

IRAN YEAR IN REVIEW

2020

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic took the world by storm, with Iran being one of the first countries impacted by the virus, on top of the economic downturn the country was experiencing. The pandemic had significant impact on UNHCR's operations, forcing us to rapidly adjust the way we work. However, UNHCR has spared no effort to continue helping and protecting refugees the best we could under these difficult circumstances throughout the year, thanks to flexible funding received, as well as specific support for Iran operation.

HEALTH

UNHCR supports the efforts of the Ministry of Health to include refugees in the national health care system. Free primary health care, including vaccinations, essential medicines and maternal and child health services are available to all, regardless of their documentation status. So far, UNHCR estimates that 90% of refugees in Iran have access to primary health care. Refugees also have access to universal public health insurance (UPHI) to cover secondary and tertiary health care, on par with nationals.



100,000 vulnerable

refugees had their insurance premium covered by UNHCR until February 2021



135 refugees

received social and psychological counselling and therapeutic services



4 health post

constructions and 1 health post rehabilitation were funded by UNHCR



145 refugee children

benefited from specialist care (cancer, cardiac, orthopedic and corrective surgeries)



7,900 refugees

benefited from harm reduction activities

CASH-BASED INTERVENTIONS

UNHCR implements different Cash-Based Interventions (CBIs), including multi-purpose cash assistance to assist extremely vulnerable refugees in meeting their immediate protection and basic needs, with choice and dignity. Other CBIs include cash for work, cash for resettlement, and cash for voluntary repatriation.



12,011 individuals

benefited from cash-based interventions

EDUCATION

All children in Iran have access to primary and secondary education, regardless of their documentation status. Refugee, undocumented and other foreign children study side by side with Iranian students, while following the same national curriculum. Higher education can also be accessed by Afghans and Iraqis if they obtain a student visa for Iran.



7 school

constructions were co-funded by UNHCR and Iran's Ministry of Education



3,815 refugees

were enrolled in literacy courses



472 students

received scholarship support through the DAFI programme for their university education

LIVELIHOODS

UNHCR implements a diverse portfolio of livelihoods interventions for refugees to become more self-reliant and better able to meet their basic needs. This in turn increases their economic potential and enables them to contribute to their host community, as well as to their home country once conditions become conducive for return. These interventions include certified technical and vocational training and income generating projects.



218 refugees

were supported through income-generating activities such as tailoring workshops or home-based enterprises



2,068 refugees

were enrolled in vocational training courses

COVID-19 SUPPORT

As part of the COVID-19 prevention and emergency response, UNHCR distributed 25,582 hygiene packages to 10,991 HHs in 20 settlements in multiple rounds and to 5,553 HHs in urban areas countrywide. In addition two rounds of hygiene packages comprised of thermometer, masks, sanitizers and liquid soaps were distributed to 28 BAFIA provincial offices / reception offices in settlements who work for refugees.

In order to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 and reduce the risk of refugees adopting negative coping mechanisms, UNHCR provided one-off Cash for Basic Needs grants to extremely vulnerable households (including those infected with COVID-19, who fall in the Special Disease category, or who are extremely vulnerable as per UNHCR and BAFIA's criteria).



100 tonnes of medical aid

were airlifted to Iran and distributed (masks, face shields, gowns, hand sanitizers, gloves, ventilators, non-contact thermometers and PPEs)



10,991 refugee households

received hygiene packages (soap, hand sanitizers, masks, and cleaning materials)



32,238 individuals

received cash support covering a 2 to 3-month period, to address the negative economic impact of COVID-19 (22,803 through bank transfers and 9,435 through gift cards)

PROTECTION

UNHCR facilitated the gradual and voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees to their countries of origin, although a temporary suspension of UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme took place between March and May as a precautionary measure against COVID-19. Resettlements also took place, despite some interruptions in air transport and an all-time low quota of 120 individuals.

UNHCR also ramped up its hotline capacity to respond to increased needs and calls in 2020, coupled with the need to provide assistance remotely amidst the pandemic. Legal support continued to be provided, although again in an amended and socially-distanced way.



38,428 approaches to UNHCR (3,020 in person and 35,408 voice call approaches)



7 community-based projects were implemented



947 refugees voluntarily repatriated (all Afghans)



110 refugees were submitted for resettlement and are being considered by resettlement countries



949 individuals were referred to Dispute Settlement Committees as part of UNHCR's legal assistance activities



4,303 individuals were referred to UNHCR-hired lawyers

INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

UNHCR, jointly with BAFIA, provides infrastructure support both inside and outside refugee settlements to ensure refugees' enhanced access to shelter, sustainable energy and safe water resources. In addition, UNHCR contributed to the renovation of refugee reception areas for a better access to the services provided by BAFIA.



24 shelter/ infrastructure projects

were implemented in 9 settlements, targeting 12,500 residents



Reception areas in 8 key locations

were renovated with UNHCR's contribution

CHALLENGES

UNHCR's Iran operation remained critically underfunded in 2020, with just 42% of funding received as of December. Significant support was received in the context of COVID-19, which allowed UNHCR to respond to the emergency, however substantial needs remained in other sectors such as education, health or protection. Travel restrictions also created delays or interruptions in certain activities, for example voluntary repatriation and resettlement.

Furthermore, COVID-19 both created new challenges and aggravated existing ones, with consequences to be mostly felt in 2021 and beyond. These included a significant deterioration in refugees' socio-economic status, challenges in accessing remote education, shortages in medical supplies, and durable solutions for refugees being at an all-time low.

As the Government of Iran nevertheless maintained its exemplary services to refugees, increased funding and international responsibility-sharing is needed in 2021, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees.

UNHCR Iran is grateful for the generous contributions of its main donors in 2020.

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United Nations CERF



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