

IRAN

March – April 2021

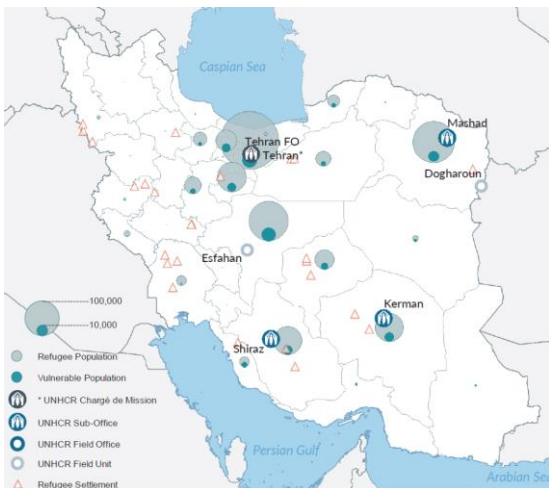
OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

In April, Iran began battling its fourth wave of COVID-19. Movement restrictions, closures of non-essential businesses and health protocols continued to be enforced throughout the country. The Statistical Centre of Iran announced the projected inflation rate in 2021 to be around 30%, a decrease of 0.5 percent from 2020, while Iran’s unemployment rate for 2021 is projected to stand at 12.4%. In April, Western and Iranian officials kicked off talks in Vienna on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), with the goal to produce a road map for both the US and Iran to return to compliance with the deal, which the previous US administration withdrew from in May 2018.



* 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, **527** individuals, all Afghan refugees except for 1 Iraqi refugee, had returned from Iran to their country of origin by the end of April, 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 April 2021, **6** individuals had departed for resettlement to Sweden. The outbreak of COVID-19 significantly affected resettlement departures. By the end of April 2021, **6** resettlement cases (13 individuals) had been submitted to two countries, namely Sweden and Norway and awaited a decision.

SECONDARY MOVEMENTS

In March 2021, Afghans were the **second most common** nationals to claim asylum in Europe (2,670 claims), after Syrians (51,95 claims).

Afghans made up **6%** of all arrivals to Europe through the Mediterranean from 2020 to April 2021.

Afghan children made up 40% of all asylum applications by unaccompanied minors in Europe in the past 7 months, with applications increasing 17% from a year ago.

1,159 unaccompanied Afghan children were reported to be in Greece in April 2021. Afghan children make up **32%** of all unaccompanied children in Greece.

PROTECTION

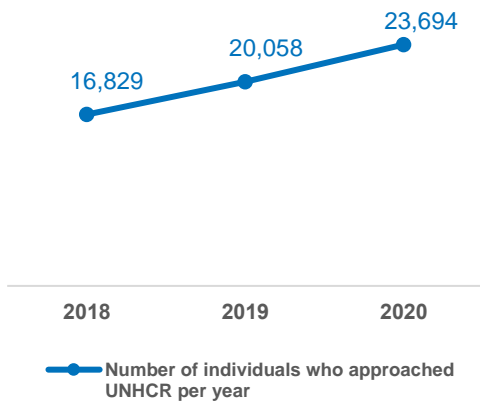
REGISTRATION/DOCUMENTATION

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 consultation** and **advocacy** with the Government. According to the Ministry of Interior, as of the end of March, 88,000 individuals had registered to obtain Iranian nationality, out of which 22,000 cases completed the administrative procedure; yet only 835 received their identity documents - *Shenasnameh* .

Isfahan and Shiraz are now added to the list of cities in Iran where Afghans can apply to receive their Tazkerah on the **e-Tazekrah** website of the Government of Afghanistan. Previously, only Tehran, Mashhad, Zahedan and Kerman were on the list.

CASE MANAGEMENT

In April, **2,356** refugees contacted UNHCR via its receptions and hotlines. The main reasons for the approaches were to receive assistance (1,487), health reasons (403) and for resettlement (181). In Mashhad, challenges with medical expenses and inability to purchase household items were the main reasons for approaching UNHCR.



In Tehran, UNHCR continued its efforts to reach out to local NGOs and charities that may provide protection and assistance to refugees during the pandemic. In April 2021, UNHCR offices collectively referred **149 cases** to various NGOs/INGOs and charities for assistance.

Livelihoods, health and legal assistance were recorded as the three main reasons for these referrals.

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, while others raise the limitations of virtual interaction as compared to face-to-face engagement.

UNHCR Iran continues to monitor the COVID-19 situation across all provinces, where we are present, to identify when the pandemic situation will allow for expanded **in-person interaction with persons of concern**. 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 March to the end of April 2021, **121** 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 **599** individuals were also assisted by UNHCR-Hired Lawyers (UHLs) from March to the end of April 2021. Due to the COVID-19 situation, UHLs mostly provided legal counselling remotely.

EDUCATION

Some 500,000 students (including 470,000 Afghans) have been enrolled in the 2020-2021 academic year in Iran, including some 130,000 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.

A total of 3,844 children and adolescents continued to receive literacy training at both literacy and transition levels provided by the UNHCR Government partner Literacy Movement Organization.

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 remain closed due to COVID-19. To mitigate these challenges, UNHCR procured 21,500 tablets for distribution to prioritized groups of students in coordination with our governmental counterparts.

At tertiary level, 472 DAFI scholars were supported. The DAFI programme is being implemented in Iran through the Pars Development Actors Institute (PDA) and in close coordination with the Government of Iran.

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 7th cycle of the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI) in February 2021, enrolments continued countrywide, and all refugees 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 April 2021, a total of 54,115 refugees had enrolled in the UPHI, out of which 53,380 (45% out of the 120,000) refugees were vulnerable and special disease cases (and thus received a free UPHI booklet, supported by UNHCR). In Iran, refugees have access to free of charge primary health care.

In Mashhad, families with member with disabilities reported facing extra challenges in meeting their needs including diapers and specialized services such as physio- and speech therapy which are excluded from the health insurance coverage.

LIVELIHOODS

2,295 refugees and 7 Iranian nationals benefitted from the 2020 UNHCR-supported livelihood interventions as of the end of April 2021. The projects, either implemented directly by UNHCR or through partnership agreements, include technical and vocational training, income-generating activities in workshops and the establishment of home-based enterprises. UNHCR also supported two vocational schools by providing equipment benefitting some 388 refugee and 357 Iranian students.

Based on media reports in March, over a million people in Iran have lost their jobs due to the pandemic over the past year. As reported by the UNHCR sub-office in Mashhad, since the outbreak of the pandemic more refugees have had to resort to garbage/recycling material collection in poor hygienic conditions, as other job opportunities have become sparse.

As some basic commodities such as oil, chicken and sugar that are under governmental subsidies are only being delivered by presenting national ID numbers, several refugee families reported faced challenges to access these food items, forcing these families to pay extra on the black market/informal economy.

As of the end of April, **907** vulnerable households (4,535 individuals) had received multipurpose cash support from UNHCR, out of a total of 3,635 refugee households (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 work, cash for relief of disability, cash for resettlement, and cash for voluntary repatriation, where a total of 489 households (608 individuals) were assisted.

ACCESS TO FINANCIAL SERVICES

Based on a circular published by the Central Bank of Iran in April, banks and financial institutes are now authorized to issue debit cards (ATM Cards) for foreign nationals, including refugees (Amayesh cardholders). This policy statement, which clarifies the rights of refugees in terms of banking, is also in line with UNHCR's financial inclusion policy, which promotes refugees' access to national banks and other mainstream financial services and offers options for their personal finances which are more transparent, efficient, and financially compliant.

SHELTER

Paying for rent has been one of the major difficulties faced by refugees in Iran. Given losses of income linked to the pandemic and the absence of job opportunities, many refugees are in debt, with several months of unpaid rent putting them at risk of eviction.

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.

On 7 April, UNHCR and the European Union (as 2021 chair of the Core Group of the SSAR Support Platform) hosted the first Core Group meeting at Iran level, to discuss country-level priorities as well as a work plan for 2021. The key priorities that were endorsed are:

- 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.

The Iran Core Group also agreed on a series of events and activities to take place in 2021, in support of these priorities. The Core Group also gathered in Afghanistan on 22 February and in Pakistan on 8 April to agree on similar country-level work plans, before the three work plans were presented at global level on 19 April.

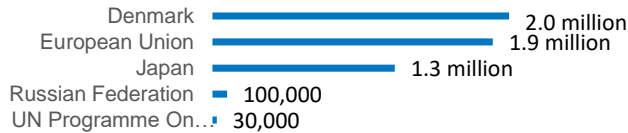
FUNDING UPDATE

As of 20 April 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 **7.04 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

Canada 3.7 million

Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions.

Norway 80 million | Sweden 66.9 million | Netherlands 36.1 million | Denmark 34.6 million | Germany 26 million | Private donors Spain 21.5 million | Switzerland 16.4 million | Ireland 12.5 million | Belgium 11.9 million | Private donors Republic of Korea 10.8 million

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

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