



Photo: Marjan Jesmi/NRC

NRC's operations in Iran

Humanitarian overview

For the past 40 years, Iran has hosted one of the largest and most protracted refugee crises in the world. Two years on from the political changes in Afghanistan, at least 4.5 million Afghans reside in Iran, making it the largest refugee hosting country worldwide. This number comprises 750,000 Amayesh cardholders (long-term registered refugees), 267,000 visa holders (long-term Afghan residents in Iran), 360,000 with a residence permit, 2.6 million who joined a 2022 government-led registration exercise, and a further large number of undocumented persons.

Iran's inclusive policies grant access for all Afghans to primary health care, and Afghan children can study in Iranian public schools. Amayesh and visa holders are allowed to work in certain job categories. Despite the inclusive policies and support from the international community, Afghans still face challenges finding and retaining a stable income. This affects their ability to secure housing and keep their children in school, and could adversely impact their ability to renew their documentation and legal status on time. The re-imposition of US sanctions on Iran in 2018 and the Covid-19 pandemic have further pressured Iran's economy, increasing the challenges faced by all Afghans in Iran. Iran is also prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, which can lead to displacement and destruction.

NRC's operation

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 ten provinces and coordinate closely with UNHCR and other Regional Refugee Response Plan partners in Iran, and with NRC operations in Afghanistan.

From April 2019, we expanded operations to help people affected by floods, and from 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 newly arrived Afghan refugees who need protection and basic services. Our programme in 2024 will continue to focus both on supporting the protracted refugee caseload and the new arrivals living in refugee settlements and within host communities.

NRC in Iran

Established	2012
International staff	12
National staff	114



NRC in Iran

Country office

Tehran

Areas of operation

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



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Water, sanitation and hygiene promotion (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:

- installs and repairs latrines, showers and hand-washing facilities in public spaces such as refugee settlements and schools
- provides water, electricity and sewage connection to newly constructed shelter units in refugee settlements
- offers hygiene promotion training for students and adults
- distributes hygiene kits to students and households to reinforce training and support behaviour change

Education

In 2015, an “education decree” was issued, meaning that, in principle, all Afghan children are given access to education irrespective of their legal status in Iran. However, socio-economic and cultural barriers to the implementation of this decree remain.

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

- provides cash assistance to Afghan families so they can continue sending their children to school
- offers accelerated education programmes, with our partner the Literacy Movement Organization, through literacy and numeracy courses for out-of-school children to help them bridge the gap and enter school at the appropriate level
- offers school readiness programmes for children who have never been to school, to support school enrolment
- provides life-skill courses for school students, parents and teachers
- supports the formal education system by rehabilitating classrooms and expanding existing school infrastructure (including water and sanitation facilities), and providing essential education materials including school equipment and stationery
- provides stationery and educational materials to pupils

Shelter and settlements

Our shelter team works towards providing displaced Afghans and those affected by emergencies with safe and suitable living conditions and 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 pupils
- establishes community centres designed to serve as hubs delivering services to Afghan 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 school as well as providing post-disaster preparedness equipment in refugee settlements

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 not resorting to negative coping strategies. Our team:

- distributes multi-purpose cash through bank cards or transfers to cover basic needs
- establishes community income-generating workshops and provides income-generating activities to small business owners to initiate and/or expand their activities
- provides certified vocational and transferrable skills training including tailoring, construction, confectionery, gardening and computer use

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

Information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA)

Our ICLA team supports Iran's displaced Afghan population in ensuring they have proper documentation, and with accessing essential services and making informed decisions. Our experts provide:

- information and counselling to improve access to essential services and maintaining legal status in Iran
- unconditional cash assistance to the most vulnerable to help them obtain and maintain legal residence, access identity and civil documentation, as well as essential services; cash assistance is complemented with information which helps Afghans decide on how to use it and how to address their most pressing protection concerns
- information on how to access identity and civil documentation and available services upon return, so they can make informed decisions

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 - United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
 - United Nations Population Fund