

# Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran

20 July 2021

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

**No mass influx into Iran yet** although new arrivals have increased.

**Contingency plan not yet activated.** If activated, the Iran Government estimates an influx of 500,000 over six months, with an assumption that their stay will be temporary. Meanwhile, UNHCR's initial planning figure is of 150,000 new arrivals over three months upon activation of the contingency plan, scalable depending on developments.

**UNHCR is focusing on preparedness**, for example by pre-positioning Core Relief Items (CRIs) and carrying out joint site assessments.



## SECURITY SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

- Afghanistan is currently witnessing the highest number of conflict-related casualties on record, with on average **500-600 security incidents per week**. During the first quarter of 2021, the number of recorded civilian casualties resulting from conflict were **29% higher** than in the same period in 2020, according to UNAMA.
- As of 11 July, the Taliban claimed to hold **85% of Afghanistan** after taking key border crossings. Fighters said they have seized the border town of Islam Qala (a main conduit of trade and population movement with Iran). Reportedly, **Government control of the territory has reached its lowest level since 2001**.
- Four **Priority Areas for Return and Reintegration** (PARRs) are under Taliban control in the provinces of Nangarhar (two), Kunduz and Baghlan. The four PARRs are Majjboorabad, Shekh Mesri, Sher Khan Bandar and Shahrak Mohajreen.
- The Taliban have said they plan to **present their peace plan** to the Government of Afghanistan in August, and that the peace talks and process will be accelerated in the coming days. The Afghan

Government has publicly welcomed the development, even if the timeline is ambitious, stating it will help them to understand what the Taliban want.

- In the past weeks, UNHCR in Herat (Afghanistan) has not been able to issue **security clearance for Afghans to voluntary repatriate**, in view of the prevailing and uncertain security conditions. Around 30 persons have been stranded in Dogharoun (Iran) while awaiting clearance and are being accommodated at the UNHCR/BAFIA compound. The families' return intention is linked to the deteriorated economic situation and loss of income in Iran. They received counselling on security developments in Afghanistan, of which they were not aware. Although UNHCR has the capacity to provide those stranded at the border with **shelter and food**, should their number increase, UNHCR will have to explore supplementary accommodation and food services.



Afghan refugees awaiting voluntary repatriation, as well as undocumented Afghans wishing to return, at Dogharoun near the Afghan border. © UNHCR

- UNHCR is concerned about the **documentation status** of these individuals, should clearance not be received for their movement to Afghanistan, as their exit visas are expiring and their Amayesh cards may not be reissued. Given the continuously deteriorating situation along the Afghan border and in PARRs, discussions are ongoing on how to improve information-sharing with refugees, to ensure their decision to return is informed and voluntary. UNHCR also continues to advocate for vulnerable Afghan persons of concern's access to documentation.
- Meanwhile, as of the end of May, the estimated number of **deportations of undocumented Afghan citizens increased by 346%** compared to the same period last year and continue to take place as of July. Approximately 290,000 Afghans were deported by end of May 2021, compared to 65,000 deported by end of May 2020.

## DISPLACEMENT

### INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT WITHIN AFGHANISTAN

- Since the beginning of 2021, OCHA's real time displacement tracking in Afghanistan has recorded over **220,000 displacements**, with a spike recorded in May. Internal displacement in the first five months of 2021 was higher than in 2020 (112,000) and 2019 (180,000) respectively.
- In recent years, nearly 3 million people have been forcibly displaced by conflict in Afghanistan, with some **400,000 displaced in 2020 alone**.
- For further information on displacement and needs within Afghanistan, please consult the [UNHCR Afghanistan Data Portal](#).

### MOVEMENTS INTO IRAN

- The irregular entry of Afghans into Iran is currently estimated by the Government of Iran at approximately **5,000 per day**, or up to three times the previously estimated daily average of 1,400-2,500. However, it is difficult to develop a reliable analysis in the absence of systematic border monitoring.
- As of 6 July and since the beginning of the Iranian calendar year (21 March 2021), according to the Khorasan Razavi Border Commander, Iran has witnessed a **69% increase in the entry of Afghans** compared to the same period last year. The foreign nationals are said to have been arrested by border guards, denied entry into Iran and deported.

- Based on limited interactions with arriving communities, an increased number are reporting that **conflict or fear of conflict** is driving their decision to flee to Iran. There is also a potential change in the profile of arrivals, with reported increased numbers of **women, families, and unaccompanied children** (previously predominantly men), as well as of first-time arrivals.
- From 29 June to 19 July, UNHCR received **263 new Afghans in Tehran**, all of whom travelled to Iran as families and cited fear of violence and threats from the Taliban as the main reason for fleeing, using irregular routes. To further assess their profiles, UNHCR has scheduled interview appointments. Additionally, on 18 July, UNHCR in Shiraz received the first call to its reception line from a newly-arrived family of seven, who fled violence in Afghanistan and arrived in Iran via Mashhad Airport.
- Reports suggest that most undocumented Afghans are entering Iran **through Sistan-Baluchistan province, via Pakistan**, and that undocumented Afghans are first using the Rabat crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan, then seek to enter Iran via the Taftan crossing between Pakistan and Iran.
- During a recent joint site assessment by UNHCR and BAFIA in Kalendin (Sistan-Baluchistan province), officials suggested that between **20-30 families were entering Iran around Jalegh/Jaq every day**. It is understood that most of these families entered Iran 'illegally', through mountainous areas south of Kalendin and through the Jalegh crossing, some 250 km south of Taftan. Joint assessments of additional sites are planned shortly.
- Iran already hosts over **3 million Afghan nationals** (refugees, undocumented and passport-holders), having maintained inclusive policies towards refugees for over 40 years, at times despite its own economic challenges.

#### **NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLANNING**

The Government of Iran has informed UNHCR that they forecast possible new arrivals from Afghanistan to be around **500,000 over six months**. In case of an influx, new arrivals would reportedly be granted access to Iranian territory and settled in settlements in locations along the border.

This is considered as a **temporary setup**, with an expectation that these individuals will return to Afghanistan after six months, in the hope that the situation stabilizes. Shelter, health and food would be the priorities to cope with the Government's scenario.

Such contingency planning is a **Government-led process**, which has not yet been activated, though UNHCR is actively engaging to receive clarity on various issues, including the status that will be conferred to new arrivals and their length of stay in said settlements.

Upon activation, and in support of Government-led efforts, UNHCR will coordinate the refugee response among international actors in Iran, with 18 participating UN agencies and international NGOs under its leadership, in line with the **Refugee Coordination Model**. A UNHCR-Government task force would meet on a regular basis.

It is assumed that new arrivals would be received through **formal border crossing points**, to ensure that movements are organized, and to prevent disorderly onward movements within Iran. UNHCR is seeking clarity on the location of the designated arrival border points and the level of infrastructure established (e.g. reception points, screening areas).

As per current practice and in line with historical precedence, **movement** outside of any established site is likely to be restricted, with onward movements to other parts of Iran also expected to be prohibited. Hence, the focus will likely be on responding to needs within settlements.

In view of the Government's requests for **international support**, particularly tangible material contributions such as food, shelter and health, there is an expectation that international actors will be expected to make a significant contribution to the response, in the spirit of enhanced burden-sharing.

## EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND PREPAREDNESS

### UNHCR PREPAREDNESS

- On June 27, UNHCR declared a level 1 emergency for the Afghan situation, which was then scaled up to a **level 2 emergency** on 16 July, covering Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkey, and facilitating its ability to scale-up its operational responses.
- As of 19 July, UNHCR and partners had **visited several provisional sites** identified by BAFIA to host newly-arriving Afghans in the provinces of Sistan and Baluchistan, Khorasan Razavi and South Khorasan. Significant investment will be required to rehabilitate and/or prepare the sites, notably in terms of shelter, sanitation/water supply and health facilities. Based on the visits, UNHCR and the Government will discuss the sites' suitability, taking into account protection and various operational considerations.
- In addition, UNHCR has visited **border crossing points** in Khorasan Razavi and South Khorasan provinces, including border transit facilities ran by BAFIA. Further analysis will be prepared by UNHCR.
- Currently, UNHCR has **prepositioned tents, CRIs and hygiene kits** (including COVID-19 supplies) for 10,000 persons. There is a need to increase quantities to cater for 50,000 persons, as well as for additional staffing.
- On 28 June, upon the Government's request, UNHCR pre-positioned **Core Relief Item (CRI) for 1,000 persons** in the temporary settlement of Niatak in Sistan-Baluchistan province.
- On 11 July, UNHCR dispatched **Core Relief Items (CRIs) and COVID-19 hygiene packs** for pre-positioning at the Dogharoun border, to cover the needs of 500 individuals. The CRIs include family tents, tarpaulins, kitchen sets, jerrycans, blankets and sleeping mats. Each COVID-19 hygiene pack comprises disposable face masks, hand sanitizer, soap, dish washing liquid, and detergent powder to cover two months of family's needs.
- As access to border crossing points remains difficult, UNHCR is enhancing communication with refugee focal points and partners and counterparts in the field to **receive and triangulate information** of population movements.



Core Relief Items (CRIs) pre-positioned at UNHCR's Dogharoun field unit, near the Afghan border in Sistan-Baluchistan province. © UNHCR

### PROCUREMENT PLANNING AND AVAILABLE STOCK

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