Highlights

- Iran is facing three simultaneous emergencies; a spike in cases of people affected by the coronavirus COVID-19, flooding and locust.
- More than 8,000 cases of COVID-19 have been detected, 291 people have died.
- Locust swarms’ threat to farmland areas in five provinces.
- Heavy rains have affected 24,000 people in 2 provinces.

Coronavirus COVID-19

Situation overview:
The first COVID-19 case was detected in Iran on 19 February. Between February and 10 March, the Iranian Ministry of Health and Medical Education has confirmed 8,042 COVID-19 cases across the country, including 291 deaths. Some 2,731 people have recovered from the disease. The outbreak has prompted temporary suspension of flights and border closures with Iran until further notice. Travel inside Iran has also been restricted. All schools and universities are closed until Persian New Year on 20 March. Similarly, mass gathering events and open markets have been suspended with several other restrictions and closures imposed in different provinces. Economic activities have been disrupted and negatively affected as a result.

Humanitarian impact/needs:
The spread of COVID-19 has affected all 31 provinces across the country. The government has requested hospitals to ensure readiness for COVID-19 patients by not admitting non-emergency patients. Hospitals across the country have been dedicated to treat only COVID-19 patients and a network of 35 laboratories are dedicated to affected cases. There are reports of shortages of masks, gloves, disinfectants and personal protective equipment to clean subways, taxis, and buses. The UN has received the request from the Government for support with medical supplies, test kits and other medical equipment.

Humanitarian response and coordination:
To boost national capacity to respond to the crisis, UN agencies are providing support to procure and import critical medical supplies. WHO is spearheading these efforts to help authorities contain and reverse the outbreak. On 2 March, WHO expert teams arrived in Tehran to offer technical assistance to national and local health authorities. Shipments of medical supplies and personal protective gears requested by Iranian authorities have arrived in the country over the past two weeks. UNICEF has started importing protective equipment for professionals dealing with children and mothers, and UNHCR are assisting the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs to protect nearly a million refugees, mainly Afghans, and their host communities. WFP has procured masks, gloves and hand sanitizers for staff in charge of food distributions and school meals. UNDP in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is procuring protection equipment for staff working at the Centre for Disease Control, detention centres, as well as mental and social health institutions and UNFPA is working to protect vulnerable older people and people with disabilities. France, Germany, UK and Azerbaijan have pledged over US$10 million in financial aid to help Iran combat COVID-19.

Desert locusts

Situation overview:
In late February, there were 22 reports of moderate to high-density immature swarms in coastal areas in Khuzestan, Bushehr, southern Fars and western Hormozgan provinces. Limited local breeding has occurred on the south-east coast in Hormozgan province. Last year, desert locusts resulted in major losses on over 500,000 hectares of farmlands and gardens. The number of locust swarms this year is predicted to reach seven-fold that of last year. As a result, controlling activities will continue until June at a large scale targeting up to a million hectares of agricultural lands in 10 southern and south-western provinces of the country.

Humanitarian impact/needs:
Locust invasion is impacting the livelihoods and farmlands in Hormozgan, Sistan and Baluchestan, Bushehr, Fars and Khuzestan. It may also raise a concern over food security with substantial area of farmland is at risk of severe damage in these provinces – according to the Plant Protection Organization.

Humanitarian response and coordination:
National control operations are underway with at least 15 task forces tackling and tracking desert locusts in different provinces. Approximately 17,500 hectares of land in southern parts of the country are undergoing aerial spraying of chemical insecticides and ground pest control operations.
Floods

Situation overview:
Heavy rains since 24 February have caused widespread floods across south-west Iran, including Lorestan and Khuzestan provinces. Most of the affected people are in Nurabad, Memulan and Poldakhtar cities. Damage to several roads and bridges have cut access to at least 58 villages. More than 150 villages have been affected by gas outage and all roads have been blocked due to severe flooding in Lorestan and the surrounding areas. The rainfall has relatively reduced since then, however new waves of rain are expected towards the end of March and will expectedly continue throughout April.

Humanitarian impact/needs:
Based on initial assessments, about 617 km of roads and 332 bridges have been damaged in Lorestan. About 900 hectares farmland in Silakhor in Lorestan have also been affected. People in the flooded areas in Lorestan moved to safe places with support of the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS), which has secured emergency shelter for more than 320 displaced people in the province. There is a concern about the risk of communicable waterborne diseases, disruption to schooling and livelihoods especially with the ongoing Coronavirus and desert locust outbreaks. Such overlapping national crises is adding to the complexity of economic hardship faced by the poorest household in Iran.

Humanitarian response and coordination:
Over the past two weeks, humanitarian assistance has been provided by Iranian authorities and the IRCS to the most affected people. IRCS relief teams have been deployed to multiple districts in Lorestan Province and have so far established eight emergency resettlement centers in Durrod and other locations in rural areas at risk of floods.