

Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

22-28 February 2022

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

710,039 people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan since the start of 2021, of which 21% are women and 58% are children.

According to evolving estimates by the Government of Iran, approx. **500,000** Afghans have arrived in Iran in 2021.

Borders remain officially closed for asylum-seekers. The requirements of valid visas and passports are still being strictly applied and tighter border control measures are being enforced at unofficial border crossing points. **34,185 Afghans who arrived in Iran** from 1 January 2021 to 28 February 2022 have approached UNHCR requesting assistance and protection.

The Government of Iran continues to systematically return Afghans in large numbers, despite UNHCR's non-return advisory. Last week, UNHCR in Afghanistan witnessed several hundred Afghans being returned at the border crossing point of Islam Qala.

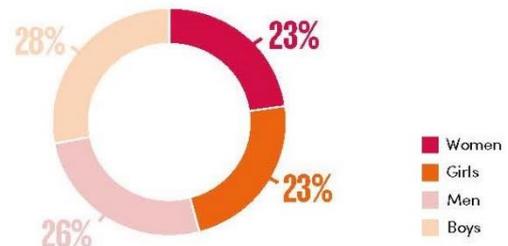


POLITICAL, SECURITY & HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

- The Red Cross says Afghanistan is inching closer towards economic collapse, with a paralysed banking system slowing down international efforts to get financial aid into the war-ravaged country. Organisations such as the Red Cross have been forced to rely on informal money exchanges to move cash in to pay the salaries of some workers, although most of Afghanistan's estimated 500,000 state employees have now worked without pay for months. [The International Committee for the Red Cross Director General Robert Mardini told Reuters](#), that his organization is paying some 10,000 doctors and nurses using the informal 'hawala' money transfer network.
- On 27 February, [France 24](#) reported that Taliban's Spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, has said the Taliban will not allow any more Afghans to be evacuated until the situation improves abroad for those who have already left. Mujahid said the Taliban had received reports of thousands of Afghans "living in very bad conditions" in Qatar and Turkey. "The government has the responsibility to protect the people so this will be stopped until we get the assurance that their lives will not be endangered," he said. He further added that women would be barred from travelling abroad unless accompanied by a male chaperone.

- In a recent factsheet issued by UN Women and UNHCR, titled **'Women and Girls in Displacement'**, it is indicated that during 2021, women and girls made up an estimated 46 per cent of the almost 80,000 Afghans in need of international protection reported in Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (the countries that are part of the RRP 2022). While most of those entering Pakistan and Iran were recorded as nuclear groups of women and men with children and other dependents, more than 4,000 people fled without a partner to Pakistan and Iran in 2021 alone. Despite the existential threats posed by conflict and the many gender-specific forms of persecution currently taking place in Afghanistan, many Afghan women and girls are not able to leave the country through regular channels. Restrictions on movement and the lack of documentation may pose challenges for women, especially at official border points. Unofficial border points are more remote, lack basic facilities, and often require travellers to employ smugglers, and those conditions put women and girls at further risk of violence.

Proportion of newly recorded Afghans in need of international protection in Refugee Response Plan countries, by sex, 2021 (percentage)



Source: UNHCR records. Data as of 11 December 2021.
 Note: The 2022 Refugee Response Plan for Afghanistan focuses on populations in Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

- UNHCR continues to rely on the Government of Iran to share figures on the total number of Afghans arriving in Iran in 2021 and 2022, so far, working with the assumption of approximately 500,000 arrivals in 2021. Nonetheless, the absence of a centralized registration system in Iran and continued lack of comprehensive and sustained access to border areas, makes it difficult for UNCHR to verify these figures. Under the assumption that a large number will likely be deported, other individuals moving to Iran for livelihoods or family reasons, and 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.** According to the Government of Iran, only 505 Afghans have officially applied for asylum in Iran as a result of the emergency last summer. UNHCR continues to seek clarity from Iranian authorities in relation to asylum procedures in Iran, including how persons with international protection needs can fill in their asylum claims in accordance with Iranian legislation and international standards.¹
- As reported by **Tolo News**, local officials in Herat and Nimroz provinces say that more than **3,000 people go to Iran every day because of unemployment in Afghanistan.** According to the officials, these are individuals who 'legally' go to Iran to work, and do not include those crossing irregularly. "Those who go to Iran legally are about 2,000 to 2,500 people a day, and those who come to Afghanistan from Iran are about 1,000," said Homayoun Hemmat, deputy commissioner of Islam Qala border. UNHCR continues to face challenges in verifying numbers, given lack of sustained access at border and general registration system/database. Previously, the government indicated that some **4-5,000 Afghans enter Iran every day.**
- Since the start of 2021 and so far in 2022, UNHCR has **identified 34,185 Afghans** who newly arrived in Iran (and approached UNHCR receptions through **8,423 heads of households**). Requests for financial assistance is **on the rise**. Such requests can be attributed to a combination of factors such as length of displacement; depletion of meagre resources and deteriorating economic conditions in Iran resulting in continued inflation. Since January 2022, Tehran and Esfahan field offices have identified around 700 households to be assessed for possible cash assistance.
- As reported by the **UNHCR office in Kerman**, 24 families (120 individuals) are being held by the government in the Alghadir site in Sistan and Baluchestan province. **Four families (19 individuals) were given exceptional**

¹chromeextension://efaidnbmnnnibpajpcglclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=https%3A%2F%2Fspcommreports.ohchr.org%2FTMResultsBase%2FDownloadFile%3Fgid%3D36808&clen=794955

approval by BAFIA to be relocated to Zahden city. However, the latest update received from BAFIA indicates that the families have not yet been able to move as BAFIA has so far not found appropriate accommodation for these families. The reason for this delay is that BAFIA Sistan and Baluchestan prefers for all those four families to be settled together in one location for ease of commute, monitoring, and protection. UNHCR is advocating with the authorities for the families to be allowed to relocate at earliest. NRC is ready to support with cash for rent.

ONWARD MOVEMENTS

- While in 2021 UNHCR received no quota for resettlement of Afghan refugees, in 2022 we are working with resettlement partners and the Government of Iran to resettle **3,000 cases**, given the increasing protection needs of refugees in Iran combined with the security situation in Afghanistan.

RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN

- Afghans who are apprehended while trying to enter Iran continue to be returned to Afghanistan despite UNHCR's non-return advisory and advocacy for those fleeing conflict to be provide asylum. Through the analysis of available data and information, **UNHCR estimates that 65% of all newly arriving Afghan asylum seekers are deported from Iran by the Government.** In February 2022, UNHCR issued a [Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan](#), superseding the previously issues non-return advisory in August 2021. In the same vein, UNHCR continues to call on asylum States to ensure that Afghans whose claim for international protection was rejected prior to the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban are able to lodge a fresh or subsequent claim, on the basis that the current situation in Afghanistan amounts to changed circumstances that may give rise to a need for international protection as refugees or otherwise.
- On 25 February, [Tolo News](#) reported on Afghans who were recently deported by the Iranian government, including women and children, who complain about the harsh and reckless treatment at the hands of Iranian forces. Moreover, the head of an Afghan transportation company actively working on the Kabul-Herat route, said that there has been an increase in the number of people being deported from Iran in recent weeks, where more than 2,000 Afghans from Iran cross at the Islam Qala border area in Herat each day.

THE REGIONAL RESPONSE PLAN (RRP) 2022

- On 25 August 2021, UNHCR launched the Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Preparedness and Response Plan (RRPRP), involving 10 partners. Results include:
 - Partners significantly expanded stockpiles of emergency assistance to facilitate a swift and scalable response to any potential new arrivals. stockpiles of core items were increased to support a response to up to 150,000 new arrivals over a 3-month period. This included prepositioning of non-food items in the country for between 70,000 to 140,000 persons, tents for over 50,000 persons, and ready-to-eat food rations to support 21,500 individuals for their first six days upon arrival in Iran.
 - Partners scaled-up presence and preparedness/ response interventions in the eastern border provinces (Sistan and Baluchestan, South Khorasan and Khorasan Razavi), from which Afghans are mostly entering Iran. To facilitate a timely frontline response to new arrivals, emergency in-kind assistance was prepositioned in advance field locations including the Niatak site, existing warehouses in and Government facilities in these areas.
 - Partners augmented existing regular programmes targeting new arrivals, existing refugee communities in Iran and host communities.
 - Technical surge staff were deployed to support ongoing preparedness and response efforts, while coordination capacity was also reinforced across agencies to enhance joint planning through the sector working groups.

- **On 11 January 2022, UNHCR launched the 2022RRP.** The RRP targets 5.7 million persons of concern in the neighboring countries of Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, in coordination with 40 partners and requires **USD 623 million**. **For Iran in 2022, the RRP is targeting 2.2 million persons of concern, including Afghans of varying status and host communities, with 16 partners involved, and requiring USD 259 million.** This includes approximately USD 69 million on health and Nutrition, USD 42.5 million on Shelter and NFIs, USD 35.1 million on WASH, USD 27.5 million on education, USD 27.3 million on protection, USD 27 million on livelihoods and resilience, and USD 22.2 million of food security.
- **The construction of the Niatak site is ongoing and recently a meeting was held with the BAFIA consultant, UNHCR and other partners on technical issues.** As reported by local media, [IRNA](#), [ISNA](#), on 23 February, Iran's Minister of Interior, Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi, embarked on the two-day mission to Sistan and Baluchestan province, accompanied by DG BAFIA of the province. The minister visited the Niatak site to observe construction progress and the Milak border crossing. The latest reporting from **9 February 2022**, shows that:
 - One batch of 206 tent platforms is 97% completed and a second batch is 79% completed.
 - For transitional shelters, the first batch of 36 shelters is 32% completed, the second is 44% completed and the third is 0% completed.
 - The boundary wall is 48% completed and the landscaping, which involves removing debris, demolishing the old boundary wall, and construction of main roads is 15% completed.

FUNDING NEEDS

The total interagency regional funding needs under the RRP in 2022 are:

- USD 623 million.
- Including almost USD 263.7 million for UNHCR alone.

For Iran, under the RRP in 2022, interagency needs are:

- USD 259 million.
- Including USD 119.4 million for UNHCR.

FUNDING UPDATE

As of 22 February 2022, UNHCR's overall programs in Iran (regular and emergency programming) were 39% funded.

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 programs 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 USD 46.7 million.

Germany 16.9 million | Italy 5.6 million | European Union 4.25 million | Republic of Korea 0.68 million | UNAIDS 0.009 million

SOFTLY EARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS | USD

Netherlands 4 million

Norway | Private donors

MAJOR UNEARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions:

Sweden 77.6 million | Norway 72.5 million | Netherlands 37.2 million | Denmark 35.6 million | Germany 27.6 million | Switzerland 18.4 million | Belgium 11.9 million | Ireland 11.8 million

Algeria | Armenia | Bulgaria | Canada | Estonia | Finland | Iceland | Liechtenstein | Lithuania | Luxembourg | Monaco | Montenegro | Peru | Qatar | Republic of Korea | Singapore | Thailand | Turkey | Uruguay | Private donors

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