

IRAN

April - June 2021

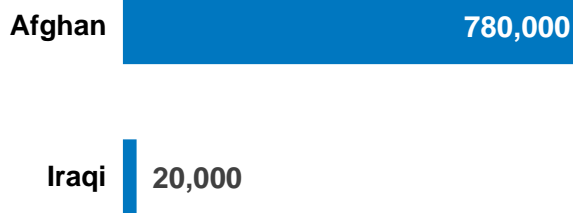
In the first half of 2021, **COVID-19** infections continued to rise, with the pandemic entering a fifth wave as of end of June. Nationwide vaccinations continued at a low rate with only **2%** of its population being fully inoculated by early June.

The Iranian Rial continued to **devalue**, coupled with flaring **inflation**, causing prices of basic goods to continue to rise. The average prices for food and beverages in the 12-month period ending May 21, increased by **47.8%** compared with last year's corresponding period.

Refugees' and host communities' ability to **make ends meet** continued to be affected. Sustained **international humanitarian support** remains key to facilitate Government efforts to provide inclusive policies towards refugees, including free COVID-19 testing.

POPULATION OF CONCERN

800,000

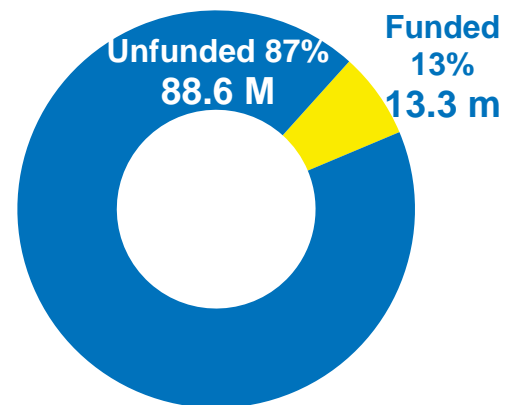


Based on the data received from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in October 2020, on which consultations are ongoing. The breakdown is based on UNHCR's estimations.

FUNDING (AS OF JUNE 2021)

USD 101.9 million

Requested for Iran



UNHCR PRESENCE

UNHCR Staff

& Affiliate Workforce:

127 National Staff

18 International Staff

Offices:

1 Branch Office in Tehran

1 Field Office in Tehran,

3 Sub-Offices in Mashhad,

Kerman and Shiraz

2 Field Units in Esfahan

and Dogharoun



Working with partners

- The **Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA)** is UNHCR Iran's main government counterpart. Tripartite partnership agreements have been signed or are being finalised with other partners, including:
- **Governmental:** Ministry of Education (MoE), Literacy Movement Organization (LMO), Ministry of Health (MoH), Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO), Iran Health Insurance Organization (IHIO).
- **National NGOs:** Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV), Society for Recovery Support (SRS), Rebirth Charity Organization (Rebirth), Pars Development Activists Institute (PDA), Iranian Life Quality Improvement Association (ILIA), KIYANA, Iraqi Refugee Aid Council (IRAC) .
- **UN agencies and International Organizations:** UNHCR coordinates with UN partner agencies, NGOs and international organizations under the umbrella of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR).

Main activities

Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)

The SSAR is a quadripartite multi-year regional strategy between UNHCR and the governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Launched in 2012, the SSAR provides a framework for cooperation between humanitarian and development actors to address the needs of Afghan refugees and the communities that host them. It is also the guiding regional policy framework for protecting and enabling solutions for Afghan refugees. The June 2019 quadripartite meeting between the three governments and UNHCR saw the SSAR extended until end 2021. The key objectives of the SSAR in Iran are focused on health, education and livelihoods.

A **Support Platform** dedicated to achieving the SSAR objectives was launched on 16 December 2019 as part of the first-ever Global Refugee Forum. The Support Platform aims to reinforce the priorities of the SSAR and mobilize additional resources to promote and realize its three pillars – voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration, and assistance to host countries – while seeking to address the remaining gaps through reinvigorated, sustained and coherent humanitarian and development investments. As of late 2020, 12 states and international organizations have become members of the **Core Group** of the Support Platform, namely the Asian Development Bank, Denmark, the European Union, Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Qatar, Switzerland, Turkey, UNDP, the United States of America, and the World Bank.

On 6 July 2020, UNHCR and the three governments launched a **portfolio of projects** as part of the SSAR Support Platform, outlining key areas of focus and support needs for two years (2020-21).

Protection

- **Registration and documentation:** The Government of Iran is responsible for asylum-seeker registration and refugee status determination, and annually renews refugee identification cards (*Amayesh*). *Amayesh* cards give refugees conditional freedom of movement, access to basic services and eligibility for temporary work permits. In 2021, the registration exercise of *Amayesh XV* started in May. The process is ongoing and all eligible heads of households were required to approach or contact *Kefalat* centers to obtain an appointment and renew their cards by 21 September 2021.
- According to data received from the government in October 2020, on which consultations are ongoing, some **800,000 refugee card holders** reside in Iran, of which it is estimated that 780,000 are Afghan and 20,000 are Iraqi. In addition, according to data provided by the Government in October 2020, some **586,000 Afghan passport-holders** with Iranian visas reside in the country, including former *Amayesh* cardholders who now have student visas that allow them to access higher education. Holders of Iranian visas in their family passports saw their visas expire in 2019. In January 2021, the government announced that the validity of the family passports' visas would be extended for one year.

- It is estimated that some 2.6 **million undocumented Afghans** also live in Iran. In 2017, the Government of Iran issued slips to more than 804,000 undocumented individuals¹ (mostly Afghans) who participated in a 'headcount exercise,' targeting certain categories of individuals residing in Iran without a valid *Amayesh* card or an Iranian visa and national passport. The type of documentation to be issued as a result of the headcount exercise is not announced yet. UNHCR continuously engages with relevant parties to pursue this matter.
- **Durable solutions:** UNHCR facilitates **voluntary repatriation** of Afghan and Iraqi refugees to their countries of origin. On 2 March 2020, UNHCR temporarily suspended voluntary repatriation activities as a preventive measure to limit the exposure of staff, partners and refugees to COVID-19. The facilitation of voluntary repatriation resumed on 2 May 2020, only through Field Unit Dogharoun. However, due to persevering conflict and instability in both countries of origin, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, only a modest number of refugees are opting for voluntary repatriation.

Regarding **resettlement** to third countries, UNHCR Iran has not received any quota for 2021 yet. Using resettlement countries unallocated quota UNHCR submitted 26 individuals (10 cases) to Finland, Norway and Sweden via UNHCR's global Resettlement Service. Departures to third countries have resumed and 37 individuals have departed to New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Advocacy continues to improve the resettlement quota for refugees in Iran. During the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement, UNHCR presented the situation of resettlement in Iran, emphasising on the necessity for an increased quota for Iran, given the existing and increasing vulnerability and needs for resettlement among the refugees in Iran.

- **Onward movement:** Although the arrival of Afghan asylum-seekers to Europe has significantly subsided since the EU-Turkey deal was signed in March 2016, displacement and onward movement of Afghans continue. Afghans made up almost 7% of all arrivals to Europe through the Mediterranean in 2020. In the second half of 2020, Afghans started arriving in Italy in greater numbers, taking boats from Turkey and Greece. Roughly one quarter of arrivals were in Italy and the remainder landed in Greece. During the first quarter in 2021, Afghans were the second most common citizenship claiming asylum in Europe after Syrians. For the third year in a row, Afghanistan was the second largest country of origin. Applications by Afghans increased for the third consecutive month, growing by a third from February 2021. More than two fifths of all unaccompanied minors in May 2021 were from Afghanistan. In 2020, 52% of Afghan asylum claimants in Europe were granted international protection. According to the Mixed Migration Centre (June 2020), 25% of Afghans interviewed in Turkey started their journey from Iran.²

Community-based protection: UNHCR Iran continuously seeks to strengthen meaningful participation of and engagement with persons of concern, to understand their protection risks, build on their capacities and pursue solutions that take into account their perspectives and priorities. In Iran, community-based projects, awareness raising sessions and focus group discussions are key activities that facilitate community engagement. These activities allow for refugees and UNHCR to together identify, prioritize and address key issues within refugee communities, whether it be related to child protection, peaceful coexistence, persons with specific needs, including those living with disabilities. Allowing refugees to take ownership of these activities is key to their success. During the COVID-19 pandemic, community-based protection activities have been adjusted to ensure continued, albeit largely remote, two-way communication with communities on COVID-19 as well as key protection-related topics. In the first half of 2021, UNHCR Iran reached 1,709 refugees through awareness raising activities. Meanwhile, in consultation with refugee communities and local authorities, 11 community-based projects were developed, covering a range of topics such as stress management and mental health during the pandemic, awareness raising and distribution of hygiene kits, virtual sports competitions for children, support to children engaged in child labor and positive parenting. These projects are pending approval.

- **Persons with specific needs:** UNHCR provides support to persons with specific needs through targeted cash-based and in-kind assistance, referrals to governmental and non-governmental partners, and inclusion in relevant programmes such as livelihoods and community-based protection activities.

¹ According to the Quadripartite Meeting held in mid-June 2019

² <https://www.easo.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends>

Protection of women and children: UNHCR provides support to women and children directly through case management and through a referral system with governmental and non-governmental partners. During the pandemic the case management takes place remotely unless the situation demands otherwise.

- **Legal support:** UNHCR, jointly with BAFIA, operates a Legal Services Project to provide legal assistance to refugees in Iran to resolve disagreements through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. Currently, 16 functioning Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs) and 17 UNHCR Hired Lawyers (UHLs) are operational across the country. UHLs also provide free legal advice and assistance to Afghan and Iraqi refugees.

Education

UNHCR continues to support the efforts of the Government of Iran in providing access to formal primary and secondary education for all children regardless of documentation, and to non-formal education (literacy classes) as well as to tertiary education (DAFI programme)

- **School construction:** In 2021, UNHCR is supporting the Government by co-funding the construction of seven schools in refugee-hosting provinces that are among the poorest in terms of infrastructure.
- **Inclusive policies for the undocumented:** Following a decree by the Supreme Leader in 2015, stating that all Afghan children should attend school regardless of documentation status. According to the Ministry of Education, the number of Afghan and Iraqi children enrolled in primary and secondary schools in 2021 is 500,080, including 138,000 undocumented children .
- **Fee regulation:** Following new regulations on the registration of foreign nationals in May 2016, “*refugee-specific*” fees of USD 70-90 were removed. In 2020, based on the newest education circular, families holding government-issued identification documents including passports, residence permits, Amayesh XIII or XIV, laissez-passer, or Refugee Booklets, were able to approach schools and register their children for the 2020/2021 academic year.
- **Higher education:** In 2021, under the DAFI Scholarship Programme and through a tripartite partnership agreement with Pars Development Actors (PDA), a total of 569 refugee students will benefit from DAFI programme (369 ongoing and 200 new) and receive support with tuition fees and living allowances. The DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) Scholarship Programme offers qualified refugee students the possibility to earn an undergraduate degree in their country of asylum.

Health

- **Primary health care:** UNHCR continues to complement the efforts of the Ministry of Health (MoH) to ensure the provision of quality free-of-charge similar to nationals Primary Health Care to refugees, including vaccinations, antenatal care, maternal and child health, essential medicines and family planning, in health posts located in settlements and refugee-populated urban areas. In 2021, UNHCR is contributing towards the construction of 5 health centres, rehabilitation of 2 health centers and support (including through procuring medicine) of 134 health posts. For 27 of these health posts, which are primarily in refugee-hosting areas, UNHCR also covered personnel costs of essential health staff.
- **Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI):** As part of the agreement between UNHCR, BAFIA and the Iranian Health Insurance Organisation (IHIO), and in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health, all registered refugees have access to enrol in a health insurance scheme, similar to Iranian nationals, for the 7th consecutive year since 2015, covering both hospitalization and para-clinical services (medicine, doctor’s visits, radiology, etc.). For the 7th cycle (23 Feb 2021 to 24 Feb 2022), UNHCR is covering 100% of the insurance premium for up to 120,000 of the most vulnerable refugees, including refugees who suffer from special diseases³ and their families, while the remaining refugee population can enrol in the health insurance by paying the premium fee.

³ Special Diseases include Haemophilia, Thalassaemia, Renal Failure, Kidney Transplant, and Multiple Sclerosis as defined by Iranian MoH.

In addition to improving the healthcare of refugees, UPHI provides social protection benefits and offers potential protection dividends by reducing the risk of high out-of-pocket health expenditures, and negative coping mechanisms related to economic vulnerability, particularly where surgery or hospitalisation is required.

- **Other health and protection interventions:** UNHCR continues to collaborate with national charities and NGOs to extend its outreach in the area of health for specific vulnerable categories. The interventions include: harm reduction services through the “Society for Recovery Support” organization. UNHCR also addresses the psychological, social and legal needs of refugees through collaboration with the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV).

Livelihoods

Enhancing refugees' livelihoods opportunities, by recognising that refugees should be empowered to earn a decent living, remains a priority for UNHCR Iran. Giving refugees the possibility of benefiting from livelihoods opportunities will prepare them to become more self-reliant and self-sufficient – enabling them to meet the basic needs of their families and become less dependent on humanitarian assistance. Refugees who are able to develop their skills and capacities, and engage in income-generating activities, are more likely to feel prepared to return to their home country, compared to refugees who have not. UNHCR implements its livelihood projects through three national partners.

- **Employment/income generation:** In 2021, UNHCR in collaboration with the Government of Iran, and non-governmental partners will continue to implement a diverse portfolio of livelihoods interventions to enhance income and employment opportunities for refugees. These interventions include certified technical and vocational training in 50 occupations which will benefit some 1,968 refugees, as well as income generation projects to be implemented through UNHCR's interventions by establishment / expansion of business workshops. Some 286 job opportunities are planned to be created, and will include on-the-job technical and vocational training and various income-generating Cash-Based Interventions. UNHCR implements cash-based interventions (CBIs) directly and through partners, including multi-purpose cash assistance to assist extremely vulnerable refugees in meeting their immediate protection needs and basic needs, with choice and dignity. CBIs are used to facilitate access to higher education and healthcare, to support shelter and livelihoods needs, to support persons with disabilities, and to assist in covering documentation and transportation needs prior to resettlement. UNHCR co-leads a Cash Working Group with INGOs and UN agencies to harmonize approaches and maximize cooperation between all CBI actors in the country. UNHCR's approach to CBIs is guided by the principle of financial inclusion, which seeks to ensure that refugees can access the same national financial channels and mechanisms as Iranians. Between April to June 2021, 3,645 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 380 individuals 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.

Additionally, to address the negative economic impact of COVID-19, UNHCR rolled out one-off Cash for Basic Needs grants since April 2020, to cover basic shelter, nutritional and hygiene needs for a two-to-three-month period. Furthermore, UNHCR has rolled out an additional cash-based intervention in response to COVID-19, through its main counterpart, BAFIA. Through this intervention, UNHCR and BAFIA have provided unrestricted and unconditional multi-purpose cash to eligible vulnerable households registered in the Government's database, to enable them to independently prioritize and meet their basic needs during COVID-19. The objective is to mitigate the negative impact and reduce the risk of adopting negative coping mechanisms for extremely vulnerable households, for example, those who are infected with COVID-19, who fall in the Special Disease category, or who are extremely vulnerable due to economic and other protection reasons as per UNHCR and BAFIA's criteria. Over 32,000 individuals benefitted from both COVID-19 cash interventions in 2020, either directly implemented by UNHCR, or through BAFIA. In 2021 UNHCR continues to provide multi-purpose cash, cash for basic needs for COVID-19, and also collaborate with BAFIA to vulnerable households with cash cards across the country. Between April to June 2021, UNHCR offices in the field in co-operation with BAFIA have identified and assisted 3,782 individuals at risk or in need, who have been affected by the pandemic.

Shelter and Infrastructure

In an effort to improve refugees' access to essential services (including shelter, water, domestic energy, sanitation and community halls), through a bipartite agreement with BAFIA, UNHCR supports critical infrastructure needs in the most refugee-populated urban areas and in refugee settlements.

Emergency Preparedness and Response (Contingency Planning)

UNHCR is working closely with BAFIA and other partners on refugee emergency preparedness and response. A regularly updated scenario-based Contingency Plan for the Afghanistan situation is being discussed with the Government to respond to a possible sudden influx of arrivals to Iran. This inter-agency contingency plan also reflects the contributions of up to 19 international partners, and is ultimately overseen by the Refugee Emergency Coordination Group (RECG) chaired by UNHCR. Sector Working Groups are responsible for the implementation of the contingency plan, under the leadership of dedicated lead agencies for each sector.

For non-refugee emergencies, UNHCR continues to play an active role in the UN Country Team/Crisis Management Team/Disaster Management Team and the Protection Working Group for preparedness.

COVID-19

UNHCR's response to the pandemic is anchored in supporting the Ministry of Health's country-wide response by providing medical equipment in hospitals and health centres. UNHCR has airlifted more than 100 tonnes of medical aid, including masks, face shields, gowns, hand sanitizers, gloves, ventilators, non-contact thermometers and PPEs, to help address critical shortages and support the COVID-19 national response complementing the refugee inclusive efforts led by the government. UNHCR will also provide electronic 21,500 tablets to provide continued access to online learning for refugee students in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and BAFIA.

Moreover, as a mitigative measure as well as a response to outbreaks, UNHCR, in coordination with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs of the Ministry of Interior, distributed basic COVID-19 related hygiene packages, including items such as soap, hand sanitizers, masks, and cleaning materials, to almost 11,000 refugee households residing in three populated refugee settlements across the country as well as eight provinces and urban areas. Further, the office shall continue to replenish a contingency stock to be able to provide a prompt response in case of needs in settlements or urban areas.

Contingency Response

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

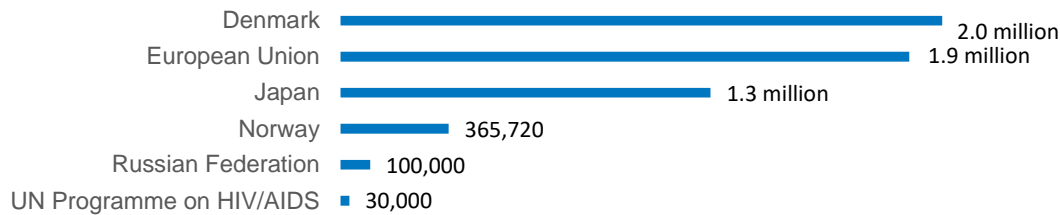
Item description	Dogharoun	Sub-office Kerman	Niatak	BAFIA Sistan and Baluchestan
Hygiene pack	100	0	0	2,900
Family Tent	100	0	200	1,000
Tarpaulin	99	0	200	4,000
Jerry can	200	0	400	4,000
Blanket	512	0	1,000	8,000
Sleeping Mat	500	0	1,000	6,250
Kitchen set	100	0	200	1,500
Gas Stove	100	100	0	0
Water tank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

Financial information

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 **13.3 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.

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

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