



International Conference on
Social Protection
in contexts of **Fragility & Forced Displacement**

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ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN



"This insurance brought hope and relief to our family..."

Habibollah

TESTIMONIES

"... We were knocking at every door asking for help from relatives and acquaintances to cover a few more dialysis sessions, so I could live a few more days. This [universal public health] insurance brought hope and relief to our family, and peace and joy back into our house."

Habibollah, 48, Afghan refugee, dialysis patient

"I always wanted to contribute to society and to the livelihood of my family. Every time I [needed] my medication, I had to borrow money from friends and relatives. I no longer have to worry about the repeated painful bleeding in my hands and legs [and] I am relieved that I now have affordable access to [universal public] health assistance."

Ajab Khan, 22, Afghan refugee, hemophiliac





BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Islamic Republic of Iran is host to one of the largest and most protracted urban refugee situations in the world, and has provided asylum to refugees for nearly four decades. There are an estimated 3-3.5 million Afghans residing in Iran –registered refugees, passport holders and undocumented– and some 30,000 registered Iraqi refugees. Many are second or third generation Afghans living in Iran.

In recent years the government has introduced policies conducive to inclusion and sustainable access to national services for the Afghan and Iraqi refugees living in Iran. These include registration and status determination, as well as issuing refugee identity, or “Amayesh” cards, which enable refugees to access basic services and work permits. According to the registration phase completed mid-2014, an estimated 951,142 Afghan refugees and 28,268 Iraqi refugees reside in Iran, of which approximately 97% live in urban and semi-urban areas, while the rest reside in 20 guest cities managed by UNHCR’s main government counterpart, the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants’ Affairs (BAFIA) of the Ministry of Interior.

UNHCR and the governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran launched the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), a quadripartite multi-year regional strategy which aims at ensuring protection and finding solutions for Afghan refugees. The SSAR was realigned in 2016 to support host countries to create a better environment for Afghans to sustain their lives in the first country of asylum, which for many is Iran. This realignment places greater emphasis on health, livelihood and youth empowerment through education and skills development, as well as enhancing protection space in the country of asylum.

PROMISING PRACTICES

An agreement between BAFIA, UNHCR and the Iranian Health Insurance Organization (IHIO), in close cooperation with Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME), now grants all registered refugees in Iran access to a health insurance package comparable to that available to Iranian nationals under the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI), introduced in 2014. The package covers hospitalization and para-clinical services for 12 months. UNHCR covers the premium for vulnerable refugees, while other refugees can enroll by paying premiums. The scheme has improved the healthcare of refugees and reduced catastrophic out-of-pocket expenditures of patients and problems caused by providing family treatment costs.

Since 2015, all eligible children attend public schools regardless of documentation status. Now over 400,000 Afghan and Iraqi children, 72,052 of which are undocumented, are enrolled in primary and secondary school. In May 2016, refugees were exempted from paying school tuition fees. UNHCR supports the government through co-funded construction of schools in densely-refugee populated areas. Further, UNICEF has supported enhancing institutional capacity of the government to provide alternative primary education to refugee children in partnership with NGOs and address socio-cultural barriers of access to education among Afghans in Iran.

KEY MESSAGES:

- Objectives set by the government are critical for complementary work across the social protection and humanitarian continuum, and for ensuring long-term cohesion;
- Recognizing and balancing all actors’, and neighbours’, incentives for engaging is critical for long-term support;
- National delivery systems and processes can extend beyond social protection into services; and
- Social protection instruments benefit from a long-term vision, which may include social integration of displaced persons into host communities, links to livelihood support and/or labour markets.



MAIN CHALLENGE(S) AHEAD AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

The government initiated an identification exercise in 2017, targeting specific groups of undocumented Afghans, with focus on groups who have stayed in Iran for a number of years and established links with the country. Afghans who register receive an official slip, temporarily allowing them to remain in the country and protecting them against detention and deportation. Further steps toward regularization are expected in the near future.

There is a need for greater sharing of responsibility among other member states to support the government in its efforts to meet the needs of displaced populations. UNHCR, the government and other partners continue to seek opportunities to support these efforts.

USEFUL RESOURCES

[Universal Public Health Insurance resources \(1\)](#)

[Universal Public Health Insurance resources \(2\)](#)

[Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees](#)