

# Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

19 October 2021

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

**677,832** people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan in 2021.

Afghans continue to make their way to Iran irregularly through unofficial borders. UNHCR is aware of **19,641 Afghans who arrived in Iran** from 1 January until 15 October. The numbers are very likely much higher. **71%** of those interviewed by UNHCR reported having resorted to smugglers to cross into Iran.

**Official borders between Afghanistan and Iran remain closed for asylum seekers.** UNHCR continues its advocacy with the Government to open borders and allow individuals in need of international protection to get it.



## POLITICAL & SECURITY SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

- **UNHCR's emergency response in Afghanistan continues.** Over the last two weeks, UNHCR has assisted some 100,000 people throughout Afghanistan with emergency shelters, blankets, solar panels, and cash for the most vulnerable. In total, we have reached more than half a million displaced people with assistance so far this year. Additionally, the first of three planned **UNHCR aid flights landed in Uzbekistan** on 15 October, carrying shelter supplies to be taken by truck for tens of thousands of internally displaced people in Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan. The flight carried 32 tonnes of relief supplies from UNHCR's warehouse in Dubai - mainly shelter items, kitchen sets and plastic tarpaulins.
- The overall security situation in the country remains relatively calm, though **isolated but violent incidents continue to take civilian lives.** On 15 October, suicide bombers attacked a mosque in Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, killing dozens of people and wounding dozens more, the second such attack on a Shiite place of worship on successive Fridays in the country. The Islamic State Khorasan, also known as ISIS-K and ISKP, claimed responsibility. These attacks can be seen as a display of the organization's newly established reach, as it begins a reinvigorated campaign of violence against the people of Afghanistan and the new Taliban government.

- For the Shiite minority and many of the Hazaras in Afghanistan, ISKP's regained strength has ushered in yet another era of uncertainty. Earlier this month, [Amnesty International](#) said that the Taliban unlawfully killed 13 Hazaras, including a 17-year-old girl, amplifying fears for ethnic and religious minorities. On 16 October, it was reported that **large populations of the Hazara ethnic group have been ordered to evict their homes** by the Taliban. Most evictions are taking place in remote and rural areas of the country. It is estimated that between 400 to 2,000 families have been displaced from 15 villages in Daikundi province in central Afghanistan. Among the new arrivals in Iran, 40% are Hazaras; **UNHCR suspects the number of Hazaras crossing to Iran will likely increase**, in light of these recent attacks.

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## DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

- As of 18 October, UNHCR identified **19,641 Afghans who newly arrived in Iran** (based on 4,786 heads of households who approached UNHCR directly at our receptions). UNHCR noticed a sudden increase in the number of new arrivals in August, in the lead up to and immediately after the Taliban takeover of Kabul. Due to ongoing instability, Afghans have continued to flee their country for Iran. However, it remains challenging for UNHCR to understand whether the number of arrivals from August to October have increased, decreased or stayed at the same levels. That said, UNHCR has increased its reception capacities and is now able to conduct protection screenings of larger numbers of newly arrived Afghans. To date, UNHCR interviewed 870 families (consisting of 3,609 individuals) of which:
  - 40% were Hazara** and 38% were Tajik.
  - 71% had documents (of whom 52% had Tazkiras, 18% passports with visas and 12% passports without a visa), while **28% had no documents**.
  - 50% were in Tehran**, followed by Mashhad (18%) and Isfahan (17%).
  - Access to shelter (56%), livelihoods (52%) and documentation (41%) **were amongst the most required needs** by newly arrived Afghans.
  - On average, **newly arrived Afghans spent 7.8 days travelling to Iran**, with 80% crossing from Afghanistan while 17% went through Pakistan. 81% said they travelled to Iran by car, while 72% said they travelled on foot.
- According to official figures shared by the Government of Iran to UNHCR, **807 individuals remain in Iran and are being held by the Government** in facilities in border areas (107 in Al-Ghadir, in Sistan and Baluchistan province, and 700 individuals in Sefid Sang, in Khorasan Razavi province). These are among the 3,646 persons previously communicated by the government to have arrived in Iran in August. The majority of these individuals are understood to have returned to Afghanistan, though UNHCR is seeking clarity on the voluntary nature of these returns.
- The number of newly arrived Afghans is much higher** than reported by UNHCR, as many Afghans continue to cross into Iran undetected and irregularly. Different government officials at different times and events have unofficially stated that the number of new arrivals may range **between 100,000-300,000**. UNHCR continues to face challenges in monitoring arrivals and verifying figures, due to the absence of a centralized registration system and continued lack of comprehensive and sustained access to border areas.
- Official borders between Afghanistan and Iran remain closed for asylum seekers, with only individuals with passports and valid visas being reportedly allowed in. The passport department of the *de facto* authorities in Afghanistan has announced the **resumption of passport distribution in Afghanistan**. According to officials, the department will issue up to 6,000 passports per day. UNHCR believes that this development may lead to an increase in arrivals in Iran.

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## RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN

- The Government of Iran continues to return Afghans who are apprehended while trying to enter Iran, despite advocacy by UNHCR to provide asylum to those fleeing conflict. Notably, UNHCR in Kerman reported a considerable increase in the number of irregular movements, subsequent arrests and deportations over the past week. On 12 October, the Iranian Minister of Interior, Ahmad Vahidi, **urged Afghans not to approach the Iranian borders**, confirming that police forces will systematically return those crossing. **UNHCR continues to call on the Iranian Government to keep borders open for asylum-seekers**.
- UNHCR continues to advocate with Iranian authorities to be able to visit the Government-managed Fariman facility at the border, where it is understood Afghans who have been intercepted while trying to enter Iran are being held, to assess the conditions and identify potential ways to assist vulnerable persons of concern who remain at the facility. In principle, UNHCR does not support returning people to a territory where their life or freedom would be threatened. On 16 August 2021, UNHCR issued a **non-return advisory** for Afghanistan, which remains in place. UNHCR is seeking further clarity and reiterating the principle of non-refoulement to the Government.

## ONWARD MOVEMENTS

- On 15 October, UNHCR issued a [statement](#) calling on states to **expedite family reunification procedures for Afghan refugees**. While many countries have specific legal frameworks that provide for refugee family reunification and offer specific safeguards and waivers, UNHCR is worried that many Afghan refugees could face considerable administrative barriers in realising this legal right. UNHCR is also encouraging countries to apply liberal and humane criteria in identifying qualifying family members under these schemes, taking into account diverse family compositions and structures. The principle of family unity is protected under international law and in binding regional legal instruments.
- On 15 October, Human Rights Watch [reported](#) that Afghans who crossed from Iran to Turkey described abuse by soldiers at the Turkish-Iranian border. Experiences of beatings, having belongings seized, and being denied adequate food or medical treatment while in custody were among the abuses reported. UNHCR does not have access to border areas in Turkey and cannot verify these accounts. UNHCR notes the building of a wall by Turkish authorities along its Iranian border; **while States have a legitimate right to control their borders and manage irregular movements, this has to be done in accordance with international law**, including the right to seek international protection. UNHCR continues to engage with Turkish authorities to support the application of such mechanisms in compliance with national legislation.

## REGIONAL REFUGEE PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLAN (RRPRP)

- On 25 August, UNHCR launched the **Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Preparedness and Response Plan (RRPRP)**. This is an inter-agency plan with 10 partners working on a coordinated response to potential outflows, by supporting the host countries of Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This plan focuses on preparedness, limited emergency response and expanded support to regular programmes.
- Discussions are ongoing between UNHCR, partners and BAFIA representatives to accelerate site construction. On 11-13 October, UNHCR and BAFIA carried out a technical mission to Niatak to discuss way forward, including with infrastructure designs (shelter, communal WASH facilities, etc.). UNHCR is also discussing supporting BAFIA with the **rehabilitation of government sites** (Taybad and Fariman) that are currently being used to host new Afghan arrivals. Meanwhile, UNHCR is **prepositioning 30,000 Core Relief Items** (CRIs) in Iran – including the procurement of 10,000 hygiene kits.
- In light of newly arrived persons moving towards urban centres, UNHCR continues to advocate 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.
- In line with standing global arrangements, the Refugee Coordination Model has been activated in Iran under the leadership of UNHCR and in support of the Government of Iran, and regular sector working group meetings are taking place. UNHCR has instituted a biweekly bilateral Task Force meeting with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) to discuss the operational response for the new arrivals.
- UNHCR is currently leading the development of the 2022 RRP with partners. Unlike the 2021 RRP, the 2022 RRP will be more expansive, taking a needs- and area-based approach to support new arrivals and the 'old caseload' of Amayesh-cardholders, undocumented Afghans and host communities.

### 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

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

For Iran, interagency needs are **USD 135.9 million, including USD 58.8 million for UNHCR**. As of 18 October, 3 of the 10 agencies participating under the RRRP have reported receiving a combined USD 4.89 million, indicating that the RRRP is 4% 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 overall funding needs for 2021: USD 118.9 million**. As of 12 October 2021, UNHCR's overall programmes in Iran (regular and emergency programming) were **38% 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 **15.3 million**

**European Union** 9.2 million | **Denmark** 2 million | **Finland** 1.79 | **Japan** 1.25 million | **Norway** 0.36 million | **Russian Federation** 0.1 million | **UNAIDS** 0.03 million

### Major softly earmarked contributions | USD

**Germany** 33.3 million | **Private donors Australia** 13.4 million | **Austria** 11.8 million | **Private donors Denmark** 5 million | **Denmark** 4.8 million | **Norway** 4.1 million | **Private donors Germany** 3.4 million | **Japan** 2.9 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 2.6 million

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

### Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions

**Norway** 80 million | **Sweden** 66.9 million | **Private donors Spain** 62.6 million | **United Kingdom** 40.4 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 31.9 million | **Germany** 26 million | **Private donors Japan** 23.6 million | **Japan** 23.4 million | **France** 20.2 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Private donors Italy** 15.7 million | **Private donors Sweden** 13 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Italy** 10.7 million

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