

Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

19 August 2021

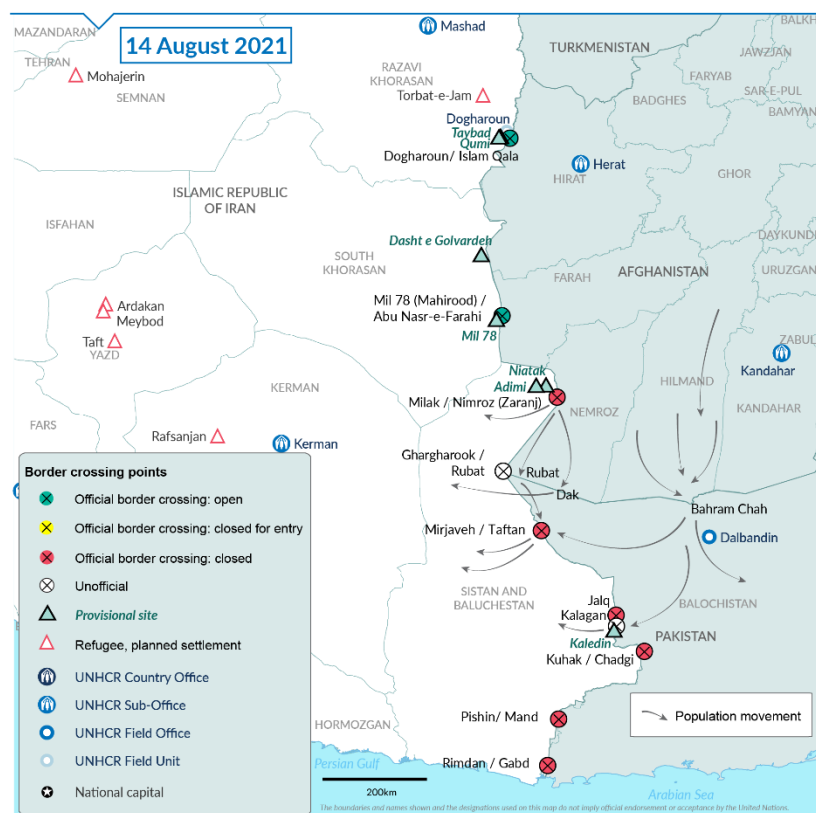
KEY HIGHLIGHTS

UNHCR has issued a **non-return advisory** for Afghanistan, calling on all countries to allow civilians fleeing Afghanistan access to their territories, and for a bar on forced returns, including of asylum-seekers who have had their claims rejected.

No mass influx into Iran yet although new arrivals have increased. At present 1,760 new arrivals are hosted by the Government in various border locations.

Borders between Iran and Afghanistan are officially closed since 16 August, except for two that remain open for commerce. Informal routes are likely being used to come into Iran.

UNHCR is focusing on advanced preparedness, such as pre-positioning and dispatching Core Relief Items (CRIs) in eastern areas, and joining site assessments in view of site development.



SECURITY SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

- **All major cities in Afghanistan are under Taliban control**, including Kabul and its presidential palace. The security situation in Kabul remains relatively stable, with sporadic incidents of fighting and gunfire.
- **Kabul airport is semi-functional**. On Monday, a civilian rush was reported at the airport in Kabul, with the UN terminal reportedly breached and civilians accessing UN aircrafts parked in the area. Military evacuation flights have continued out of Kabul. Civilian flights remain suspended.
- Initial reports suggest that some 120,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have started to **return from Kabul to their places of origin**, including to the northern region. IDPs residing in informal

settlements in Kandahar have also reportedly began returning. There are no verified numbers of returnees for now.

- The border situation with neighbouring countries remains fluid, though **no large-scale movements out of Afghanistan** have been reported so far.
- The UN peacekeeping mission (UNAMA) has recorded about **2,392 casualties** (783 killed and 1,609 injured) in May and June – a record since the start of systematic documentation in 2009. In total, fighting across the country has claimed the lives of over 40,000 people since 2009 when UN reporting began.

DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

Afghans have so far largely fled within Afghanistan's borders, and UNHCR has not observed mass influxes to Iran yet. At the same time, refugees, partners and other sources have reported that movements of Afghans outside of the country have risen in recent months. The situation remains fluid and most Afghans do not have the documentation needed to cross international borders regularly. In addition, there are border closures.

- As of 16 August, **all borders between Iran and Afghanistan have been officially closed**. Only the Islam Qala/Dogharoun crossing in Khorasan Razavi province, and the Abu-Nasr-e-Farahi/Mahirood crossing in South Khorasan province, are open for commercial purposes. Clarity is being sought on the conditions under which the Iranian Government is allowing Afghans at the border to enter. UNHCR continues to advocate for the Iranian authorities to keep border crossings open for Afghan civilians seeking protection and asylum, as well as to liaise with Government authorities in neighbouring countries for information.
- Prior to the Taliban assuming de facto control of the country on Sunday, the Government of Iran had already estimated that some **3,000 to 5,000 Afghans were arriving per day**, up to three times the previously estimated daily average of 1,500. However, most of these movements were estimated to consist in regular, pendular movements between Iran and Afghanistan, rather than in asylum-seeking.
- According to Iran's Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA), a total of **2,988 Afghans have recently crossed** into Iran, a majority of whom (2,688) have crossed since 6 August, while 300 have arrived weeks ago. UNHCR estimates that the actual number of Afghans to have entered Iran is likely to be significantly higher, as many may have entered through informal routes. There continue to be challenges in monitoring arrivals and verifying figures.
 - Since 6 August, when Afghanistan's Nimroz province was taken over by the Taliban, at least **2,688 Afghans** have arrived in Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan and Khorasan Razavi provinces, according to BAFIA. A majority (2,650) entered through the Milak border crossing in Sistan and Baluchistan, and include a mix of civilians and non-civilians. There remain challenges in identifying their profiles due to a lack of access. The other 38 persons (8 families) entered through Dogharoun, in Khorasan Razavi province, and were transferred to the Fariman facility, where they likely remain.
 - BAFIA also reported that **some 300 Afghans** had arrived through Dogharoun some weeks ago. UNHCR does not have further information on these arrivals.
- Amongst these new arrivals, only **some 1,760 reportedly remain in Iran**, while the other 1,228 are thought to have been returned to Afghanistan by the Government of Iran, including a number of military personnel. UNHCR is unable to verify that the returns were voluntary, and there are concerns that some civilians seeking asylum may have been forcibly returned.
- The above-mentioned persons who remain in Iran are being **hosted by BAFIA**. Amongst them, up to 1,600 single men are hosted at the Milak site and Adimi facility, and 13 families (72 individuals) are in Zahedan. These sites are reportedly being managed by the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS).

- Iran already hosts over **3 million Afghans** (refugees, undocumented and passport-holders), having maintained inclusive policies towards refugees for over 40 years, at times despite its own economic challenges. UNHCR calls on Iran to continue their tradition of hospitality by allowing Afghans seeking safety into the country.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND PREPAREDNESS

- **Basic assistance** reportedly continues to be provided to newly arrived Afghans hosted by BAFIA, largely by the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS). Assistance includes shelter, Core Relief Items (CRIs), hot meals, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). UNHCR has also dispatched 18,600 water bottles, cooking stoves, standard CRI kits (including tents), COVID-19 hygiene kits and water storage tanks to the Zahedan warehouse and the Milak site, upon request of the local authorities.
- In preparation for further influxes, the Government of Iran is seeking to **prepare the Niatak site** (Sistan and Baluchistan province) to host some 7,380 individuals for up to a year.
- The Government of Iran has centrally expressed a preference for a **“phased approach” to site development**, focusing first on Niatak site in Sistan and Baluchistan, as well as possibly Taybad site in Khorasan Razavi, before developing other sites. The approach is still being discussed with UNHCR, provincial authorities and other partners.
- More broadly, the Government of Iran has also asked **international partners to preposition supplies** for new arrivals, notably food, drinking water, water tanks, hygiene items, shelter, and core relief items (CRIs). A detailed list has been shared with sector focal points, covering requirements for 20,000 persons over a two-month period.

UNHCR PREPAREDNESS

- In view of the Government’s prioritization of Niatak site, **UNHCR presented a draft plan of the site** to BAFIA, which was well received and will be followed by a technical mission to refine the plan in consultation with all stakeholders, and initiate site development.
- UNHCR has prepositioned **CRI kits, hygiene kits and tents for 1,200 households (6,000 persons)** in the Niatak site. Other UN agencies, and international and national actors, are also in the process of prepositioning supplies in Sistan and Baluchistan province. This assistance includes ready-to-eat food (beans and biscuits) for 1,000 persons, hygiene kits, personal protective equipment (PPE), and various health items and menstrual hygiene kits.
- In Dogharoun (Khorasan Rasavi province), UNHCR is also **preparing for some 250 new arrivals (50 households)** by pre-positioning tents, CRI kits, hygiene packs, as well as gas, cooking stoves and water storage tanks.

NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLANNING

The Government of Iran has informed UNHCR that they forecast possible new arrivals from Afghanistan to be around **500,000 over six months**. In case of an influx, new arrivals would reportedly be granted access to Iranian territory and settled in locations along the border.

This is considered as a **temporary setup**, with an expectation that these individuals will return to Afghanistan after six months, in the hope that the situation stabilizes. 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 their length of stay in said settlements.

Upon activation, and in support of Government-led efforts, UNHCR will coordinate the refugee response among international actors in Iran, with 18 participating UN agencies and international NGOs under its leadership, in line with the **Refugee Coordination Model**. A UNHCR-Government task force would meet on a regular basis.

UNHCR is seeking clarity on the location of the designated arrival border points and the level of infrastructure established (e.g. reception points, screening areas).

As per current practice and in line with historical precedence, **movement** outside of any established site is likely to be restricted, with onward movements to other parts of Iran also expected to be prohibited. Hence, the focus will likely be on responding to needs within settlements.

In view of the Government's requests for **international support**, particularly tangible material contributions such as food, shelter and health, there is an expectation that international actors will be expected to make a significant contribution to the response, in the spirit of enhanced burden-sharing.

FUNDING NEEDS

UNHCR Iran funding needs for preparedness: **USD 14.6 million**

UNHCR Iran overall funding needs for 2021: **USD 111.8 million**

FUNDING UPDATE

As of 17 August, UNHCR's **overall programmes** were **26% 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 programmes with broadly earmarked and unearmarked funds.

Earmarked contributions | USD

Earmarked contributions for the Iran operation amount to some **13 million**.

European Union 9.2 million | **Denmark** 2 million | **Japan** 1.25 million | **Norway** 0.36 million | **Russian Federation** 0.1 million | **UNAIDS** 0.03 million

Major softly earmarked contributions | USD

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