

IRAN Quarterly Factsheet

October - December 2021

As of the end of 2021, Iran had registered over 6 million cases and more than **130,000** deaths due to COVID-19, and the country had overcome the fifth wave of the pandemic. By the end of December, over 50 million out of Iran's population of 85 million were fully vaccinated, of which some **1 million** were Afghan nationals including refugees and undocumented individuals.

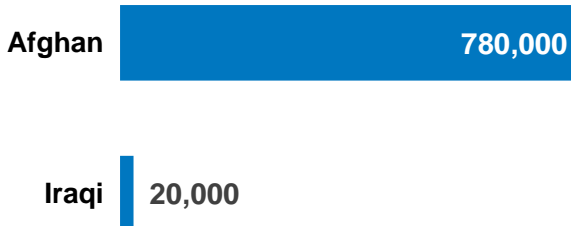
According to evolving estimates by the Government of Iran, up to **500,000** Afghans arrived in Iran in 2021.

While visiting the Islamic Republic of Iran in December, **the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, urged the international community to scale up its support** to the Government and people of Iran, who are receiving Afghans fleeing a deteriorating situation in their country.

Sustained international humanitarian support remains needed to support the Government in maintaining their inclusive refugee policies.

POPULATION OF CONCERN

800,000



Based on the data received from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in October 2020, on which consultations are ongoing. The breakdown is based on UNHCR's estimations.

UNHCR PRESENCE

UNHCR Staff & Affiliate Workforce:

182 National Staff

33 International Staff

Offices:

1 Country Office in Tehran

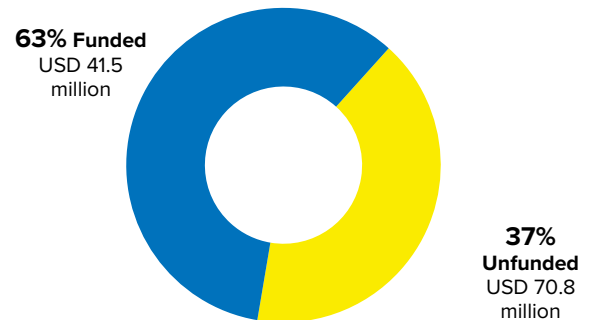
1 Field Office in Tehran,

3 Sub-Offices in Mashhad, Kerman and Shiraz

2 Field Units in Esfahan and Dogharoun

FUNDING (AS OF DECEMBER 2021)

USD 112.3 million



Working with partners

The **Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA)** is UNHCR Iran's main government counterpart and signatory to all tripartite partnership agreements. Other current partners with whom agreements have been signed include:

- **Governmental:** Ministry of Education (MoE), Literacy Movement Organization (LMO), Ministry of Health (MoH), Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO), Iran Health Insurance Organization (IHIO).
- **National NGOs:** Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV), Society for Recovery Support (SRS), Pars Development Activists Institute (PDA), Iranian Life Quality Improvement Association (ILIA), KIYANA, Iraqi Refugee Aid Council (IRAC).
- **UN agencies and International Organizations:** UNHCR coordinates with UN partner agencies, NGOs and international organizations under the umbrella of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR).

Main activities

Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)

The SSAR is a quadripartite multi-year regional strategy between UNHCR and the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Launched in 2012, the SSAR provides a framework for cooperation between humanitarian and development actors to address the needs of Afghan refugees and the communities that host them. It is also the guiding regional policy framework for protecting and enabling solutions for Afghan refugees. The June 2019 quadripartite meeting between the three governments and UNHCR saw the SSAR extended until the end of 2021. The key objectives of the SSAR in Iran are focused on health, education and livelihoods.

A **Support Platform** dedicated to achieving the SSAR objectives was launched on 16 December 2019 as part of the first-ever Global Refugee Forum. The Support Platform aims to reinforce the priorities of the SSAR and mobilize additional resources to promote and realize its three pillars – voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration, and assistance to host countries – while seeking to address the remaining gaps through reinvigorated, sustained and coherent humanitarian and development investments. The current members of the **Core Group** of the Support Platform are: the Asian Development Bank, Denmark, the European Union, Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Qatar, Switzerland, Turkey, UNDP, the United States of America, and the World Bank.

On 6 July 2020, UNHCR and the three governments launched a **portfolio of projects** as part of the SSAR Support Platform, outlining key areas of focus and support needs for two years (2020-21).

In December 2021, an SSAR meeting was organized including ministers and officials of the Government of Iran, national and international SSAR partners, and heads of UN agencies. Government counterparts requested more assistance from UNHCR and the international community to support refugees, and the High Commissioner advocated to the Government on UNHCR's asylum and protection issues in the country.

Protection

- **Registration and documentation:** The Government of Iran is responsible for the registration of asylum-seekers and refugee status determination, and annually renews refugee identification cards - *Amayesh* for Afghans and *Hoviat* cards for Iraqis. Refugee identification cards give refugees conditional freedom of movement, access to basic services and eligibility for temporary work permits. In 2021, the registration exercise of *Amayesh XVI*, where heads of households were required to approach *Kefalat* centres to renew their cards, started on 17 May and was officially closed on 21 November. UNHCR continues to advocate with the Government to receive regular updates on the number of persons of concern in Iran, to better inform our planning and response.

According to data received from the Government in October 2020, some **800,000 refugee cardholders** reside in Iran, of which it is estimated that 780,000 are Afghans and 20,000 are Iraqis. In addition, some **586,000 Afghan passport-holders** with Iranian visas reside in the country, including former *Amayesh* cardholders who now have student visas that allow them to access higher education, as well as some **2.6 million undocumented Afghans**. In 2017, the Government issued documentation slips to more than

804,000 undocumented individuals¹ (mostly Afghans) who participated in a ‘headcount exercise’ targeting Afghans residing in Iran without a valid *Amayesh* card or an Iranian visa and national passport. The type of documentation to be issued as a result of the headcount exercise has still not been announced. UNHCR continuously engages with relevant governmental counterparts to pursue this matter.

- **Durable solutions:** UNHCR facilitates **voluntary repatriation** of Afghan and Iraqi refugees to their countries of origin. By the end of December UNHCR facilitated the repatriation of 865 returnees to Afghanistan and 11 returnees to Iraq. This represents a slight decrease compared to the 948 repatriations facilitated in the same period in 2020. Following the issuance of the non-return advisory for Afghanistan on 16 August, UNHCR remains cautious and continues to provide enhanced counselling to prospected returnees on the situation in their final destinations and routes thereto, particularly to those with more vulnerable profiles, on a case-by-case basis.
- UNHCR Iran did not receive any **resettlement** quotas for 2021. However, departures to third countries resumed and, as of the end of December, 96 individuals have departed to Australia, Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Advocacy continues to increase the resettlement quotas for refugees in Iran. UNHCR is working with resettlement partners and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to upscale the resettlement programme in 2022, particularly given the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan.
- **Onward movement:** Although the arrival of Afghan asylum-seekers to Europe significantly reduced following the signing of the EU-Turkey deal in March 2016, displacement and onward movement of Afghans continue. Consistent with a pattern observed since August 2021, Afghans became the top citizenship applying for asylum in the EU in the last quarter of 2021. The overall number of Afghan asylum applicants in the EU doubled from the previous year to some 97 800, the most since 2016 with nearly two thirds of all Afghan applications in the EU+ lodged between August and December. The recognition rate fluctuated strongly over the course of 2021 (e.g. between 45 % in July and 91 % in both October and November), being especially high in the last four months of the year. In fact, the recognition rates for Afghan applicants in October and November were the highest on record. About half of all UAMs applying for asylum in Europe were Afghans (13 000, the most since 2015), increasing almost continuously since June 2021.
- **Community-based protection:** UNHCR Iran continuously seeks to strengthen meaningful participation and engagement of persons of concern, to better understand the protection risks they are facing, build on existing capacities and pursue solutions that take into account their perspectives and priorities. In Iran, community-based projects, awareness-raising sessions, focus group discussions and participatory data collection exercises are key activities that facilitate community engagement. These activities allow refugees and UNHCR to together identify, prioritize and address key issues within refugee communities, whether it be related to child protection, peaceful coexistence, persons with specific needs, including those living with disabilities. Allowing refugees to take ownership of these activities is key to their success. During the COVID-19 pandemic, community-based protection activities have been adjusted to ensure continued, albeit largely remote, two-way communication with communities on COVID-19 as well as key protection-related topics. However, with large numbers of new arrivals approaching UNHCR receptions since July 2021, UNHCR Iran has also been conducting in-person group counselling. From January until the end of December 2021, UNHCR Iran reached 22,823 refugees through awareness-raising and information dissemination activities (18,384 in-person and 4,439 virtually). Meanwhile, in consultation with refugee communities and local authorities, 13 community-based projects were developed, covering a range of topics such as stress management and mental health during the pandemic, awareness-raising and distribution of hygiene kits, virtual sports competitions for children, support to children engaged in child labour and positive parenting. Despite advocacy at several levels, no response has been provided from the Government on approval of the projects, and therefore the respective budgets have had to be reallocated for 2021. UNHCR continues to advocate for the clearance of the projects for implementation in 2022.
- **Persons with specific needs:** UNHCR provides support to persons with specific needs through targeted cash-based and in-kind assistance, referrals to governmental and non-governmental partners, and

¹ According to the Quadripartite Meeting held in mid-June 2019

inclusion in relevant programmes, such as livelihoods and community-based protection activities. In 2021, 95 persons with specific needs received cash for disability.

- **Protection of women and children:** UNHCR provides support to women and children directly through case management and through a referral system with governmental and non-governmental partners. During the pandemic, case management were largely remote, however, in the past months offices have started shifting back to in-person activities.
- **Legal support:** UNHCR, jointly with BAFIA, operates a legal services project to provide legal assistance to refugees in Iran to resolve disagreements through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. As of the end of December 2021, 16 functioning Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs) and 17 UNHCR Hired Lawyers (UHLs) are operational across the country. UHLs also provide free legal advice and assistance to Afghan and Iraqi refugees. In 2021, UHLs provided assistance to 4,005 individuals and DSCs provided assistance to 1,105 individuals.

Education

UNHCR continues to support the efforts of the Government of Iran in providing access to formal primary and secondary education for all children regardless of documentation, and to non-formal education (literacy classes), as well as tertiary education, DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholarship programme.

- **School construction:** In 2021, UNHCR is supporting the Government by co-funding the construction of 7 schools in refugee-hosting provinces with the poorest infrastructure.
- **Literacy Training:** In 2021, a total of 1,380 refugees benefitted from accelerated education programmes (AEP) through attending classes conducted by the Literacy Movement Organisation of Iran (LMO).
- **Inclusive policies for the undocumented:** Since May 2015, all children in Iran have had access to primary and secondary education, regardless of their documentation status. Refugee, undocumented and foreign national children study side by side with Iranian school children and follow the same national curriculum. According to the Ministry of Education, the number of Afghan and Iraqi children enrolled in primary and secondary schools in 2021 is 500,080, including 185,000 undocumented children.
- **Fee regulation:** Following new regulations on the registration of foreign nationals in May 2016, “*refugee-specific*” fees of USD 70-90 were removed. In 2020, based on the newest education circular, families holding government-issued identification documents including passports, residence permits, *Amayesh* XIII or XIV, laissez-passer, or Refugee Booklets, were able to approach schools and register their children for the 2020/2021 academic year.
- **Higher education:** In 2021, under the DAFI Scholarship Programme and through a tripartite partnership agreement with Pars Development Actors (PDA), a total of 569 refugee students benefitted from support with tuition fees and living allowances (361 ongoing and 217 new). This scholarship programme offers qualified refugee students the possibility to earn an undergraduate degree in their country of asylum.

Health

- **Primary healthcare:** UNHCR continues to complement the efforts of the Ministry of Health (MoH) to ensure the provision of quality free-of-charge similar to nationals. Primary Health Care to refugees includes vaccinations, antenatal care, maternal and child health, essential medicines and family planning, in health posts located in settlements and refugee-populated urban areas. In 2021, UNHCR contributed towards the construction of five health centres, the rehabilitation of three health centres and support (including through procuring medicine) of 134 health posts. For 27 of these health posts, which are primarily in refugee-hosting areas, UNHCR also covered personnel costs of essential health staff.
- **Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI):** Since 2015, as part of the agreement between UNHCR, BAFIA and the Iranian Health Insurance Organisation (IHIO), and in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health, all registered refugees have had access to enrol in a health insurance scheme, similar to Iranian nationals, covering both hospitalization and para-clinical services (medicine, doctor’s visits, radiology, etc.) at a subsidized rate. For the 7th cycle (23 Feb 2021 to 24 Feb 2022), UNHCR is covering 100% of the insurance premium for up to 120,000 of the most vulnerable refugees, including refugees who suffer from special

diseases² and their families, while the remaining refugee population can enrol in the health insurance by paying the premium fee. By end December 2021, a total of 108,096 refugees had enrolled in the UPHI, out of which 95,741 (80% out of 120,000) refugees were vulnerable and special disease cases for which UNHCR pays the fee (and thus enrolled in the scheme free of charge).

In addition to improving the healthcare of refugees, UPHI provides social protection benefits and offers potential protection dividends by reducing the risk of high out-of-pocket health expenditures, and negative coping mechanisms related to economic vulnerability, particularly where surgery or hospitalisation is required.

- **Other health and protection interventions:** UNHCR continues to collaborate with national charities and NGOs to extend its outreach in the area of health for specific vulnerable categories. The interventions include harm reduction services through the Society for Recovery Support Organization in the provinces of Khorasan Razavi and Fars. UNHCR also addresses the psychological, social and legal needs of refugees through collaboration with the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV).

Livelihoods

Enhancing refugees' livelihoods opportunities, by recognising that refugees should be empowered to earn a decent living, remains a priority for UNHCR Iran. Giving refugees the possibility of benefiting from livelihoods opportunities will prepare them to become more self-reliant and self-sufficient – enabling them to meet the basic needs of their families and become less dependent on humanitarian assistance. Refugees who are able to develop their skills and capacities, and engage in income-generating activities, are more likely to feel prepared to return to their home country, compared to refugees who have not. UNHCR implements its livelihood projects through three national partners.

- **Employment/income generation:** In 2021, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Government, and non-governmental partners implemented a diverse portfolio of livelihoods interventions to enhance income and employment opportunities for refugees. These interventions included certified technical and vocational training in some 50 occupations which benefited a total of 1,968 refugees, as well as income generation projects through partners as well as UNHCR's Direct Implementation interventions of establishment/expansion of business workshops which benefitted some 268 refugees. UNHCR supports three vocational training schools by providing necessary equipment in refugee-hosting areas through which 237 refugee students were supported.
- UNHCR implements **cash-based interventions (CBIs)** directly and through partners, including regular **multi-purpose cash** assistance, to assist extremely vulnerable refugees in meeting their immediate protection and basic needs. CBIs are also used to facilitate access to higher education and healthcare, to support shelter and livelihoods needs, persons with disabilities, and cover documentation and transportation needs prior to resettlement. Additionally, to address the negative economic impact of COVID-19, UNHCR rolled out one-off **Cash for Basic Needs** grants since April 2020, to cover basic shelter, nutritional and hygiene needs for a two-to-three-month period. UNHCR also collaborates on joint COVID-19 cash grants with BAFIA and is presently considering expansion of joint cash-based interventions in urban areas later this year for vulnerable households with special protection needs.
 - Between October to December 2021, 3,909 refugees received multi-purpose cash support from UNHCR, out of a total of 14,198 individuals who benefited from this assistance in 2021. Further, some 5,000 vulnerable refugee Amayesh cardholders were provided gift cards jointly by UNHCR and BAFIA provincials in the five provinces of Tehran, Esfahan, Shiraz, Kerman and Khorasan Razavi where UNHCR has a presence. In order to help vulnerable refugees meet their basic needs during the winter period, UNHCR has disbursed unrestricted multipurpose cash to 30,566 individuals in 20 settlements in collaboration with WFP in December. Also, 18,007 individuals in the urban area were supported with top-up cash assistance. Through a partnership agreement with IRAC, multi-purpose cash has been provided to 120 vulnerable Iraqi households in Tehran, Qom, Ilam and Khouzestan provinces. Cash assistance helps vulnerable families to meet their basic needs with choice and dignity.

² Special Diseases include Haemophilia, Thalassemia, Renal Failure, Kidney Transplant, and Multiple Sclerosis as defined by Iranian MoH.

- In 2021, UNHCR continued to provide Cash for Basic Needs for COVID-19 directly and through BAFIA for vulnerable households across the country impacted by the pandemic. Between October to December 2021, UNHCR offices in the field have directly identified and assisted 2,974 individuals at risk or in need who have been affected by the pandemic.
 - Other cash supports including cash for refugee focal points, cash for relief of disability, cash for resettlement, and cash for voluntary repatriation, DAFI scholarship, cash for students visa, resulted in assistance to a total of 1,692 individuals.
- UNHCR co-leads a Cash Working Group with INGOs and UN agencies to harmonize approaches and maximize cooperation between all CBI actors in the country. UNHCR's approach to CBIs is guided by the principle of financial inclusion, which seeks to ensure that refugees can access the same national financial channels and mechanisms as Iranians.

Shelter and Infrastructure

In an effort to improve refugees' access to essential services (including shelter, water, domestic energy, sanitation and community halls), through a bipartite agreement with BAFIA, UNHCR supports critical infrastructure needs in the most refugee-populated urban areas and in refugee settlements. Of the existing refugee population in Iran, 4% live in settlements, while the other 96% live in urban areas.

Moreover, in light of the Afghanistan situation and Taliban's takeover of the country, which has resulted in a large number of Afghans fleeing into Iran, a series of joint visits with the Government and other agencies has taken place, to assess several identified provisional sites to host newly-arriving Afghans in the provinces of Sistan and Baluchistan, Khorasan Razavi and South Khorasan. UNHCR and BAFIA signed on 13 September 2021 (?) an amendment to an agreement to commence infrastructure work for the development of the Niatak camp in the eastern border district of Sistan and Baluchistan. Once fully completed (with the co-contribution of other specialized agencies), the camp is expected to be able to host some 6,500 new arrivals. The amendment also includes the upgrade of two transit/reception areas in South Khorasan and Khorasan Razavi, to enable dignified reception and short stays of persons of concern.

Construction of the Niatak site continues, with progress on the permanent brick shelters, individual WASH facilities, roads and boundary walls all underway. Additionally, the rehabilitation of a derelict school at the site is 80% completed and the rehabilitation of a second existing school should start soon. The expected time of completion, however, has now been pushed back to the second half of 2022. This delay comes after the finalization of the WASH strategy, as the agreed upon sewage plans will take longer than expected to consult. An assessment of the sustainability of the water supply at the site has also been initiated. UNHCR is engaging with the key actors involved to try to accelerate progress and find interim solutions to this delay.

Emergency Preparedness and Response (Contingency Planning)

UNHCR continues to work closely with BAFIA and other partners on refugee emergency preparedness and response. A regularly updated scenario-based Contingency Plan for the Afghanistan situation is being discussed with the Government to respond to a possible sudden influx of arrivals to Iran. This inter-agency contingency plan also reflects the contributions of up to 19 international partners and is ultimately overseen by the Refugee Emergency Coordination Group (RECG) chaired by UNHCR. Sector Working Groups are responsible for the implementation of the contingency plan, under the leadership of dedicated lead agencies for each sector.

UNHCR is currently in advanced discussions with the Government to support site upgrades and provision of short to medium term relief items for new arrivals, referrals of persons in need and other urban-based responses in the areas of basic needs, education and health as services increasingly become overstretched.

On 25 August 2021, UNHCR launched the Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Preparedness and Response Plan (RRPRP). This is an inter-agency plan with ten 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.

Between October and December 2021, UNHCR led the development of the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for Afghanistan. This plan covers the whole of the response, including emergency preparedness and response. Under the Iran portion of the plan, 15 international humanitarian actors are appealing for a total of USD258.8 million across seven sectors.

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 BAFIA to discuss the operational response for the new arrivals.

As part of preparedness and emergency response, the office dispatched the following items to field locations:

Item description	Dogharoun	Sub-office Kerman	Niatak	BAFIA Sistan and Baluchestan
Hygiene pack	100	0	0	2,900
Family Tent	100	0	200	1,000
Tarpaulin	99	0	200	4,000
Jerry can	200	0	400	4,000
Blanket	512	0	1,000	8,000
Sleeping Mat	500	0	1,000	6,250
Kitchen set	100	0	200	1,500
Gas Stove	100	100	0	0
Water tank (5000 ltr)	30	30	0	0

For non-refugee emergencies, UNHCR continues to play an active role in the UN Country Team/Crisis Management Team/Disaster Management Team and the Protection Working Group for preparedness.

COVID-19

UNHCR's response to the pandemic is anchored in supporting the Ministry of Health's response by providing medical equipment in hospitals and health centres. UNHCR has airlifted more than 100 tonnes of medical aid, including masks, face shields, gowns, hand sanitizers, gloves, ventilators, non-contact thermometers and PPEs to help address critical shortages and support the national COVID-19 response. This complements the refugee inclusive efforts led by the Government where refugees and foreign nationals are included in the COVID-19 National Deployment and Vaccination Plan (NDVP), albeit with some delays for vaccinations due to procurement and economic issues acquiring vaccines.

UNHCR, in collaboration with the UN country team (UNCT), supported the Government's application for the supply of vaccines for 20% of persons of concern through the **COVAX Humanitarian Buffer**, for which Iran received approval on 28 September. A further shipment of 1.6 million doses arrived in Iran on 16 November 2021 and were used to vaccinate persons of concern.

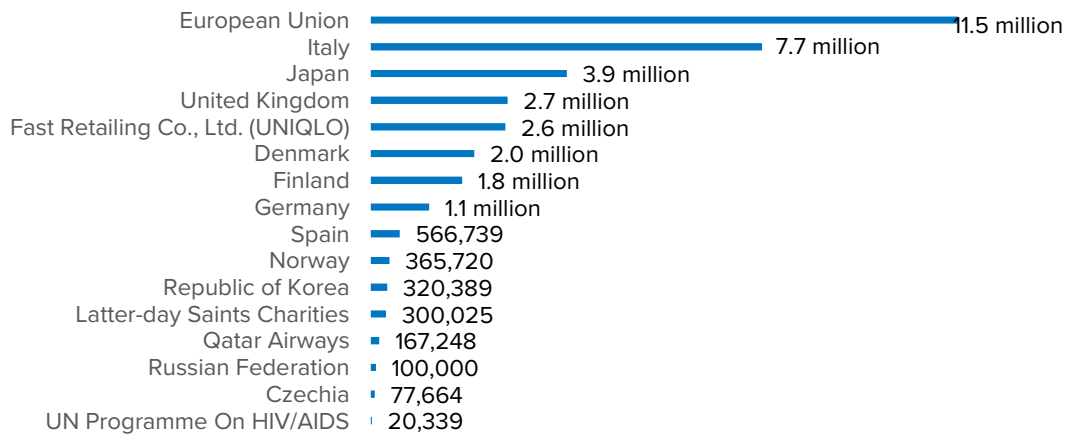
Financial information

As of 31 December 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 **27.6 million**



UNHCR is thankful to the Government of Germany for its support through the DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) Scholarship Programme, which supports 581 students in Iran.

Softly earmarked Contributions | USD

Germany 95.9 million | **Private donors Australia** 20.8 million | **France** 12.4 million | **Austria** 12.2 million | **Private donors USA** 9.4 million | **Private donors Spain** 8.4 million | **Spain** 7.1 million | **Private donors Germany** 6.1 million | **Private donors United Kingdom** 5.7 million | **Norway** 5.2 million | **Private donors Denmark** 5.1 million | **Denmark** 4.8 million | **Canada** 3.5 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 3.4 million | **Japan** 2.9 million | **Private donors Canada** 2.8 million | **Australia** 2.7 million | **Private donors Switzerland** 2.4 million | **Private donors Italy** 2 million

Czechia | Iceland | Ireland | Jersey | Liechtenstein | Luxembourg | Netherlands | New Zealand | Poland | Slovakia | Slovenia | Private donors

Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions.

Private donors Spain 83.8 million | **Norway** 80 million | **Sweden** 75.4 million | **Private donors Japan** 43.6 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 42.4 million | **United Kingdom** 40.4 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Germany** 26 million | **Japan** 23.4 million | **Private donors Italy** 22.5 million | **Private donors Sweden** 21.7 million | **France** 20.2 million | **Private donors USA** 17.7 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Italy** 10.7 million

Algeria | Armenia | Australia | Austria | Bulgaria | Canada | Costa Rica | Cyprus | Estonia | Finland | Holy See | Iceland | Liechtenstein | Luxembourg | Malta | Mexico | Monaco | Montenegro | Morocco | New Zealand | Peru | Philippines | Portugal | Qatar | Republic of Korea | Russian Federation | Saudi Arabia | Serbia | Singapore | South Africa | Spain | Thailand | Turkey | United Arab Emirates | Uruguay | Private donors

For more information, please contact:

Farha Bhoyroo
 External Relations Officer
bhoyroo@unhcr.org, +98 9121327183

Links:

Data portal: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/irn>
 Website: <https://www.unhcr.org/ir/>
 Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/unhcriran/>