

Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

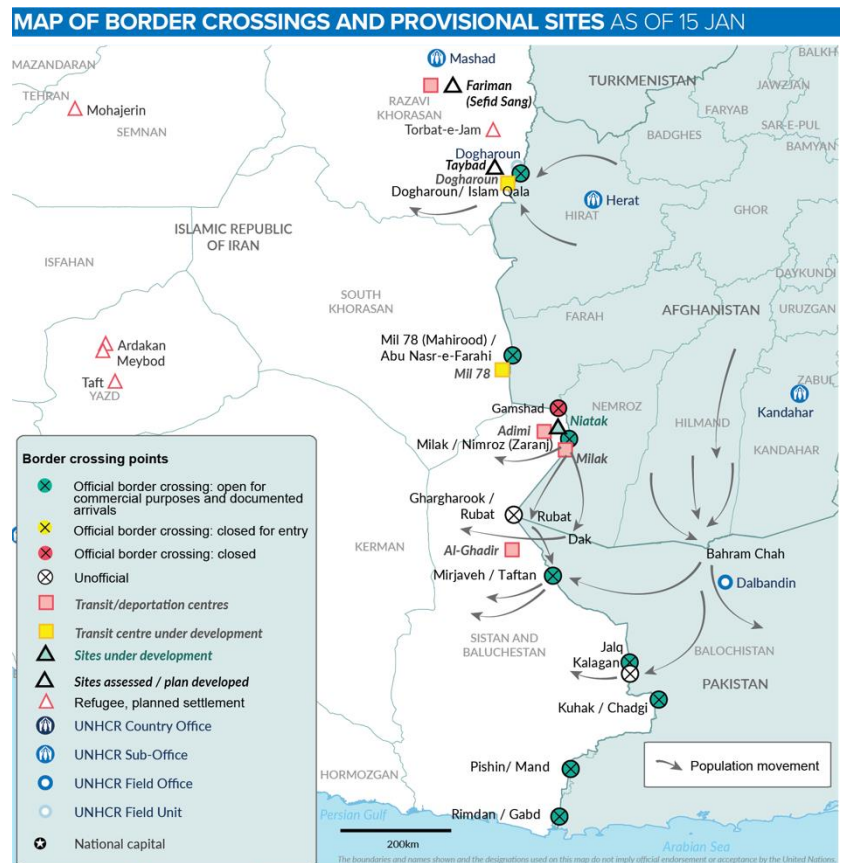
23 January 2022

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

700,180 people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan since the start of 2021, of which 21% are women and 59% are children.

According to preliminary 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. Reports indicate that the number of Afghans arriving in Iran has decreased in recent weeks as a result. **29,345 Afghans who arrived in Iran** from 1 January 2021 to 23 January 2022 have approached UNHCR requesting assistance and protection.



POLITICAL, SECURITY & HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

- On 13 January, describing a “nightmare unfolding in Afghanistan”, **the United Nations’ Secretary-General, António Guterres, warned that the world is “in a race against time to help the Afghan people.”** (Link) The UN Chief said the size of the appeal launched on 11 January “reflects the scale of the despair.” He added that there are “babies being sold to feed their siblings. Freezing health facilities overflowing with malnourished children. People burning their possessions to keep warm.” Currently, more than half the population depends on life-saving assistance but without a more concerted effort from the international community, Mr. Guterres stated that “virtually every man, woman and child in Afghanistan could face acute poverty.”
- Taliban leaders in Afghanistan are institutionalizing “large-scale and systematic gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls”, independent UN human rights experts warned on Monday** (Link). The group of around three dozen Human Rights Council-appointed experts highlighted a “wave of measures” such as barring women from returning to their jobs, requiring a male relative to accompany them in public spaces, prohibiting women from using public transport on their own, as well as imposing a strict dress code on women and girls. “Taken together, these policies constitute a collective punishment of women and girls, grounded on gender-based bias and harmful practices,” the experts said. These policies have also affected the ability of women to work and to make a living, pushing them further into poverty. “Women heads of

households are especially hard hit, with their suffering compounded by the devastating consequences of the humanitarian crisis in the country”, they explained. The experts noted the increased risk of exploitation of women and girls, including of trafficking for the purposes of child and forced marriage, as well as sexual exploitation and forced labour.

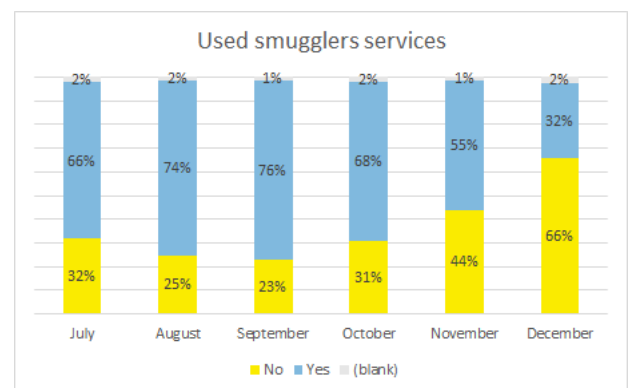
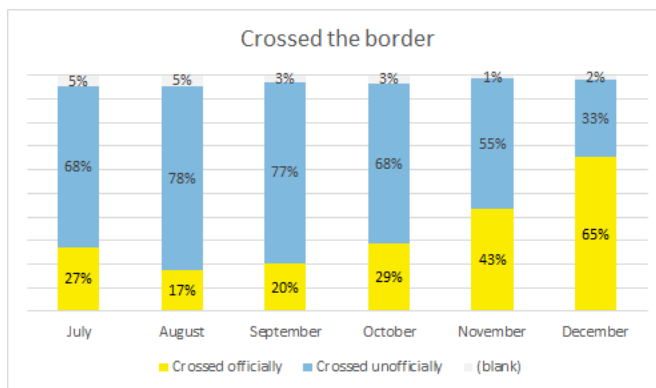
- **On 22 January, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) called on the Taliban to provide information on the whereabouts and protect rights of two women rights activists, Tamana Zaryab Paryani and Parawana Ibrahimkhel, who disappeared on 19 January from Kabul (Link).** The Taliban have denied any involvement in their disappearance. Paryani was among about 25 women who took part in an anti-Taliban protest on 16 January against the compulsory Islamic headscarf for women. Similar raids were reported across homes of female protesters in Kabul. Other reports claim that the Taliban’s religious police have threatened to shoot women NGO workers in a north-western province of Afghanistan if they do not wear the all-covering burqa, two staff members told AFP. “The Taliban are intensifying their attacks on the civic space, and more specifically on women who are pioneers of the civic space,” said Shaharзад Akbar, chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.
- **On 19 January, the UN International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that more than half a million people have lost or been pushed out of their jobs in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover, warning that the economy has been “paralyzed” (Link).** By the middle of this year, it’s expected that job losses will increase to nearly 700,000 - with direct predictions topping 900,000 - as a result of the crisis in Afghanistan and restrictions on women’s participation in the workplace. Women’s employment levels were already extremely low by global standards, but ILO said that they are estimated to have decreased by 16% in the third quarter of 2021, and they could fall by between 21% and 28% by mid-2022. The lack of work also threatens to worsen child labour levels in Afghanistan, where only 40% of children aged 5 to 17 years old attend school.
- **On 11 January, eight Afghan students who had been attending class died in explosion outside their school due to the detonation of explosive remnant of war, which also left four other children injured (Link).** All twelve were boys. UNICEF’s acting representative in the country, Alice Akunga, described the incident as underlining the importance of the international community providing more support for Afghanistan, so authorities can “clear explosive ordnance and remnants of war”. “Equally important is to educate children and their communities about the risks and the preventive measures to take”, she added.

DISPLACEMENT TO IRAN

- According to preliminary estimates by the Government of Iran, approximately 500,000 Afghans have arrived in Iran in 2021. UNHCR continues to face challenges in monitoring new arrivals and verifying figures. This is due to the absence of a centralized registration system in Iran and continued lack of comprehensive and sustained access to border areas. Instead, UNHCR is using available indications from various sources to estimate the number for 2021-22. Bearing in mind 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.**
- **On 9 January, the Iranian government lifted the restriction on tourist visas at the Iran-Afghanistan border, which was introduced at the end December 2021 due to the new Omicron COVID-19 variant. Afghans can now apply again for a tourist visa to enter Iran. The requirements of valid visas and passports are still being strictly applied at the border and tighter border control measures continue to be enforced in areas of unofficial border crossing points.** In Kerman Province, UNHCR observed a sharp decrease in the number of new arrival cases approaching the Office compared to the previous months, most likely as a result of these developments. In Tehran, there continues to be high numbers of approaches to the Office by passport-holding Afghans who arrived in the country earlier this year, mainly to request is either visa extension, visa registration or resettlement to third countries.
- **Since the start of 2021 and so far in 2022, UNHCR has identified 29,345 Afghans who newly arrived in Iran (and approached UNHCR receptions through 7,124 heads of households).** As of 23 January, out of these new arrivals, UNHCR had interviewed 2,403 families (which consist of 9,160 individuals) for protection concerns. Of these interviewed:
 - 80% had no status in Iran/were undocumented, 10% were valid visa holders, 2.7% were valid family visa holders and 2.4% were former Amayesh cardholders.
 - 56% are women and 44% are men.
 - 40% are Hazara, 36% are Tajiks, 11% are other, 8% are Pashtuns and 2.41% are Uzbeks.

- 41% reported needs related to accessing shelter, 41% accessing documentation, 39% accessing livelihood, and 25% accessing food.

- **From interviews with new arrivals, UNHCR has identified significant decreases in the proportion of Afghans crossing unofficially and the proportion using smugglers since September 2021.** Of those Afghans who arrived in the month of September, 77% did so unofficially and 76% used smugglers. Over the following three months, there has been a steadily decreased in these figures and in December only 33% reported entering unofficially and only 32% used smugglers. As previously highlighted, this is in line with reports of increased security measures in areas of unofficial border crossing points and the reopening of the Iranian consulate in Afghanistan, which has restarted issuing visas.



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.**
- Provincial BAFIA has reported that in Sistan and Baluchistan Province approximately 400 Afghans are arrested per day and most are deported in less than 24 hours. This is consistent with the previous trend. Currently, there are 28 Afghan families (138 individuals) kept in Al-ghadir supervisory camp whose deportations are suspended pending decision from Central BAFIA. Suspension of deportation is extremely rare and limited to these families kept in Al-Ghadir. In Rey County, the Police Commander stated that 1,800 foreign nationals were arrested and deported from the county in the past 6 months and the presence of irregular foreign nationals is not acceptable.
- In 2021, the total number of voluntary repatriations assisted through Field Unit Dogharoun reached 851 individuals, of which 57.3% were students who then re-enter Iran on a student visa. During the first half of January 2022, 24 applicants were assisted, including 16 students (67%), to return to Afghanistan. This suggest that refugee students still show interest in traveling to Afghanistan for status change, as opposed to going to Kish Island (which the Government put in place after August). This could be associated with volrep package assistance they receive. **UNHCR continues to disseminate relevant information on voluntary repatriation and the situation in Afghanistan to all those undertaking voluntary return to Afghanistan.**

ONWARD MOVEMENTS

- **The bodies of two refugees from Afghanistan have been found near the Turkey-Iran border in the Saray district of Turkey's eastern Van province.** This comes after an Afghan refugee mother froze to death at the border earlier this month and reports by Bianet that in the last two months, at least eight refugees froze to death at the border. According to the Turkish organization Human Rights Association (IHD), in the last three years, at least 160 refugees have lost their lives in Van after crossing from Iran, with 49 refugees dying from hypothermia, 68 drowned in Lake Van, 42 killed in traffic accidents and one killed by gunfire. Despite these risks, evidence continues to emerge of Afghans undertaking this dangerous journey. On 14 January, MedyaNews reported on video showing what appears to be hundreds of Afghan refugees walking through a snowstorm at the Iran-Turkey border as they try to reach Turkey. On 15 January, another video purportedly showed a long line of Afghans in winter conditions using a ladder to climb what was said to be a border wall at the Iran-Turkey border.

THE REGIONAL RESPONSE PLAN (RRP) AND HUMANITARIAN REPORTS PLAN (HRP) 2022

- **On 11 January 2022, UNHCR and OCHA launched the HRP and RRP.** The HRP aims to assist 22.1 million people in Afghanistan, requiring **USD 4.4 billion** and the coordination of 158 dedicated humanitarian organizations operating in Afghanistan. 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**. **The humanitarian and refugee response plans combined require over USD 5 billion in international funding in 2022.** During the online launch event, a number of refuge-hosting countries, including Iran, donor States and humanitarian organizations provided input on the need for assistance and their efforts and commitments to provide support.
- **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.
- **No construction work has started for the renovations of border reception centers at Dogharoun and Mil 78, and reportedly no expenditures has been undertaken from the allocated budget of this project.** UNHCR is following up with BAFIA for further information on this delay. Next week, UNHCR and partners will undertake a mission with BAFIA to Fariman in Khorasan Razavi Province to determine the possibility of a second temporary site for Afghan new arrivals.

FUNDING NEEDS

For 2022, the **interagency regional funding needs** under the RRP 2022 are **USD 623 million**, including almost **USD 263.7 million for UNHCR alone**.

Under the RRP for Iran, interagency needs are **USD 259 million in 2022, including USD 119.4 million for UNHCR**.

As of 18 January 2022, UNHCR's **overall programs in Iran** (regular and emergency programming) were **32% 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 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 31.3 million**.

Germany 16.7 million | **Italy** 5.6 million | **European Union** 4.2 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 | **Netherlands** 37.2 million | **Denmark** 35.6 million | **Germany** 27.6 million | **Switzerland** 18.4 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Ireland** 11.8 million

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