

Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

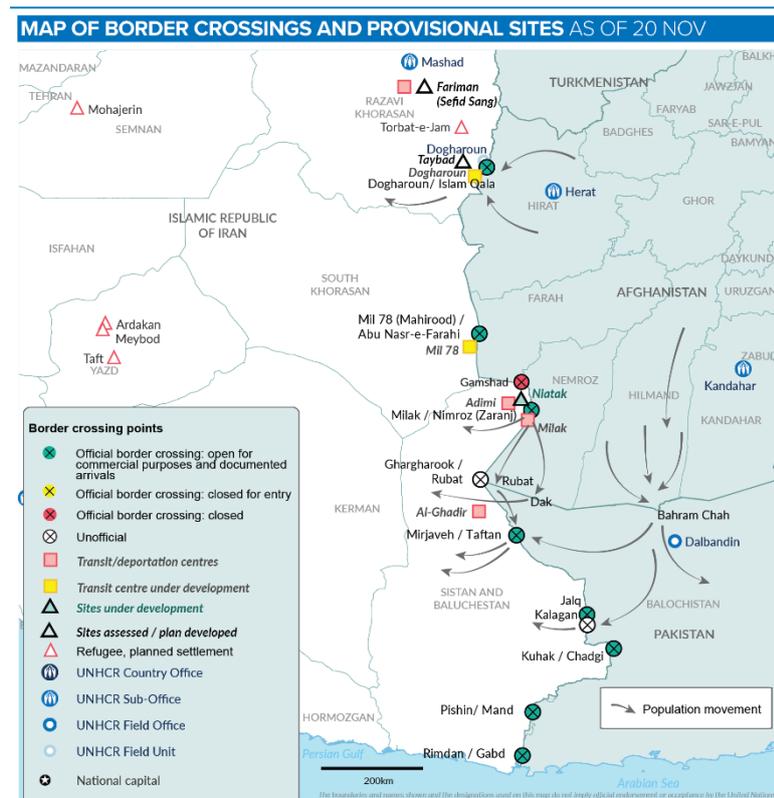
2 December 2021

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

669,492 people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan in 2021, of which 15% are families, 21% are women and 59% are children.

Afghans continue to make their way to Iran informally through unofficial borders. UNHCR is aware of **23,964** Afghans who arrived in Iran from 1 January to 27 November, though the numbers are much higher.

Official borders between Afghanistan and Iran remain closed for asylum seekers. **UNHCR estimates 65% of all newly arriving Afghan asylum seekers are deported from Iran by the government.**



POLITICAL, SECURITY & HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

- With millions in Afghanistan facing starvation as winter arrives, the **World Food Programme urged countries to put politics aside and step-up support to avert a potential catastrophe**. Humanitarian needs in the country have increased, the UN agency **said**, with all 34 provinces facing a crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity. The rising cost of wheat has led to an 80 per cent increase in the price of bread, a staple for many families. In some areas, people are compensating by consuming a variety of wheat that has been known to cause neurological problems. Many are surviving on bread and tea with milk.
- On 17 November, the UN Special Representative and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Deborah Lyons, during a Security Council meeting **stated** that three months after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, it is taking “halting steps to pursue international legitimacy”. Lyons also stressed that the international community must remain engaged with the Taliban in order to shape “a more positive future trajectory”. She further warned that “**to abandon the Afghan people now would be a historic mistake – a mistake that has been made before with tragic consequences.**”
- On 30 November, **UNHCR in Iran received increased financial support from the Government of Germany to support Afghan refugees in 2021**, from an initial EUR 3.2 million to EUR 57 million. The total German contribution to emergency support for Afghanistan amounts to EUR 600 million for Iran, Pakistan, and

- Afghanistan. “Germany has always played a big part in supporting humanitarian efforts in Iran, but even more so now. During these times of increased humanitarian needs, Germany’s generous funding will strengthen UNHCR’s response to protect vulnerable refugees,” said Ivo Freijesen, UNHCR’s Representative in Iran.

DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

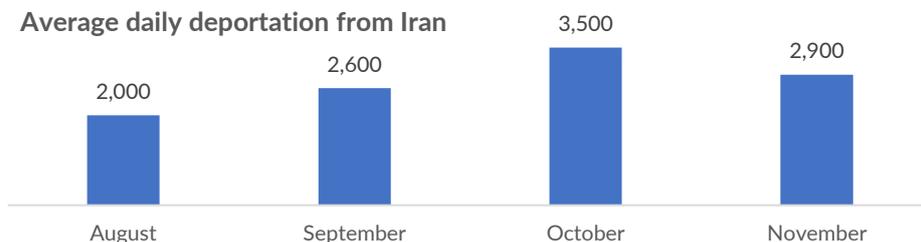
- Since the beginning of the year, UNHCR identified **23,964 Afghans who newly arrived in Iran** (on behalf of 5,981 individuals who approached UNHCR’s receptions). As of 27 November, out of the new arrivals approaching us directly, 1,719 families (consisting of 6,688 individuals), have been interviewed by UNHCR:
 - **In the last two weeks alone, UNHCR’s receptions in Tehran (where 50% of new arrivals reside) and Isfahan have screened 298 new arrivals.** Their main concerns and needs included resettlement (40%), financial support (28%), medical assistance (14%) and protection concerns (7%) related to SGBV, legal assistance and child protection.
 - **While most new arrivals interviewed were male heads of households (HHs) (78%), some 1,500 women (22%) were identified as female HHs.** The latter group are considered a vulnerable group who may be more likely to have to resort to negative coping mechanisms to provide for their families. UNHCR is directing more focus on its urban response to support vulnerable groups to meet their needs in a dignified and resilient manner, including through cash assistance for specifically selected priority groups.
 - **5% of new arrivals reported having ‘special diseases’,** as defined by UNHCR as being Hemophilia, Thalassemia, renal failure, kidney transplant, Multiple Sclerosis. All persons of concern in Iran have access to primary healthcare. However, UNHCR is concerned that those who do not hold a refugee status (i.e. all new arrivals) will be unable to afford secondary and tertiary healthcare, given the economic downturn. UNHCR continues its efforts to work with the government to expand and make more affordable medical services (including the national insurance team) for all.
- **UNHCR has begun disbursing cash assistance to new arrivals in Tehran and Isfahan.** By late December, more than 350 households (some 1,750 individuals) - including new arrivals and undocumented Afghans from the existing caseload - will receive cash assistance. UNHCR continues to advocate with the government to obtain agreements on a more comprehensive out-of-camp/urban response, including cash-based interventions for larger numbers of persons of concern.
- It remains challenging for UNHCR to verify the scale of cross-border population movements from Afghanistan. **Different government officials, at various times and events, have unofficially stated that the number of new arrivals to Iran may range between 100,000-300,000.** The operation is using available indications from various sources to estimate the Afghan new arrivals in Iran for 2021/2022, in order to better inform planning. Bearing in mind that a large number will likely be deported, that others are individuals travelling to Iran for livelihoods or familial reasons, and that a small number may move onwards towards Turkey, **UNHCR estimates that 274,000 Afghan new arrivals will remain in Iran – 166,000 in 2021 and 108,000 in 2022.** These are best estimates which will be reviewed regularly.

RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN

- On 1 December, through a News Comment UNHCR’s Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, Mr. Indrika Ratwatte, **conveyed concern regarding the escalating risks faced by Afghans seeking to flee into neighbouring countries.** With deportations of Afghan asylum-seekers having escalated from Iran and other countries in the region since August, **UNHCR called on all authorities to immediately end the forced return of Afghans.** UNHCR also urges all countries receiving Afghan new arrivals to keep their borders open. UNHCR stands ready to help governments expand humanitarian assistance and support accessible and efficient asylum systems as needed.
- Afghans who are apprehended while trying to enter Iran continue to be returned to Afghanistan, despite UNHCR’s non-return advisory and advocacy to provide asylum to those fleeing conflict. Through its analysis of available data and information, **UNHCR estimates 65% of all newly arriving Afghan asylum seekers are deported from Iran by the government.**

- Based on information collected by UNHCR in Afghanistan, a total of 60,532 Afghan individuals have been deported during the first three weeks of November this year, which is a daily average of 2,900 deportations, with a peak of 5,200 in one day on 2 November.

Average daily deportation from Iran



REGIONAL REFUGEE PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLAN (RRPRP)

- On 25 August, UNHCR launched the **Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Preparedness and Response Plan (RRPRP)**, an inter-agency plan with 10 partners, focusing on preparedness, limited emergency response, and expanded support to regular programmes. UNHCR is currently leading the development of the 2022 RRP, with planning assumptions of a steady and ongoing flow of new arrivals into Iran from Afghanistan (with an expectation that, although the situation in Afghanistan is likely to further deteriorate, there will not be an observable mass influx into neighbouring countries), with borders likely to continue to be tightly managed. The 2022 RRP development is advancing, with a total budget of US\$258.7 million having been agreed with 15 partners, covering 8 sectors.
- In light of newly arrived persons moving towards urban centres, UNHCR is strongly advocating with BAFIA for a **complementary urban response**. This is also to avoid an encampment policy at the border and have a hybrid response, in line with UNHCR global policy. Activities being proposed for an urban response include cash-based assistance, as well as reinforcing UNHCR's regular activities like education and health support.

NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLANNING

The Government of Iran informed UNHCR that, under a worst-case scenario, they anticipate that up to **500,000 new arrivals from Afghanistan could enter Iran over 6-months**. In case of an influx, new arrivals would reportedly be granted access to Iranian territory and settled in locations along the border. Shelter, health and food would be the priorities to cope with the Government's scenario.

Such contingency planning is a Government-led process. UNHCR continues to seek additional guidance and clarity on various issues, including the status that will be conferred to new arrivals and the process for receiving them.

UNHCR coordinates the refugee response among international actors in Iran, with 18 participating UN agencies and international NGOs under its leadership, in line with the globally-agreed **Refugee Coordination Model**. UNHCR and BAFIA convene on a regular basis, through an agreed-upon biweekly/bilateral meeting. Discussions are ongoing around options for more inclusive coordination.

FUNDING NEEDS

For 2021, the **interagency regional funding needs** are **USD 299 million**, including almost **USD 131 million** for UNHCR alone.

For Iran, **interagency needs** are **USD 135.8 million**, including **USD 58.9 million** for UNHCR. As of 28 November, 3 of the 10 agencies participating under the RRRP have reported receiving a combined USD 28 million, indicating that the RRRP is 19% funded. This analysis is based on partners reporting new funding; however, the actual funding is likely higher, as many partners have not yet reported on the funding they have most recently received.

UNHCR Iran's funding needs for both its regular and emergency programmes in 2021 are USD 112.1 million. As of 29 November 2021, UNHCR's **overall programmes in Iran** (regular and emergency programming) were **54% funded**.

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. Whilst interest in the current emergency is relevant and opportune, UNHCR wishes to also highlight ongoing regular programming needs which are severely underfunded.

Earmarked contributions | USD

Earmarked contributions for the Iran operation amount to some **20.4 million**

European Union 9.2 million | **Japan** 3.85 million | **United Kingdom** 2.69 million | **Denmark** 2 million | **Finland** 1.79 | **Italy** 1.77 | **Norway** 0.36 million | **Spain** 0.36 million | **Qatar Airways** 0.17 million | **Russian Federation** 0.1 million | **UNAIDS** 0.03 million

Major softly earmarked contributions | USD

Germany 95.9 million | **Private donors Australia** 15.9 million | **Austria** 11.8 million | **Private donors Germany** 5.5 million | **Private donors Denmark** 5.1 million | **Denmark** 4.8 million | **Norway** 4.1 million | **Private donors United Kingdom** 3.8 million | **Private donors Spain** 3.6 million | **Japan** 2.9 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 2.8 million

Canada | Czech Republic | Iceland | Ireland | Jersey | Liechtenstein | Luxembourg | New Zealand | Poland | Slovakia | Slovenia | Spain | Private donors

Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions

Norway 80 million | **Sweden** 75.4 million | **Private donors Spain** 69.3 million | **United Kingdom** 40.4 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 35.3 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Private donors Japan** 30.9 million | **Germany** 26 million | **Japan** 23.4 million | **France** 20.2 million | **Private donors Italy** 17.6 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Private donors Sweden** 14.4 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Italy** 10.7 million

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