

# IRAN

1 December 2019

**2,009**

Refugees have voluntarily repatriated with UNHCR assistance so far in 2019

**678**

Refugees departed for resettlement in 2019

**480,000**

Afghan and Iraqi students enrolled in the 2018-2019 academic year

## POPULATION OF CONCERN

**979,410**

**Afghan** 951,142

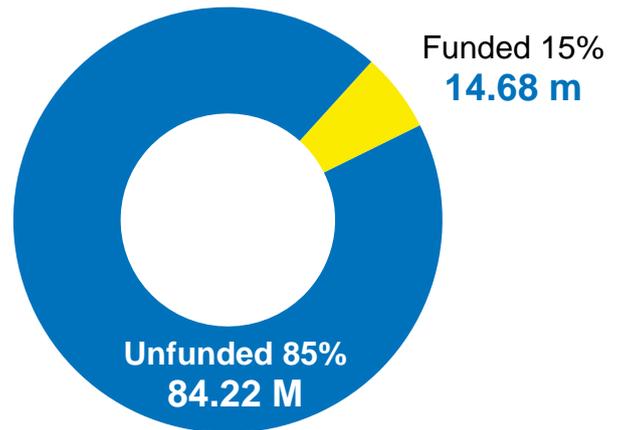
**Iraqi** 28,268

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

## FUNDING (2019)

**USD 98.9 million**

Requested for Iran



## UNHCR PRESENCE

### UNHCR Staff

#### & Affiliated Workforce:

146 National Staff

15 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 exist 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:** Association for Protection of Refugee Women and Children (HAMI), 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, as well as NGOs and international organizations, under the umbrella of the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). UNHCR continues to collaborate with its network of partners and to implement joint activities.

## Main Activities

### Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)

The SSAR is a quadripartite multi-year regional strategy between UNHCR and the governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. It was launched in 2012 to ensure the protection of Afghan refugees and finding durable solutions for them. 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 remain focused on health, education and livelihoods. UNHCR has developed a regional document to further clarify its strategic direction in line with government priorities: called 'Enhancing Resilience and Co-Existence through Greater Responsibility Sharing', the document places emphasis on the need to invest in the self-reliance of refugees to enable conducive stays in host countries and sustainable reintegration once conditions in Afghanistan become suitable for return. The document also emphasizes the need for enhanced responsibility and burden-sharing by the international community in line with the Global Compact on Refugees, which was affirmed at the UN General Assembly in December 2018. The Global Refugee Forum (Geneva, December 2019) will further underscore the need for enhanced responsibility-sharing and the quest for durable solutions.

### 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 until 21 November 2019. 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 intergrated BAFIA database "SIAM" (Intergrated 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

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

'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 continues to facilitate the gradual and **voluntary repatriation** of Afghan and Iraqi refugees to their respective countries of origin. However, persevering conflict and instability in both countries mean that only a modest number of refugees are opting for voluntary repatriation. In 2019, 2,009 individuals (1,952 Afghans and 57 Iraqis) were assisted to return. Of these, 42% 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 2018 (January to end of December), a total of 1,984 refugees voluntarily repatriated (1,972 Afghans and 12 Iraqis), 51% of whom indicated their intention to return to Iran on student visas.

Regarding **resettlement** to third countries, in December 2019, 8 individuals (1 family) were accepted by New Zealand and 2 individuals were accepted by the UK. One family of 3 individuals was submitted to Australia through HQ. Also during the reporting period, 16 individuals (4 families) departed to Sweden.

- **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. In 2018, Afghans ranked as the 5<sup>th</sup> largest population arriving in Europe<sup>2</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest group of asylum-seekers in Europe after Syrians.<sup>3</sup> By the end of October 2019, the arrivals of Afghans to Europe through Mediterranean sea and land was the highest of all nationalities (20.5%).<sup>4</sup> Afghanistan is also the country of origin of most unaccompanied minors who apply for asylum in Europe (one in three in September 2019).<sup>5</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. In 2019, UNHCR developed several community-based project proposals in consultation with governmental counterparts and refugee communities, on topics such as providing safe playing spaces for children, life skills trainings as well as hygiene and sanitary item distributions for those most in need.
- **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. With the support of the State Welfare Organisation (SWO), assistance to persons with specific needs has been further enhanced, especially for the elderly and for persons with disabilities.
- **Protection of women and children:** UNHCR provides support to women and children through a referral system with governmental and non-governmental partners.
- **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 17 UNHCR Hired Lawyers (UHLs) across the country for this reporting month. In addition to participating in the DSCs, UHLs provide free legal advice and assistance to Afghan and Iraqi refugees. In 2019, UHLs assisted 4,595 individuals (4,527 Afghans, 67 Iraqis

<sup>2</sup> <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/68006>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EASO-2018-EU-Asylum-Trends-Overview.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.easo.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends>

and 1 Pakistani); 2,588 individuals (2,585 Afghans and 3 Iraqis) had their cases examined by the DSCs on family disputes, debts and other financial issues.

### Education

- UNHCR continues to support the efforts of the Government of Iran in providing access to formal primary and secondary education side by side with Iranian school-children, as well as non-formal education (literacy classes).
- **School construction:** Throughout 2019, UNHCR supported the Government by co-funding the construction of 12 schools in 8 provinces. UNHCR also supports transportation for a limited number of vulnerable students living in settlements who have to travel outside the settlement to attend school.
- **Literacy training:** In 2019, UNHCR continued to collaborate with the Literacy Movement Organization by supporting the literacy training of 3,228 refugees at both literacy and transition levels.
- **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>6</sup> Since 2015, some 130,000 undocumented children have enrolled in schools.<sup>7</sup>
- **Fee regulation:** In 2019, 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, have been able to approach schools and register their children for the 2019/2020 academic year. The deadline for school registration was 22 September 2019 (start of the scholastic year).

### Health

- **Primary health care:** UNHCR complements the efforts of the Ministry of Health (MoH) in providing quality primary healthcare 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. UNHCR also supports MoH in construction and rehabilitation of health posts. 27 health posts are currently receiving specific support for essential health personnel from UNHCR.
- **Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI):** As part of a breakthrough agreement between UNHCR, BAFIA and the Iranian Health Insurance Organisation (IHIO), and in close cooperation with MoH, for the 5<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 fifth cycle (24 Feb 2019 – 24 Feb 2020), UNHCR is covering 100% of the insurance premium for up to 92,000 of the most vulnerable refugees, including refugees who suffer from special diseases<sup>8</sup> and their families, while the remaining refugee population can enrol in the health insurance by paying the premium themselves. To increase refugee enrolment, the fourth window was removed and premium payers are able to enrol in the scheme from 11 December 2019 until the end of the fifth cycle (24 February 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. Discussions are ongoing between UNHCR and the Government of Iran in order to ensure there are no gaps in supporting vulnerable refugees' enrolment in UPHI for its sixth cycle (2020-21).
- **Other health interventions:** UNHCR collaborates with national charities and NGO's to extend its outreach in the area of health. These joint interventions include medical referrals through "Chain of Hope" and "MAHAK", and harm reduction services through "Society for Recovery Support" and "Rebirth".

<sup>6</sup> Figures provided by the Government of Iran as of June 2019

<sup>7</sup> Figures provided by the Government of Iran as of November 2018

<sup>8</sup> Special Diseases include Haemophilia, Thalassemia, Renal Failure, Kidney Transplant, and Multiple Sclerosis as defined by Iranian MoH.

## Livelihoods

In recent years there has been a positive shift towards enhancing refugees' livelihoods opportunities, recognising that refugees should be empowered to earn a decent living. 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 2019, UNHCR collaborated with the Government of Iran and non-governmental partners to implement a diverse portfolio of livelihoods interventions targeting some 2,723 refugees to enhance income and employment generation. These projects include technical and vocational training and establishment of home-based enterprises.
- **Business start-ups:** UNHCR has provided business start-up/business expansion equipment for income generating activities to some 177 refugees by the end of December 2019. 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.

## 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 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. In 2019, 5,137 refugee households (18,131 individuals) benefited from cash support.

## 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/Disaster Management Team towards emergency preparedness for natural disasters in Iran (mainly earthquake scenarios) and chairs the Protection Working Group for Preparedness.

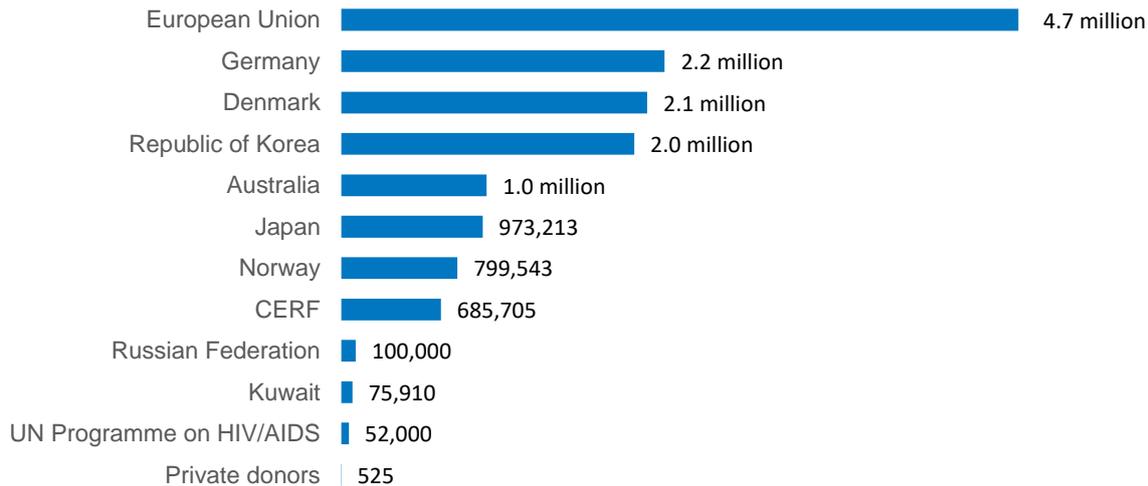
- **Response to March-April 2019 flooding:** Beyond the immediate response-phase, where core relief items were dispatched to 6 of the most affected provinces, UNHCR supported flood-affected communities in the highly refugee-populated Golestan province through constructing a school and health post, providing 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 **14.68 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 473 students in Iran.

## Funding comparison:

Compared to November 2019:  
**+ 0 USD**

## Major unearmarked contributions | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked/softly earmarked contributions.

Sweden 99.8 million | Private donors Spain 73.8 million | United Kingdom 44.6 million | Norway 44.5 million | Netherlands 43.1 million | Private donors Republic of Korea 41.8 million | Germany 28.9 million | Japan 25.7 million | Denmark 24.4 million | Private donors Japan 23.4 million | Private donors Italy 17.5 million | Switzerland 15.1 million | Private donors USA 15 million | France 14 million | Private donors Sweden 13.6 million | Ireland 10.2 million | Italy 10 million

[Softly earmarked] United States of America | Private donors Australia | Private donors Republic of Korea | Canada | Czech Republic | Finland | China | Japan | Norway

## For more information, please contact:

**Farha Bhojroo**, Communications and External Relations Officer, Iran  
[bhojroo@unhcr.org](mailto:bhojroo@unhcr.org), Office: +98 21 89349112, Mobile: +98 912 132 7183

**Paniz Zamanian**, Senior Communications and Public Information Assistant, Iran  
[zamanian@unhcr.org](mailto:zamanian@unhcr.org), Office: +98 21 89349114, Mobile: +98 912 323 9420