

NRC's operations in Iran

Humanitarian overview

For the past 40 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been hosting one of the largest and most protracted refugee crises in the world. Three years on from Afghanistan's regime change in August 2021, at least 3.7 million Afghans live in Iran, meaning it hosts more refugees than any other country. Several forms of legal documentation exist for Afghan and other refugees. Some 2.6 million people hold headcount slips, 750,000 hold the Amayesh card, 12,000 hold the Iraqi Hoviat card, 586,000 have visas, 360,000 have resident permits and 267,000 have family passports. In late 2023, the authorities introduced yet another form designed to harmonise and replace all others: the Smart ID Card. This has been issued to 2 million refugees so far. In addition, at least 500,000 undocumented Afghans are still residing in Iran and face serious threats of being deported in 2025.

Up until mid-2024, Iran's inclusive policies granted primary healthcare access to all Afghans. Afghan children could study in Iranian public schools, and access to other basic services was easy for those with documentation. However, the re-imposition of US sanctions on Iran in 2018 and the Covid-19 pandemic drained Iran's economy and public sectors, increasing challenges for both citizens and refugees. This pressured authorities to set a deadline: undocumented refugees must acquire Smart ID Cards before March 2025 to be protected against deportation. Acquiring this costly card will be the only accepted means for refugees to continue enjoying basic services in the country.

Iran is also prone to disasters, such as earthquakes and floods, which can lead to displacement and destruction of property and infrastructure.



Photo: Mohammad Reza Azadi/NRC

Our core activities



Education



Information, counselling
and legal assistance (ICLA)



Livelihoods
and food security



Protection
from violence



Shelter
and settlements



Water, sanitation
and hygiene (WASH)

NRC in Iran

Established	2012
International staff	5
National staff	98

Our areas of operation

- Alborz
- Hormozgan
- Kerman
- Markazi
- Qom
- Razavi Khorasan
- Semnan
- Sistan and Baluchestan
- South Khorasan
- Tehran
- Yazd



Our activities in detail

NRC has been assisting displaced Afghans in Iran as well as their Iranian host communities since 2012. We work to improve protection and access to basic humanitarian services across 11 provinces and coordinate closely with UNHCR and other Regional Refugee Response Plan partners in Iran, as well as with NRC's operations team in Afghanistan. Starting April 2019, we expanded our operations to help people affected by floods, and in early 2020 we significantly expanded our programmes to support the Covid-19 pandemic response. Since 2021, NRC has been working with humanitarian partners to assist new refugee arrivals from Afghanistan with protection and basic services. Our programmes for 2024-2025 continue to focus on supporting both the protracted refugee crisis and the new arrivals living in refugee settlements and within host communities.



8,360 people reached by August 2024 ▼

Education

After the regime change in Afghanistan, the number of school aged children fleeing to Iran in need for education increased. Education remains among the main motives for Afghans to flee as Iran allows children to enrol in its public schools. However, socio-economic and cultural barriers to the implementation of this policy remain.

To support children in fulfilling their right to education, our team:

- holds literacy, numeracy and catch-up courses for out-of-school Afghan children
- conducts a School Readiness Programme for pre-schoolers
- has initiated the Better Learning Programme for teachers and students
- supports the formal education system by rehabilitating classrooms and expanding existing schools' infrastructure (including water and sanitation facilities)
- provides stationery and educational materials to students and teachers
- provides cash assistance for Afghan students to support their educational costs.
- provides remedial courses with a focus on retention
- provides soft skills training to improve youth wellbeing and life skills training for parents to support children's education
- supports NRC multi-purpose service centres to ensure a safe learning environment for youth and children



14,394 people reached by August 2024 ▼

Information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA)

Our ICLA team supports Iran's displaced Afghan population, ensuring they have proper documentation and can access essential services and make informed decisions. Our experts provide:

- information and counselling sessions to improve refugees' access to essential services and support them to maintain their legal status in Iran while making informed decisions on potential durable solutions
- counselling and legal assistance services integrated with unconditional cash assistance to the most vulnerable to ensure their security of tenure, as well as access to legal stay, legal identity and civil documentation.

Cash assistance is always complemented with information, which helps Afghans decide on how to use it and how to address their most pressing protection concerns.



8,450 people reached by August 2024 ▼

Livelihoods and food security

Our livelihoods and food security team explores ways to improve refugee and displaced families' livelihoods in Iran. In addition, we also provide cash assistance to meet basic needs while preserving livelihoods and preventing negative coping mechanisms. Our team:

- distributes multi-purpose cash to help cover basic needs
- establishes community income-generating workshops as well as income-generating activities to small business owners to initiate and/or expand their businesses
- provides certified vocational and transferrable skills training including tailoring, construction, confectionery, gardening and computer literacy through local partners

- offers business skills training for youth to complement vocational training or to strengthen their skills for business development
- provides integrated livelihoods initiatives to the most vulnerable groups in multi-purpose service centres, which are complemented by life skills, psychological support, healthy diet and financial literacy courses with a linkage to the market



21,601 people reached by August 2024 ▼

Shelter and settlements

Our shelter team works towards providing displaced Afghans and those affected by emergencies with safe and suitable living conditions, and it addresses urgent shelter needs in settlements, urban, peri-urban and rural areas. Our team:

- provides/rehabilitates shelters and public infrastructure, including playgrounds, community centres, sport courts, etc.
- supports the expansion and rehabilitation of schools to provide a safe and adequate educational space for thousands of Afghan students
- establishes community centres designed to serve as hubs delivering services to Afghans and host communities
- supports our emergency response through the distribution of basic household items
- installs disaster risk reduction components, such as fire alarms and tools for fixing moving equipment in schools as well as providing post-disaster preparedness equipment in refugee settlements



22,715 people reached by August 2024 ▼

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

It is crucial that displaced Afghans in Iran as well as those affected by emergencies have access to clean water and adequate sanitation facilities. To ensure this, our WASH team:

- improves WASH infrastructure by constructing latrines, showers, and handwashing facilities in public spaces like settlements and schools
- promotes hygiene behaviour change by distributing hygiene and disinfection kits to schools, along with preventive messaging on hygiene promotion for students and families
- provides water and sewerage connection to newly constructed shelter units in settlements

Protection

The protection core competency has been newly established at NRC in Iran. It aims to promote the rights of refugees and host communities who are at risk of violence, deliberate deprivation and coercion, through strengthening access to services pertaining to safety, dignity, health and psychosocial wellbeing.

In 2024, our interventions focus was on strengthening the capabilities of communities, building resilience and social cohesion through capacity building activities, case management, monitoring, and improving coordination at community levels.

Our donors

We are grateful for the generous support from our donors:

- Norway
- Danish International Development Agency
- Australian Government's Direct Aid Program (DAP)
- DNV AS
- European Union
- European Union Humanitarian Aid (ECHO)
- Polish development cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland
- Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM)
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)
- In partnership with:
 - Education Above All Foundation's Educate A Child Programme
 - United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
 - United Nations Population Fund

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