Since 2012, NRC has been working in Iran to provide assistance to vulnerable Afghan refugees that have lived in the country for decades. We work closely with the Government of Iran and have programmes in the five provinces of Alborz, Qom, Kerman, Semnan and Tehran.

Our impact

The decades-long presence of Afghan refugees in Iran has translated into one of the most protracted refugee crises in the world. NRC Iran is supporting the Government of Iran and other humanitarian actors to deliver quality, sustainable and durable solutions to the residing Afghan population. Each year we are reaching more vulnerable families. This is also one of our goals.

In 2016 NRC reached

33,456

individuals, with shelter, WASH, education, ICLA assistance

Budget: 2016: 17 M NOK | 2015: 16 M NOK
Donor: NMFA, ECHO, DEVCO, DAP
International staff: 5
National staff: 26
Humanitarian and political background

Over the last three decades, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been hosting one of the world’s largest displaced populations with minimal international financial support. Despite the voluntary return of hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees to Afghanistan, Iran continues to host one of the world’s largest and most protracted refugee populations.

Decades-long Hosting

The modern history of Afghan migration to Iran started in 1979 with the Soviet Occupation. Since then, Afghan migration to the country has continued unabated, primarily motivated by the direct and indirect effects of war, insecurity, unemployment and inflation in Afghanistan. In the year 2001, the government of Iran initiated a process of sequential registrations that became known as Amayesh. This process enabled the Iranian Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Immigrants’ Affairs (BAFIA) to monitor emerging migration trends including the growth of the Afghan population in Iran. Those that registered in 2001 were automatically considered refugees (current number of which stands at an estimated 957,142 Afghan and 22,268 Iraqi refugees). Those that did not register were considered irregular residents in Iran unless they participated in the 2011 Comprehensive Regularisation Plan (CRP). This plan required undocumented Afghan nationals living in Iran to apply for an Afghan passport (a 2-year passport to travel to Afghanistan only) and an Iranian visa, to regularize their stay.

The majority of registered Afghan refugee households who fled from their country over three decades ago do not have any longer properties, nor social networks in Afghanistan. And the highly volatile security conditions and slow growth of the economy in Afghanistan have translated into high rates of failed reintegration of returnees and more internal displacement. The deterioration of the political, security and economic situation in Afghanistan also has an impact on Afghans residing in Iran, and especially on their potential return – whether voluntary or not.

Contact:
Country office: Iran
Address: #26, 6th Narenjestan Street, Pasdaran Avenue, Tehran
Country director: Olivier Vandecastele
Phone: +21-2614-0603
E-mail: olivier.vandecastele@nrc.no

www.nrc.no
Our Mandate

Iran is a middle income country and in 2015 it ranked 69 out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index, which put the country in the high human development category. However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that some 24 percent of registered refugees in Iran are considered as vulnerable; a rate that is on the rise due to the removal of subsidies, hyperinflation and international economic sanctions that Iran has faced in recent years.

NRC’s programme in Iran seeks to preserve the asylum space and reinforce the coping strategies of vulnerable Afghan refugees living in the country. It is also trying to enhance the Afghan refugees’ capacity to take informed decisions regarding their return, and sustainable re-integration when voluntary repatriation occurs.

NRC’s objectives are to contribute to the preservation of asylum space in Iran, to guarantee access to basic humanitarian services and to strengthen the coping strategies of the most vulnerable groups. NRC Iran prioritizes assistance to extremely vulnerable groups with protection concerns, notably boys and girls under the age of 18 (in particular out-of-school or working children) and female-headed households. NRC works in the provinces of Kerman, Semnan, Qom, Alborz and Tehran within the NRC core areas of expertise; namely Education; Food Security and Livelihoods; Shelter; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH); and Information Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA).
NRC activities in the field

Education
Following the recent decree issued by the Supreme Leader of Iran, all Afghan refugee children living in Iran can now go to school, regardless of their legal status. Moreover, in line with the Government of Norway’s White Paper on education as well as NRC’s 1 Million in School Initiative, NRC is exploring possible cooperation, through local partners - especially non-governmental organizations -, to expand its education intervention in terms of geographical access, number of beneficiaries, number of implementing partners and diversity of education-related activities. In addition to offering literacy and numeracy courses, NRC promotes and encourages extracurricular activities for Afghan children such as LEGO education classes and “Art Education for Peace” initiatives. These student-centred activities complement and sometimes substitute formal education for refugee children. Also, in cooperation with the Shelter unit, NRC has built temporary classrooms, refurbished schools and classes in refugee settlements as well as urban settings.

Food security
Under the Cash Transfer Programme, extremely vulnerable refugee families receive a rechargeable magnetic card to purchase food and hygiene products at Refah chain stores. Through peer educators, NRC offers basic training in nutrition and home-economics to Refah Card recipients, to enhance beneficiaries’ nutrition and encourage consumption choices that can increase households’ saving potentials. NRC offers vocational training for young Afghan refugees in four provinces. The trainings predominately aim at increasing refugees’ income-generating opportunities in Iran and facilitating a more sustainable return, in case of voluntary repatriation. The courses, which are offered free of charge, include, but are not limited to: basic and advanced computer skills (ICDL); digital photography and photo editing; videography; sewing; women bag-making; mobile phone repair; office administration; as well as occupational health and safety trainings. Trainees who successfully finish a course receive a graduation certificate.

And NRC will continue to explore ways to secure income-generating opportunities that can serve as durable solutions to substantially and sustainably improve the livelihood standards of vulnerable families.

Information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA)
The intervention strategy is based on two fundamental approaches, which include strengthening access to information, counselling and legal assistance in order to enable refugees’ empowerment and protection. NRC Iran seeks to ensure that Afghan refugees and people affected by displacement have access to accurate information and legal mechanisms especially in order to exercise Legal Stay (RSD) and Legal Identity and Civil Documentation (LCD). The ICLA programme in Iran, in partnership with ICLA Afghanistan, also assist Afghans who are considering return so that they have access to accurate information and legal mechanism to enable them to exercise their rights and take informed decision.

Shelter
NRC addresses serious housing deficiencies in refugee camps as well as urban, peri-urban and rural areas in Iran. The short term goal is to improve living conditions and enhance earthquake safety standards in camps as well as urban areas. In camps and settlement settings, apart from new shelters constructed for vulnerable households, public infrastructure such as power lines and lighting systems are also provided. Playgrounds, Child Friendly Spaces (CFS), sports fields and cultural centres built by NRC host activities to foster informal education for children as well. In addition to constructing new infrastructure, NRC has focused on rehabilitating damaged and out-of-use structures – such as schools – in order to meet the increasing needs of refugees for educational spaces. Distributions of Non-food items and winterization kits are also conducted regularly with the aim to advance the living conditions of refugee populations across the country. Training in basic construction practices is carried out to pave the way for more community-based approaches and energy saving trainings ensures energy efficiency, leading to

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decreased energy costs for refugee households and a more environmental friendly community.

Water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH)
Together with the Shelter unit, WASH constructs and upgrades “public latrines” in camps and for peri-urban facilities such as playgrounds and schools. Provision of Semi-public shower-latrine units in remote deprived areas with high volume of refugee populations, improvement of environmental sanitation conditions through implementation of Surface Water Collection Systems and utilization of Sewage Treatment Plants are also among common interventions made by NRC WASH unit. Furthermore, access to safe and drinkable water for refugees is ensured and adequate sanitation is safeguarded through regular hygiene kit distributions. Additionally, training proper hygiene practices for different social groups of refugees guarantees personal hygiene and sanitation and is prioritized by NRC WASH unit.

Advocacy and Research
NRC Iran will continue to support UNHCR’s Regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugee (SSAR) and advocate for increased space for coordination of humanitarian actors. NRC in partnership with the International Consortium for Refugees in Iran (ICRI) and the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS), has translated the Sphere Handbook: the “Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response”, into Persian and is providing training to national and international organizations. In 2016, NRC provided Sphere training of trainers (ToT) to enhance national capacity by increasing the number of Sphere certified national trainers. For 2017, NRC is plans to further organize more trainings for humanitarian actors; especially on Cash Transfer Programming (CTP) and camp management.