

# IRAN

January – March 2020

**233**

Refugees have voluntarily repatriated with UNHCR assistance so far in 2020

**89**

Refugees departed for resettlement so far in 2020

**480,000**

Afghan and Iraqi students enrolled in the 2019-2020 academic year

## POPULATION OF CONCERN

**979,410**

**Afghan**

**951,142**

**Iraqi**

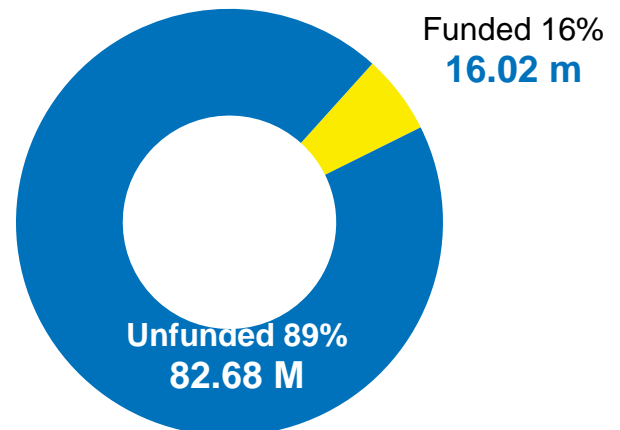
**28,268**

*Based on Amayesh IX statistics received from the Government of Iran in May 2015*

## FUNDING (2020)

**USD 98.7 million**

Requested for Iran



## UNHCR PRESENCE

### UNHCR Staff

#### & Affiliated Workforce:

**138** National Staff

**14** 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 operational government counterpart. Additionally, tripartite Project 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:** Potential partners for 2020 include: Association for Protection of Refugee Women and Children (HAMI), Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV), Society to Protect Children Suffering from Cancer (MAHAK), Society for Recovery Support (SRS), Rebirth Charity Organization (Rebirth), World Relief Foundation (WRF), Chain of Hope (COH); Pars Development Activists Institute (PDA), Iranian Life Quality Improvement Association (ILIA), Kiyana Cultural and Social Group (KIYANA), and Kowsar scientific and cultural institute (KOWSAR).
- **UN agencies and International Organizations:** UNHCR coordinates with UN partner agencies, NGOs and international organizations under the umbrella of the Solution 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, with voluntary return and reintegration as the most preferred solution. The last quadripartite meeting between the three governments and UNHCR in June 2019 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 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. It will seek to change the way in which the international community as a whole responds to the Afghan refugee situation, with a view to ensuring greater responsibility-sharing resulting from the protracted presence of large numbers of refugees.

### Protection

- **Registration and documentation:** The Government of Iran is responsible for asylum-seeker registration and refugee status determination, and periodically renews refugee identification cards (Amayesh). Amayesh cards give refugees conditional freedom of movement, access to basic services and eligibility for temporary work permits. The Amayesh XIV renewal exercise took place from 28 May 2019 and extended at least until 8 January 2020. This year, those who did not participate in the previous rounds of Amayesh exercise and exceptionally received a laissez-passer, were able to register for Amayesh XIV. For the first time, individuals and households were recorded in the new integrated BAFIA database "SIAM" (Integrated Database of Immigrants and Foreign Nationals).

According to data provided by the Government in 2015, over **951,000 Afghan refugees** hold a valid Amayesh card. In addition, some **450,000 Afghan passport-holders** with Iranian visas reside in the country, including former Amayesh card-holders who now have student visas that allow them to access higher education. In addition to individual passport-holders, the renewal of family passports was completed in early 2018, enabling families without individual passports to obtain one-year Iranian visas.

It is estimated that some **1.5-2 million undocumented Afghans** also live in Iran. In 2017, the Government of Iran issued slips to more than 804,000 undocumented individuals<sup>1</sup> (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 under negotiation. In November 2018, the Government initiated a new headcount exercise targeting foreign nationals, working informally and formally in Iran, as well as their employers. UNHCR continuously engages with relevant parties to pursue this matter.

- **Durable solutions:** UNHCR facilitate the gradual and **voluntary repatriation** of Afghan and Iraqi refugees to their countries of origin. However, persevering conflict and instability in both countries mean that only a modest number of refugees are opting for voluntary repatriation. From January to March 2020, 233 individuals (233 Afghans and 0 Iraqis) were assisted to return. Of these, 48% indicated that they were returning to Afghanistan to obtain national passports and Iranian student visas, after which they planned to come back to Iran to pursue higher education. In the same period in 2019, a total of 360 refugees voluntary repatriated (250 Afghans and 10 Iraqis), 49% of whom indicated their intention to return to Iran on student visas.

Regarding **resettlement** to third countries, UNHCR Iran's 2020 resettlement quota was reduced to 120 individuals, offered by UK (100) and Iceland (20). In the first quarter of 2020, 33 individuals were submitted to four resettlement countries – Iceland and, through UNHCR HQ, Norway, Sweden and Finland. During the reporting period, 3 individuals were accepted by Australia, 1 individual was accepted by Finland, 4 individuals were accepted by Sweden and 16 individuals were accepted by the UK.

During the first three months of 2020, 89 individuals departed to resettlement countries: 4 individuals departed to New Zealand, 70 individuals departed to Sweden, 7 individuals departed to the UK and 8 individuals departed to Australia. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the flights of several families who were scheduled to depart Iran in late February and March were cancelled until further notice.

- **Secondary 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 continues. Afghans make up 30% of all arrivals to Europe through the Mediterranean at the end of February 2020 – the largest group. Most Afghan arrivals in Europe known to UNHCR in 2019 and 2020 arrived and registered in Greece. However, smaller numbers of Afghans move irregularly from Greece or Bulgaria through the Western Balkans northwards. Additionally<sup>2</sup>, 170,000 Afghan refugees and asylum seekers reside in Turkey, as a transit country migratory routes to Europe<sup>3</sup>.
- **Community-based protection:** UNHCR, in cooperation with the Government of Iran, continues to reach out to communities and include them for assessing, designing and implementing activities and projects. Key ways that UNHCR Iran engage communities are through community-based projects, awareness raising sessions and focus group discussions. These activities help address issues identified and prioritized by communities themselves, e.g. out-of-school children, peaceful coexistence with host communities and vulnerable refugees, including those living with disabilities. Experience has shown that community-based projects, are a main tool, to closely engage with refugee communities, responding directly to the needs and priorities identified by persons of concern. Allowing refugees to take ownership of these activities is the pillar to their success.
- **Persons with specific needs:** UNHCR provides support to persons with specific needs through targeted cash-based and in-kind assistance, referral to governmental and non-governmental partners, and inclusion in relevant programmes such as livelihoods.
- **Protection of women and children:** UNHCR provides support to women and children through a referral system with governmental and non-governmental partners.

<sup>1</sup> According to the Quadripartite Meeting held in mid-June 2019

<sup>2</sup> <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/103?sv=41&geo=0>

<sup>3</sup> <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/74423>

- **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. The project is comprised of 16 Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs) and 16 UNHCR Hired Lawyers (UHLs) across the country for this reporting period. UHLs also provide free legal advice and assistance to Afghan and Iraqi refugees. From January to March 2020, UHLs assisted 818 individuals (813 Afghans, 3 Iraqis and 2 Bangladeshi); 266 individuals (Afghans) had their cases examined by the DSCs on family disputes, debts and other financial issues. In March 2020, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, there was only 2 DSC sessions across the country for emergency cases and UHLs mostly provided legal counselling remotely.

### 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 non-formal education (literacy classes).

- **School construction:** In 2020, UNHCR will support the Government by co-funding the construction of 11 schools in refugee hosting provinces. Throughout 2019, UNHCR co-funded the construction of 12 schools.
- **Literacy training:** In 2020, UNHCR will continue to collaborate with the Literacy Movement Organization by supporting the literacy training of 3,365 refugees at both literacy and transition levels (3,228 refugees in 2019).
- **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 over 480,000.<sup>4</sup> Since 2015, some 130,000 undocumented children have enrolled in schools.<sup>5</sup>
- **Fee regulation:** Following the revision of regulations for registration of foreign nationals in May 2016 “refugee-specific” fees of USD 70-90 was removed. In 2020, based on the newest education circular, families holding government issued identification documents including passport, residence permit, Amayesh XIII or XIV, laissez-passer, or Refugee Booklet, will be able to approach schools and register their children for the 2020/2021 academic year.

### Health

- **Primary health care:** UNHCR will continue to complement the efforts of the Ministry of Health (MoH). The Partnership Agreement, will ensure 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.
- **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, for the 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive year since 2015 all registered refugees can enrol in a health insurance scheme similar to Iranian nationals, covering both hospitalization and para-clinical services (medicine, doctor’s visits, radiology, etc.). For the sixth cycle (24 Feb 2020 to 24 Feb 2021), UNHCR is covering 100% of the insurance premium for up to 100,000 of the most vulnerable refugees, including refugees who suffer from special diseases<sup>6</sup> and their families, while the remaining refugee population can enrol in the health insurance by paying the premium themselves. Following the signature of the 6<sup>th</sup> cycle, as a precautionary measure due to the COVID-19 outbreak in Iran, IHIO extended the health insurance booklets of all refugees (including special disease cases) who had enrolled in the 5<sup>th</sup> cycle, until 21 June 2020.

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 negative coping mechanisms related to economic vulnerability, particularly where surgery or hospitalisation is required.

<sup>4</sup> Figures provided by the Government of Iran as of June 2019

<sup>5</sup> Figures provided by the Government of Iran as of November 2018

<sup>6</sup> Special Diseases include Haemophilia, Thalassaemia, Renal Failure, Kidney Transplant, and Multiple Sclerosis as defined by Iranian MoH.

- **Other health interventions:** UNHCR will continue to collaborate with national charities and NGO's 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 "Society for Recovery Support" and "Rebirth".

### Livelihoods

Enhancing refugees' livelihoods opportunities, through 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 – able 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 will continue to implement a diverse portfolio of livelihoods interventions targeting some 2,723 refugees to enhance income and employment opportunities for refugees. These projects include technical and vocational training, income generating projects in workshops and establishment of home-based enterprises.
- **Business start-ups:** UNHCR will continue to provide business start-up/business expansion equipment to support income generating activities which engage refugees. 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 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 to meet 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 benefit from access to the same national financial channels and mechanisms as Iranians. Some 1,900 refugee households (9,500 individuals) will benefit from multi-purpose cash support of UNHCR in 2020.

### 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 settlements and urban areas.

### Emergency Preparedness and Response (Contingency Planning)

UNHCR is working closely with BAFIA and other partners on refugee emergency preparedness and response, including the facilitation of capacity building and preparedness workshops. A regularly updated scenario-based Contingency Plan for the Afghanistan situation is in place to respond to a possible sudden influx of 150,000 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 chairs the Protection Working Group for Preparedness.

### COVID-19

UNHCR's response to the pandemic is anchored in supporting Iran's Ministry of Health's country-wide response by covering the gaps in personal protective equipments for health workers in hospitals and health centres, support to refugees and refugee hosting areas through direct cash and in kind support, and support to Government service providers such as BAFIA and Ministry of Health. UNHCR's ongoing support in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Health care also covers the needs of the most vulnerable, by providing them with needed protection.

On 23 March UNHCR airlifted some 4.4 tonnes of medical aid items, including masks, gloves and essential medicines, to help address critical shortages in Iran’s health care system and support the COVID-19 response. Further flights are scheduled in the coming weeks to transport additional aid-items, medicine and personal protective equipment (PPE) for health workers. UNHCR, in coordination with the Government of Iran, also distributed basic hygiene items such as soap and disposable paper towels to some 7,500 refugee families living in refugee settlements across the country. UNHCR continues to work with BAFIA, the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, UN agencies including the World Health Organization, and national and international NGO partners to raise awareness of key prevention measures amongst refugees and host communities.

### Floods

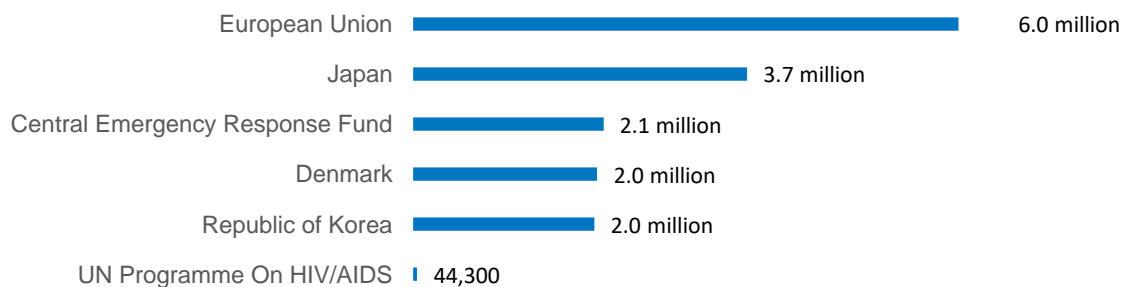
- **Response to March-April 2019 flooding:** Beyond the immediate response-phase, where core relief items were dispatched to 6 of the most affected provinces, UNHCR supported flood-affected communities in the highly refugee-populated Golestan province through constructing a school and health post, providing 12 months rental coverage for 35 Afghan families, and supporting livelihoods for 21 flood-affected Afghan households.
- **Response to January 2020 flooding:** UNHCR, in close liaison with its Governmental counterpart, has dispatched core relief items (tent, blanket, plastic tarpaulin, jerrycan and sleeping mat) for some 500 flood-affected households (Afghans and host community) in Sistan and Baluchestan province in southern Iran.

## 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 **16.02 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/softly earmarked contributions.](#)

Sweden 76.4 million | Norway 41.4 million | Netherlands 36.1 million | Denmark 34.6 million | United Kingdom 31.7 million | Germany 25.9 million | Switzerland 16.4 million | Private donors Republic of Korea 10.5 million

[Softly earmarked] Canada | Morocco | Slovakia | United States of America | Private donors

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## Links:

Data portal: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>  
Website: <https://www.unhcr.org/ir/>  
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/unhcriran/>