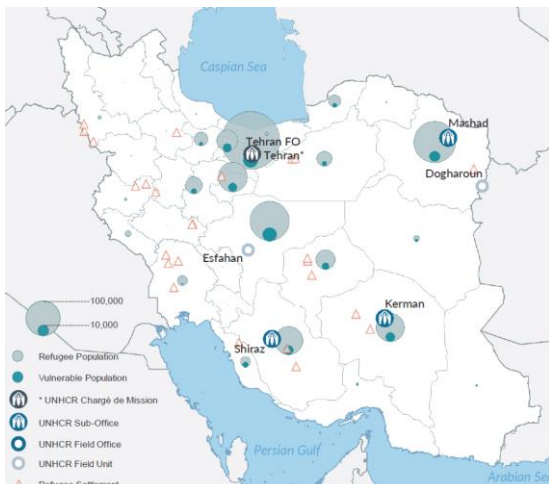
\* Based on the data received from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in October 2020, on which consultations are ongoing. The Afghan/Iraqi breakdown is based on UNHCR's estimations.



**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, **706** individuals had returned from Iran to their country of origin by the end of June, as part of UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme. UNHCR continued carrying out voluntary repatriations from its Dogharoun Field Unit.

### UNDOCUMENTED RETURNS

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 mainly losses in livelihoods linked with COVID-19 in Iran.

### RESETTLEMENT

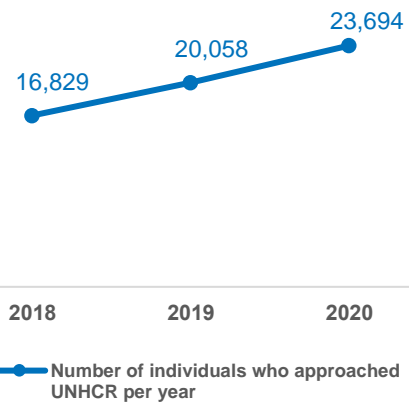
By the end of June 2021, **37** individuals had departed for resettlement to New Zealand (18), Norway (2), Sweden (8) and the UK (9). **10** resettlement cases (26 individuals) had been submitted to three countries, namely Finland, Norway and Sweden. During the same period 35 individuals were accepted by countries, namely Iceland (19), New Zealand (4), Norway (6) and Sweden (6).

At the **Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR)** that began on June 22, UNHCR presented the situation of resettlement in Iran, emphasizing the continuous reduction of quota allocated to Iran despite the increasing needs/vulnerabilities of refugees. UNHCR Iran currently has **no quota** for resettlement (down from the minimal 120 for 2020) – however, out of the 800,000 refugees in Iran, 22% are considered vulnerable and around 10% are estimated to have resettlement needs.

### ONWARD MOVEMENTS

In the **first half of 2021**, 745 Afghan asylum seekers and migrants out of a total of some 3,800 individuals arrived in **Greece** - a decrease of nearly **80%** from the prior year. Pushbacks at sea have likely contributed to the decrease in arrivals. UNHCR continues to publicly urge states to investigate all reported instances of pushbacks, and to cease such practices.

In the **Western Balkans**, some **3,245** Afghans are estimated to have arrived in the first half of 2021. 563 Afghans were estimated to have arrived in the Western Balkans in June 2021, which represents a slight increase in the average number of arrivals when compared to the previous five months—and significantly higher than in May 2021. A comparison with the same period in 2020 suggests a downward trend regarding new arrivals: some 5800 Afghan arrivals in the first half of the year, with nearly 1600 having arrived in June 2020 alone."



## PROTECTION

### REGISTRATION/DOCUMENTATION

In May 2021, the government announced the promulgation of an executive instruction on the implementation of the **Amayesh 16** exercise. All eligible groups are required to approach Kefalat centres on the basis of preset appointments. In a positive development, the requirement of Tazkirah has again been suspended for this round of the exercise (as it has been a challenge for Afghans to receive this document due to delays from the Afghan Embassy).

The amended Nationality 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 for application through **legal consultations** and **advocacy** with the Government. According to the Ministry of Interior, in May, **28,000** children below the age of 18 had filed applications for naturalization. This number represents **6,000** new applications since March 2021. Iranian nationality has so far been granted to **1,401** children born to Iranian mothers and foreign fathers. While the law does not give mothers and fathers equal rights to confer nationality to their children, it represents significant progress.

In May, two new **E-Tazkirah** centres opened in Esfahan and Shiraz, facilitating the access of Afghans who previously had to travel to other provinces to get their documents verified.

### CASE MANAGEMENT

In June, **2,482** refugees contacted UNHCR via its receptions and hotlines. The main reasons for the approaches were to receive **assistance** (1,875), **resettlement** (204) and **health** reasons (142).

In June 2021, UNHCR offices collectively referred **197 cases** to various NGOs/INGOs and charities for assistance. **Cash assistance**, **legal/protection counselling**, **health** and **psycho-social assistance** were recorded as the three main reasons for these referrals.

In early June, the transfer values for providing '**relief of disability**' items (wheelchair, hearing aid, prosthesis, etc) were updated (increased) to ensure a more meaningful and impactful intervention, given the widespread inflation rate in Iran over the past years. Relief of disability support is provided as a complementary intervention to **Multi-Purpose Cash** (MPC), in order to mitigate the risk that families may deprioritize the needs of persons with disabilities, if targeted support is not provided.

UNHCR's **reception** and **counselling** of refugees remained **largely virtual**, through phone and email, due to COVID-19. However, key protection activities, such as interviews of critical protection cases (typically CP, GBV, VolRep and RST cases), were conducted in-person on a case-by-case basis. For some refugees, **remote case management** is an opportunity to be able to reach UNHCR without having to spend time and money on travel, exposing them to COVID-19, however face-to-face counselling continues to be considered the preferred mode of interaction by many.

UNHCR Iran continues to monitor the COVID-19 situation across all provinces where we are present, and is developing guidance on how to expand **in-person interaction with persons of concern** based on the local COVID-19 conditions in different provinces. In the meantime, offices are using the guidance on remote case management for child protection and gender-based violence to remotely yet adequately address at-risk cases when required.

### LEGAL ASSISTANCE

From May to the end of June 2021, **200** 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 **682** individuals were also assisted by UNHCR-Hired Lawyers (UHLs) from May to the end of June 2021. Due to the COVID-19 situation, UHLs mostly provided legal counselling remotely.

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## EDUCATION

As per information shared by the Government of Iran, some **500,00** 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.

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 continue to remain closed due to COVID-19. To mitigate these challenges, UNHCR procured **21,500 tablets** for students. UNHCR is currently following up on the distribution of these tablets by the Government before the commencement of the scholastic year in September.

At tertiary level, UNHCR will continue its support to refugee students through **DAFI scholarship programme**, which offers qualified refugee students the possibility to earn an undergraduate degree. In 2021, some **569** university students will receive scholarship support. The DAFI programme is being implemented in Iran through a national NGO partner the Pars Development Actors Institute (PDA) and in close coordination with the Government of Iran.

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## HEALTH

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

Since the start of the 7<sup>th</sup> cycle of the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI) in February 2021, enrolments continued countrywide, and all vulnerable refugees who were eligible for a free UPHI booklet - the fee for which is paid by UNHCR - were informed by UNHCR and our governmental counterpart to approach enrolment centers (Pishkan centers) to collect their insurance booklets. The insurance booklet allows refugees to access secondary and tertiary healthcare at affordable cost through more than **1,000 public hospitals** countrywide, similar to Iranian nationals. Refugees enrolled in UPHI only have to pay 10% of franchise fee for their COVID-19 treatment and hospitalization and 30% franchise fee for para-clinical services in all Ministry of Health affiliated hospitals and those contracted with Iran's Health Insurance Organization. By June 2021, a total of **79,082 refugees** had enrolled in the UPHI, out of which 72,389 (60% out of the 120,000) refugees were vulnerable and special disease cases. In Iran, refugees have access to free of charge primary health care.

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## LIVELIHOODS

Between May to June 2021, **2,563** individuals had received multipurpose cash support from UNHCR, out of a total of 18,175 individuals who will benefit from this assistance in 2021. The multipurpose cash assistance helps households to meet their basic needs with choice and dignity. Other cash supports included cash for refugee focal points, cash for relief of disability, cash for resettlement, and cash for voluntary repatriation, where a total of 243 individuals were assisted.

In 2021 UNHCR continues to provide direct multi-purpose cash and cash for basic needs for COVID-19 through its offices. It also collaborated with BAFIA Provincials to provide vulnerable households with cash cards. Between May to June, some **3,782** individuals, affected by the pandemic and its consequences were assisted. In addition, through a partnership agreement with the Iraqi Refugees Aid Council (IRAC) organization, multi-purpose cash will be provided to 120 Iraqi households in Tehran, Qom, Ilam and Khuzestan provinces for which assessments are ongoing.

As most resources have already been exhausted by families, resorting to negative coping mechanisms, many have started **selling household items** to make ends meet. In Mashhad, more than 10 families reported having sold some household items since the start of the pandemic.

Increase in prices of basic food items such as milk, bread and cheese continues to be the main reason for families to **reduce their food intake** to two or even one meals per day which has adverse impact on the growth of children and adolescents. Families with similar problems were assessed by UNHCR and referred to charities or were considered for multi-purpose cash if eligible.

## CONTINGENCY RESPONSE

In view of the deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan, between May-June 2021 UNHCR took a number of steps to scale-up emergency preparedness efforts.

Firstly, following the activation of a **level 1** (and subsequently **level 2**) **emergency**, UNHCR Iran activated the **Refugee Coordination Model**. As part of this, a dedicated strategic coordination group, the **Refugee Emergency Coordination Group** (RECG) was established comprising of UN agencies who are part of the UN Crisis Management Team and key NGOs who contribute to the **Inter-Agency Contingency Plan**. While UNHCR's preference remains inclusive coordination under the leadership of GIRI/ BAFIA and continues to seek clarity from the government on their preferred arrangements, UNHCR has (with the support of BAFIA) taken the lead on coordinating preparedness efforts among international partners. In addition to the establishment of the RECG, UNHCR oversaw the activation/ strengthening of 7 sectors (including Logistics and Supply). UNHCR is leading / co-lead 4 of these: Protection, Shelter-NFI (and CM), Health and Logistics and Supply. UNHCR has worked with other agencies to strengthen coordination capacity across all sectors. As of end of June, all the sector working groups were active. The sector working groups are taking the lead on the implementation of the Inter-Agency Contingency Plan, specifically overseeing the implementation/ follow-up of key preparedness actions and coordinating inter-agency response capacities.

In addition, between May and June, UNHCR stepped-up engagement with BAFIA on emergency preparedness. In the process, the government indicated that Afghans fleeing Iran would be permitted to enter Iran. As of the end of June, UNHCR accompanied BAFIA central to Sistan and Baluchestan to conduct an assessment of two provisional sites identified by BAFIA to host Afghans: Niatak and Kalendin.

Internally, UNHCR also continued to accelerate preparedness, specifically through the prepositioning of additional supplies. By the end of June, CRI kits, tents and COVID-19 hygiene items for **10,000** persons had been prepositioned inside Iran. This includes sufficient stock for **1,000** persons in Niatak, to help facilitate a timely response.

As part of preparedness and emergency response, the office dispatched the following items to field locations:

Item description	Dogharoun	Sub-office Kerman	Niatak	BAFIA Sistan and Baluchestan
Hygiene pack	100	0	0	2,900
Family Tent	100	0	200	1,000
Tarpaulin	99	0	200	4,000
Jerry can	200	0	400	4,000
Blanket	512	0	1,000	8,000
Sleeping Mat	500	0	1,000	6,250
Kitchen set	100	0	200	1,500
Gas Stove	100	100	0	0
Water tank (5000 ltr)	30	30	0	0

## 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.*

The key Core Group priorities agreed for Iran for 2021 are the following:

- Advocacy and support for Iran's inclusive policies towards Afghans, notably in the areas of education and skills training, healthcare, and livelihoods, including through investments in Iran's national systems.
- Dialogue between the Government of Iran and Core Group on documentation/regularization. This includes support for the ongoing collaboration between Iran and Afghanistan on issuance of civil documentation to undocumented Afghans in Iran (e-Tazkera and e-passport).
- Advocacy for expanded resettlement opportunities for Afghan refugees in Iran.

These priorities are complemented by two additional ones, namely:

- Discussion on regional regulated labour migration with the Government of Iran.
  - Piloting a possible programme on return of qualified refugees, in close coordination with Afghanistan, in line with UNHCR Iran's Voluntary Repatriation strategy.
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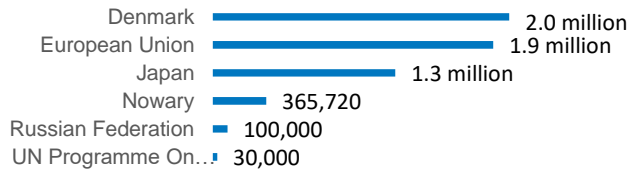
# FUNDING UPDATE

As of 22 June 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 **13.26 million**



*Donors mentioned in the graph are the "main earmarked" donors.*

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.

## Softly earmarked Contributions | USD

**Private donors Australia** 4.8 million | **Canada** 3.7 million

Norway | Spain | Private donors

## Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions.

**Norway** 80 million | **Sweden** 66.9 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Private donors Spain** 35.4 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Germany** 26 million | **France** 20 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 17.9 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Private donors Japan** 10.9 million

Algeria | Armenia | Australia | Bulgaria | Canada | Costa Rica | Estonia | Finland | Holy See | Iceland | Liechtenstein | Luxembourg | Malta | Monaco | Montenegro | New Zealand | Peru | Philippines | Portugal | Republic of Korea | Russian Federation | Saudi Arabia | Singapore | Thailand | Turkey | Uruguay | Private donors

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