

THE COVID-19 SITUATION IN IRAN was still in its third wave as of December 2020, with over 1.2 million cases and almost 55,000 deaths by the end of the month. However, cases rose at a slower pace, giving cause for cautious optimism. According to the spokesperson of Iran's Coronavirus Taskforce, fatalities from the pandemic have declined by roughly 50% in December, and hospitalizations have dropped by 40%. Health measures, such as movement restrictions and business closures, continued throughout the country. Due to COVID-19, coupled with the economic downturn, sustained international humanitarian support is key to facilitate the Government's efforts to provide inclusive policies towards refugees, including free COVID-19 testing. Working closely with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant's Affairs (BAFIA), **UNHCR CONTINUED TO PROVIDE EMERGENCY SUPPORT TO THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAN's** response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



UNHCR and the Government of Iran continued to provide **ESSENTIAL MEDICINES AND PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT** to help bolster Iran's health system. In 2020, 100 tonnes of medical aid were airlifted to Iran and distributed, while 10,991 refugee households received basic hygiene packs to prevent and contain outbreaks.



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). 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).



Thanks to the Government of Iran's **INCLUSIVE HEALTH POLICIES**, refugees and foreign nationals continued to have access to free COVID-19 testing in designated Ministry of Health centers. If refugees are enrolled in the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI), they also

have access to free treatment and hospitalization, similar to nationals, and only pay the franchise fee. However, UNHCR continues to receive reports of uninsured refugees facing challenges in affording COVID-19 treatment costs. UNHCR covers UPHI premiums for 100,000 extremely vulnerable refugees, but efforts are ongoing to encourage others to enroll. As of late December, a total of 7,372 refugees were self-enrolled premium payers.

Based on the data received by UNHCR, and information from the Ministry of Health, a total of 2,126 refugees had **CONTRACTED COVID-19** as of late December 2020 (including 84 at Sarvestan refugee settlement), with 153 deaths. As a precautionary measure, refugees have been asked to only approach settlements' health posts and BAFIA offices for urgent matters, until further notice.



UNHCR and BAFIA have increased **COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES** to share information on hygiene and health practices, by engaging with legal-aid partners, psycho-social counsellors, refugee focal points and other partners. In Kerman, training sessions on general hygiene, as well as on COVID-19 prevention measures, were held by the Ministry of Health for 10 facilitators. On 15 and 16 December, the

facilitators were in turn able to raise awareness door-to-door amongst some 2,800 women, while each household also received a hygiene kit.



Since early May, UNHCR has partially resumed **VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION** and 947 refugees have returned from Iran in 2020 – a significant decrease compared to 2,009 individuals in 2019. Additionally, 859,000 undocumented Afghans have returned from Iran in 2020, without UNHCR assistance. Some 534,000 of them returned spontaneously; a 138% increase compared to 2019, potentially due to losses in livelihoods linked with COVID-19.



UNHCR has increased its hotline capacity, for refugees to continue accessing **PROTECTION SERVICES**, such as counselling, referrals or inclusion into relevant programmes. This helps address the heightened vulnerabilities of persons with specific needs, including women and children. In 2020, health was one of the main reasons for which refugees approached UNHCR. A total of 23,694 individuals approached UNHCR in 2020, in comparison to 20,058 individuals in 2019. UNHCR's hired lawyers and psycho-social counsellors also continued to provide assistance via phone.



\$16.9M needed in 2020 for COVID-19 measures in Iran

With your support we can help prevent the virus from spreading.

In 2020, UNHCR sought USD 16.9 million for its COVID-19 emergency response in Iran. This was part of UNHCR's global funding needs and fed into the wider UN appeal. Updated financial needs for 2021 will be shared in due course.

In Iran, strengthening and promoting the inclusion of refugees in national systems can help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable.

Support for UNHCR's regular activities, as part of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), further complements the emergency response to COVID-19, by strengthening inclusive national systems, notably for health, and mitigating the virus' socio-economic impact.

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