



Norwegian Refugee Council's Country programme in Iran

For more than 30 years, Iran has provided a sanctuary to Afghan refugees. Many have grown up in exile. Iran is the only home they have ever known.

Humanitarian and political background

Over the past three decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has hosted one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Afghans began to seek refuge in Iran after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Since then, migration to the country has continued unabated. The effects of war, insecurity, unemployment and inflation in Afghanistan drive its civilians across the border. Although hundreds of thousands have returned to Afghanistan, an estimated 3.6 million Afghans remain in Iran and 800,000 are highly vulnerable and in need of immediate help.

Minimal international support

Iran is a middle-income country, and the Human Development Index ranks Iran as a relatively high-developed nation. However, an estimated 22% of registered Afghan refugees live below the poverty line, in formal refugee camps, rural areas and cities. The poverty-stricken trend is becoming more drastic as hyperinflation persists, alongside

In 2016 NRC reached

37,845

Individuals, with education, food security, shelter, ICLA and WASH.

Budget: 2016: 18 mill NOK
Donor: MNFA; ECHO; DEVCO; DAP; UNHCR; FFO
International staff: 5
National staff: 42

international economic sanctions and subsidy repeals. Iran receives minimal financial support for its role as a host country to Afghan refugees, and media interest is negligible.

The situation in Afghanistan has led to one of the largest exoduses in modern history, a painful and drawn-out journey to neighbouring Iran and Pakistan. Most will never see the homes they left behind again.



To be born an Afghan refugee in Iran instils a marginalised identity. It blocks many opportunities that children should have – school, athletics, arts. Afghan children's hope to see their home country dwindles as they mature and realise the dangers of returning. Accessing land, jobs, and services like proper medical care remains the biggest barrier for Afghans. Sometimes they experience displacement a second time, forced to move in search of necessities like clean water.

NRC activities in the field

Through our programme in Iran, we help Afghan refugees cope with the struggles of living in long-term displacement. We support them as they improve their living conditions, and we work to prevent secondary displacement. Our teams want to preserve the asylum space for Afghans in Iran, to guarantee their access to basic services and reinforce their coping strategies. We support UNHCR's Regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) and advocate for better coordination in the humanitarian response. NRC has offices located in Tehran and Kerman, and undertakes further activities in the provinces of Semnan, Qom and Alborz. The longevity of the

crisis in Afghanistan impacts the way we support Afghan refugees in Iran. Our assistance guides Afghans as they overcome long-term obstacles. Our Iran programme collaborates with our Afghanistan and Pakistan operations to close gaps in the overall regional response.

Education

The children of Dasht-e Zahmatkeshan village in Kerman province, Iran, are charmed and curious by the aerial camera capturing their school, playground, and NRC-funded cultural centre. In 2015, the Supreme Leader of Iran issued a decree stating that all Afghan refugee children – document and undocumented – can go to school, regardless of their legal status. Education and vocational training is vital to their future, whether they remain in Iran or choose to return to Afghanistan. However, the implementation of this decree remains challenging, as displaced children encounter various obstacles -such as financial, socio-economic, structural or cultural barriers. Our education teams:

- Offer literacy and numeracy courses.
- Offer extracurricular activities for children, such as "Art Education for Peace"

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initiatives.

- Builds and rehabilitates schools and classrooms in refugee settlements as well as in urban settings, in cooperation with our shelter teams.
- Give certified vocational training for Afghan refugee youth in English, and course that include computer skills, photography and photo editing, arts and handicrafts, tailoring skills, building construction, vehicle repair, office administration and occupational health and safety.

Food security

Our food security teams address the basic food needs of Afghan refugee families in four provinces. Our food security activities:

- Offer training in nutrition and home economics, to encourage food choices that can help households save money.
- Distribute a rechargeable debit card to purchase food and hygiene products at a chain of stores in different locations.

Information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA)

Our ICLA teams empower Afghan refugees and help them navigate the legal intricacies that are part of life as a refugee. Our ICLA activities:

- Give information and counselling on legal mechanisms, and how Afghans can exercise their rights in Iran. Particularly in terms of legal stay, legal status and civil documentation.
- Improve access to legal assistance by proactively reaching out to refugees.
- Assist Afghans who plan to repatriate to Afghanistan, whether to settle outstanding legal issues in Iran or to rightfully reclaim their land in Afghanistan. This is part of NRC's cross-border response for Afghanistan.

Shelter

We address the serious housing deficiencies for Afghan refugees in camps as well as urban and

rural areas. We want Afghans to live in safe and suitable conditions. Our shelter teams:

- Enhance earthquake safety standards and preparations in case of an emergency.
- Construct new shelters for vulnerable households and public infrastructure such as power lines in camps and settlement settings.
- Build playgrounds, child-friendly spaces and cultural centres, creating informal learning spaces for children.
- Construct and upgrade houses and latrines, together with our WASH teams.
- Rehabilitate houses and schools that have suffered structural damage.
- Distribute non-food items (NFI) and winter kits, including shelter repair materials.
- Give training on basic construction practices and energy saving techniques.

Water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH)

Our WASH teams work to make sure that Afghan refugees in the country are able to drink potable water and practice proper sanitation and hygiene routines. Our WASH teams:

- Distribute hygiene kits and train refugees on good hygiene.
- Construct and upgrade latrines in camps and schools, together with our shelter teams.
- Provide semi-public shower-latrines in remote, deprived areas with high concentrations of refugees.
- Collect and drain standing water in refugee communities to improve sanitation conditions.
- Maintain sewage treatment plants.
- Improve access to safe and drinkable water for refugees