

IRAN

January- March 2021

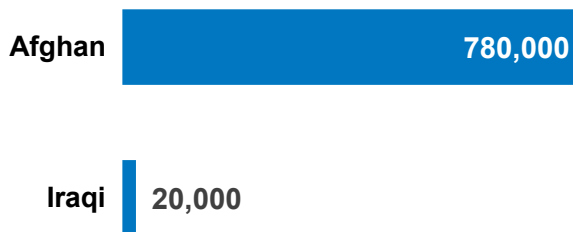
In the first quarter of 2021, **COVID-19** infections continued to rise, with the pandemic entering a fourth wave as of end of March. In February, Iran started nationwide vaccinations using the Russian Sputnik V vaccine.

The Iranian Rial continued to **devalue**, coupled with flaring **inflation**, causing prices of basic goods to continue to rise. The Statistical Centre of Iran announced the projected inflation rate in 2021 to be around 30%, a decrease of 0.5 percent from 2020.

Refugees' and host communities' ability to **make ends meet** continued to be affected. Sustained **international humanitarian support** remains key to facilitate Government efforts to provide inclusive policies towards refugees, including free COVID-19 testing.

POPULATION OF CONCERN

800,000

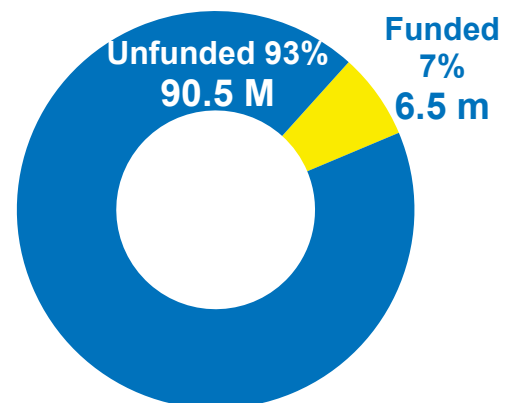


Based on the data received from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in October 2020, on which consultations are ongoing. The breakdown is based on UNHCR's estimations.

FUNDING (AS OF MARCH 2021)

USD 97.2 million

Requested for Iran



UNHCR PRESENCE

UNHCR Staff

& Affiliated Workforce:

138 National Staff

16 International Staff

Offices:

1 Branch Office in Tehran

1 Field Office in Tehran,

3 Sub-Offices in Mashhad,

Kerman and Shiraz

2 Field Units in Esfahan

and Dogharoun



Working with partners

The **Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA)** is UNHCR Iran's main government counterpart. Tripartite partnership agreements are being finalised with other partners, including:

- **Governmental:** Ministry of Education (MoE), Literacy Movement Organization (LMO), Ministry of Health (MoH), State Welfare Organization (SWO), Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO), Iran Health Insurance Organization (IHIO).
- **National NGOs:** Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV), Society to Protect Children Suffering from Cancer (MAHAK), Society for Recovery Support (SRS), Rebirth Charity Organization (Rebirth), Chain of Hope (COH), Pars Development Activists Institute (PDA), Iranian Life Quality Improvement Association (ILIA).
- **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 end 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 reinvested, sustained and coherent humanitarian and development investments. As of late 2020, 12 states and international organizations have become members of the **Core Group** of the Support Platform, namely 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).

Protection

- **Registration and documentation:** The Government of Iran is responsible for asylum-seeker registration and refugee status determination, and annually renews refugee identification cards (*Amayesh*). *Amayesh* cards give refugees conditional freedom of movement, access to basic services and eligibility for temporary work permits. In 2020, the registration exercise of *Amayesh XV* started in July. All eligible Heads of Households (HoH) were required to approach or contact *Kefalat* Centers to obtain an appointment and renew their cards by the end of February 2021, with a reported high rate of participation (above 90%). According to BAFIA, the *Amayesh XV* and *Hoviat XIV* cards will remain valid until 21 June 2021.
- According to data received from the Government in October 2020, on which consultations are ongoing, some **800,000 refugee card holders** reside in Iran, of which it is estimated that 780,000 are Afghan and 20,000 are Iraqi. In addition, according to data provided by the Government in October 2020, 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. Holders of Iranian visas in their family passports saw their visas expire in 2019. In January 2021, the Government announced that the validity of the family passports' visas would be extended for one year.

- It is estimated that some 2.1-2.25 **million undocumented Afghans** also live in Iran. In 2017, the Government of Iran issued slips to more than 804,000 undocumented individuals¹ (mostly Afghans) who participated in a ‘headcount exercise,’ targeting certain categories of individuals 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 is not announced yet. UNHCR continuously engages with relevant parties to pursue this matter.
- **Durable solutions:** UNHCR facilitates **voluntary repatriation** of Afghan and Iraqi refugees to their countries of origin. On 2 March 2020, UNHCR temporarily suspended voluntary repatriation activities as a preventive measure to limit the exposure of staff, partners and refugees to COVID-19. The facilitation of voluntary repatriation resumed on 2 May 2020, only through Field Unit Dogharoun. However, due to persevering conflict and instability in both countries of origin, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, only a modest number of refugees are opting for voluntary repatriation.

Regarding **resettlement** to third countries, UNHCR Iran’s 2020 resettlement quota was reduced to 120 individuals, offered by the UK (100) and Iceland (20). In addition to quota submissions, 17 cases (53 individuals) were submitted to Australia, , Finland, France, Norway, and Sweden via UNHCR’s global Resettlement Service. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, all resettlement departures from Iran were stopped from late February, while only Sweden resumed its admission of resettlement cases from late November. Advocacy continues to improve the resettlement quota for refugees in Iran.

- **Onward movement:** Although the arrival of Afghan asylum-seekers to Europe has significantly subsided since the EU-Turkey deal was signed in March 2016, displacement and onward movement of Afghans continue. Afghans made up almost 7% of all arrivals to Europe through the Mediterranean in 2020. In the second half of 2020, Afghans started arriving in Italy in greater numbers, taking boats from Turkey and Greece. Roughly one quarter of arrivals were in Italy and the remainder landed in Greece. In November 2020, 61% of Afghan asylum claimants in Europe were granted international protection, the highest level in 2020. In October and November, Afghan children made up nearly half of all asylum applications by unaccompanied minors in Europe.² According to the Mixed Migration Centre (June 2020), 25% of Afghans interviewed in Turkey started their journey from Iran.
- **Community-based protection:** UNHCR Iran continuously seeks to strengthen meaningful engagement with persons of concern, to understand their protection risks, build on their capacities and pursue solutions that take into account their perspectives and priorities. In Iran, community-based projects, awareness raising sessions and focus group discussions are key activities that facilitate community engagement. These activities allow for 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 the pillar to their success. During the COVID-19 pandemic, community-based protection activities have been adjusted to ensure continued, albeit often remote, two-way communication information-sharing with communities on COVID-19 as well as key protection-related topics. UNHCR Iran, in consultation with refugee communities, continues to develop community-based projects covering a range of activities in targeted communities, including the provision of support to reproductive and mental health, awareness-raising on health and hygiene, support to children’s education to prevent school drop-out, protecting children through sports activities, facilitating refugees’ access to recreational space.
- **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 inclusion in relevant programmes such as livelihoods and community-based protection activities.
- **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 the case management takes place remotely unless the situation demands otherwise.
- **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. Currently, 16

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

² “Onward Movements of Afghan Refugees” Statistical Factsheet, Asia Bureau’s Regional Mixed Movement Monitoring Unit (R3MU)

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.

Education

UNHCR continues to support the efforts of the Government of Iran in providing access to formal primary and secondary education to all children, regardless of documentation, as well as to non-formal education (literacy classes).

- **School construction:** In 2020, UNHCR supported the Government by co-funding the construction of seven schools in refugee-hosting provinces. Throughout 2019, UNHCR co-funded the construction of 12 schools.
- **Literacy training:** In 2020, UNHCR continued to collaborate with the Literacy Movement Organization by supporting the literacy training of 3,844 children and adolescents at both literacy and transition levels (3,228 refugees in 2019), to allow them to go on to be included in the formal national system.
- **Inclusive policies for the undocumented:** Following a decree by the Supreme Leader in 2015, stating that all Afghan children should attend school regardless of documentation status, the number of Afghan and Iraqi children enrolled in primary and secondary schools increased to 500,000, according to the Ministry of Education. Since 2015, some 138,000 undocumented children have enrolled in schools.
- **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 2020, under the DAFI Scholarship Programme and through a tripartite partnership agreement with Pars Development Actors (PDA), 472 DAFI students (353 ongoing and 119 new) were supported with tuition fees and living allowances. The DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) Scholarship Programme offers qualified refugee students the possibility to earn an undergraduate degree in their country of asylum.

Health

- **Primary health care:** UNHCR will continue to complement the efforts of the Ministry of Health (MoH) to ensure the provision of quality Primary Health Care to refugees, including vaccinations, antenatal care, maternal and child health, essential medicines and family planning, in health posts located in settlements and refugee-populated urban areas. In 2020, UNHCR contributed towards the construction, rehabilitation and support (including through procuring medicine) of 134 health posts. For 26 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):** As part of the agreement between UNHCR, BAFIA and the Iranian Health Insurance Organisation (IHIO), and in close cooperation with MoH, all registered refugees have access to enrol in a health insurance scheme, similar to Iranian nationals, for the 7th consecutive year since 2015, covering both hospitalization and para-clinical services (medicine, doctor’s visits, radiology, etc.). For the ongoing 7th cycle (23 Feb 2021 to 24 Feb 2022), UNHCR will cover 100% of the insurance premium for up to 120,000 of the most vulnerable refugees, including refugees who suffer from special diseases³ and their families, while the remaining refugee population can enrol in the health insurance by paying the premium themselves. UNHCR covered the costs of insurance for some 100,000 vulnerable refugees last year. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the prevailing economic downturn in Iran increasing vulnerabilities amongst refugees, this year, UNHCR agreed to temporarily increase the number of refugees covered by the scheme.

In addition to improving the healthcare of refugees, the insurance scheme provides social protection benefits and offers potential protection dividends by reducing the risk of high out-of-pocket health expenditures, and

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

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 medical referrals through “Chain of Hope” and “MAHAK,” and harm reduction services through the “Society for Recovery Support” and “Rebirth.” UNHCR will also address the psychological, social and legal needs of refugees through collaboration with the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) and the Association for the Protection of Refugee Women and Children (HAMI).

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.

- **Employment/income generation:** In 2020, UNHCR in collaboration with the Government of Iran and non-governmental partners continued to implement a diverse portfolio of livelihoods interventions, targeting some 2,068 refugees through the technical and vocational training courses in 50 occupations. Moreover, to enhance income and employment opportunities for refugees 182 job opportunities were created through UNHCR’s interventions by establishment / expansion of business workshops. These projects include technical and vocational training, income-generating projects in workshops, and the establishment of home-based enterprises.
- **Business start-ups:** In 2020, UNHCR supported 36 refugee women with the establishment of the individual businesses through the provision of start-up/business expansion equipment. UNHCR is also looking into possible cross-border initiatives to support refugees once the security situation in Afghanistan becomes more conducive for return. These initiatives will aim to link the knowledge and skills of refugees in Iran with job opportunities in Afghanistan, while also providing them with information on the situation in Afghanistan. UNHCR also intends to explore the replication of a successful Revolving Funds programme, in collaboration with the Government.

Cash-Based Interventions

UNHCR implements cash-based interventions (CBIs) directly and through partners, including multi-purpose cash assistance to assist extremely vulnerable refugees in meeting their immediate protection needs and basic needs, with choice and dignity. CBIs are used to facilitate access to higher education and healthcare, to support shelter and livelihoods needs, to support persons with disabilities, and to assist in covering documentation and transportation needs prior to resettlement. 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. Over 12,000 refugees benefited from multi-purpose cash, cash for work, cash for resettlement, and cash for voluntary repatriation from UNHCR in 2020.

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 three-month period. Furthermore, UNHCR has rolled out an additional cash-based intervention in response to COVID-19, through its main counterpart, BAFIA. Through this intervention, UNHCR and BAFIA have provided unrestricted and unconditional multi-purpose cash to eligible vulnerable households registered in the Government’s database, to enable them to independently prioritize and meet their basic needs during COVID-19. The objective is to mitigate the negative impact and reduce the risk of adopting negative coping mechanisms for extremely vulnerable households, for example, those who are infected with COVID-19, who fall in the Special Disease category, or who are extremely vulnerable due to economic and other protection reasons as per UNHCR and BAFIA’s criteria. Over 32,000 individuals benefitted from both COVID-19 cash interventions in 2020, either directly implemented by UNHCR, or through BAFIA. In 2021 UNHCR continues to provide multi-purpose cash, cash for basic needs for COVID-19 and will also collaborate with BAFIA to provide more than 500 vulnerable households (2,500 POCs) with cash cards across the country.

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.

Emergency Preparedness and Response (Contingency Planning)

UNHCR is working 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.

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 country-wide 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 COVID-19 national response complementing the refugee inclusive efforts led by the government. UNHCR will also provide electronic 21,500 tablets to provide continued access to online learning for refugee students in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and BAFIA.

Moreover, as a mitigative measure as well as a response to outbreaks, UNHCR, in coordination with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs of the Ministry of Interior, distributed basic COVID-19 related hygiene packages, including items such as soap, hand sanitizers, masks, and cleaning materials, to almost 11,000 refugee households residing in three populated refugee settlements across the country as well as eight provinces and urban areas. Further, the office shall continue to replenish a contingency stock to be able to provide a prompt response in case of needs in settlements or urban areas.

Financial information

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 **6.5 million**



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.

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** 22.1 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Private donors Spain** 13.3 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million

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