



Norwegian Refugee Council's  
**Country Programme in Iran**

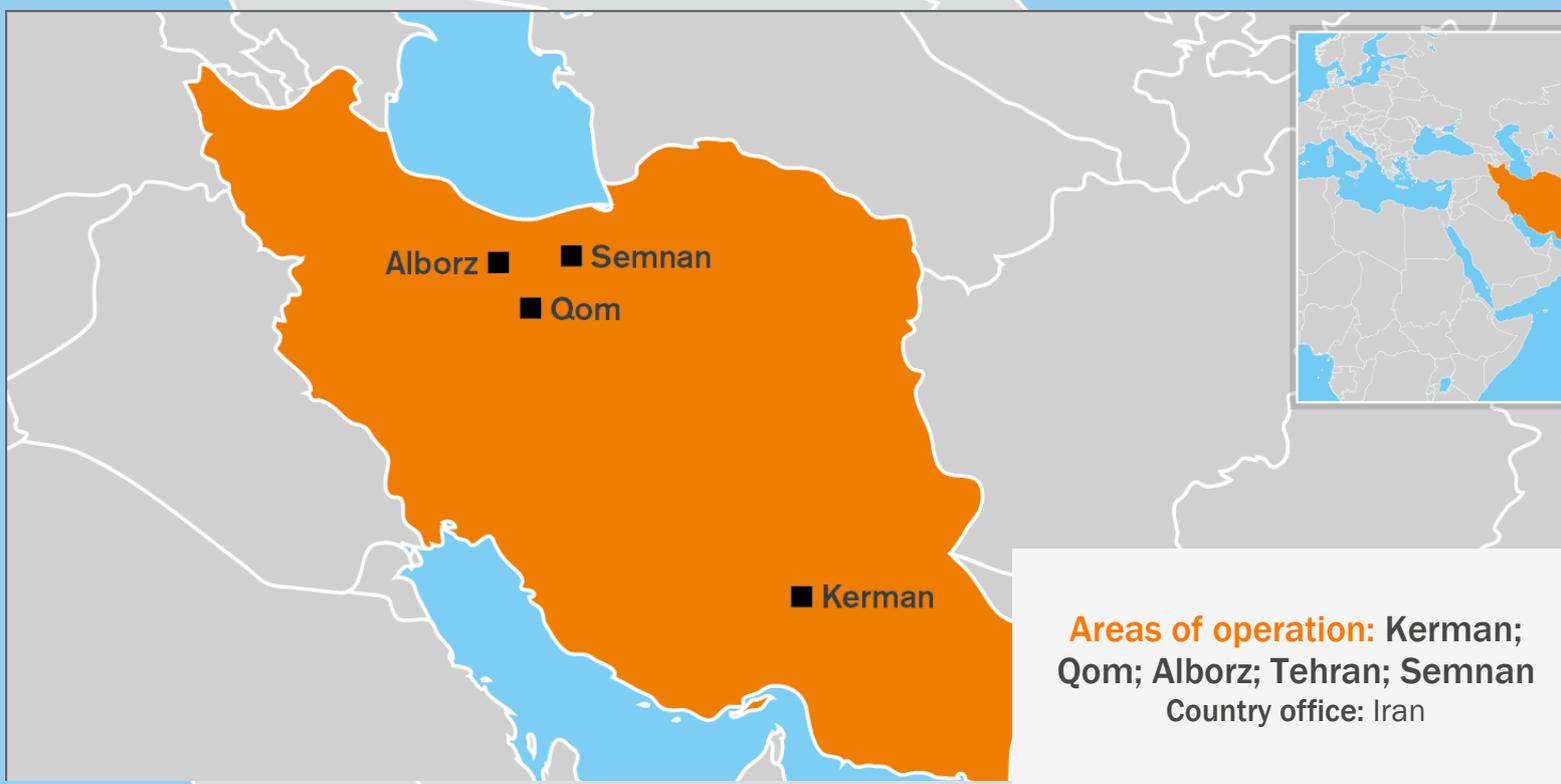
Iran is the fourth refugee host country in the world. An estimated 3.6 million Afghans now reside in Iran, including 800 000 extremely vulnerable and in need of immediate assistance. Since 2012, NRC has been supporting the Government of Iran's effort to respond to their needs.

**In 2016 NRC reached**

**33,456**

**Individuals, with Education; Food Security and Livelihood; Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance; shelter; WASH.**

Budget: 2016: 18M NOK | 2015: 16M NOK  
Donor: MNFA; ECHO; DEVCO; DAP; UNHCR; FFO  
International staff: 5  
National staff: 42



**Areas of operation:** Kerman; Qom; Alborz; Tehran; Semnan  
**Country office:** Iran

## Humanitarian and political background

During the past three decades, Iran has been hosting one of the largest and most protracted refugee populations in the world. Today, an estimated 3.6 million Afghans and over 28 000 Iraqi refugees reside in Iran. Based on the Gol’s “Amayesh 9” registration in May 2015, 951 142 Afghan and 28 268 Iraqi refugees are living in Iran. In addition, an estimated 620 000 Afghan visa-holders and 1.5 to 2 million undocumented Afghans are also residing in the country. And the Government of Iran’s (Gol) response far outweighs any other humanitarian and development actors’ assistance services to refugees and migrants -and this despite the impact of years of international sanctions on the country’s economy. Despite this support from the Gol and, to a far lesser extent, the international community, a significant proportion of Afghans living in Iran, particularly those who are not registered as refugees and the numerous Afghans on the move (inside Iran or across both countries), remain vulnerable - according to the Gol, 800 000 are highly vulnerable. NGOs, including NRC, also report that 30% of beneficiary

households include a person with a disability or chronic illness -and many have multiple disabilities. The use of detrimental coping mechanisms including child labour and early marriage for dowry is high. And for the most vulnerable, the situation is getting worse: they experience a consistent income gap, exacerbated by dramatic inflation; and many cannot afford shelter. Afghans also face substantial challenges regarding legal status: an ongoing joint needs assessment indicates that 35% of Afghans residing in Iran either hold no civil documentation or expired documents. The cost of legal documents has also dramatically increased. According to the UNHCR, for a family of five, the average cost to access Amayesh VIII was 6,693,900 IRR, whereas it reaches 12,321,000 IRR for Amayesh XI -i.e. an 84% increase. And the cost of medical treatment for undocumented Afghans is much higher than for others too. The lack of early treatment exacerbates illnesses, which then become life threatening. They also cannot obtain work permits, which leads to precarious, unsafe and poorly paid employment. They are at risk of deportation and victims of many abuses.

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## **NRC Mission**

Since 2012, NRC Iran's Overall Objective has been to provide protection and durable solutions to people who have been forced to flee. Our programmatic response has therefore three goals: to preserve existing asylum space; to build refugees' capacities in exile; and to develop their resilience and enable them to reach one of three durable solutions. The great majority of registered Afghan refugee families have been living in Iran for more than two decades. The lack of social networks or properties, the continued highly volatile security conditions, and the slow growth of the economy in Afghanistan, have resulted into high rates of failed reintegration of returnees and an exponential increase of internal displacement. At this juncture, the mere preservation of asylum space in Iran is insufficient. NRC's programme is designed to prevent unprepared return, but also to use and enhance the asylum space granted by the Iranian authorities and the opportunities that this country offers, in the most effective way. During its first three years of activity, NRC mainly focused on delivering assistance in settlements where most vulnerable documented Afghan refugees live. However, needs assessment and further negotiations with the Government of Iran have facilitated access to vulnerable urban refugees. And since 2015, NRC has been able to increase its intervention out of camps. In 2016, a Supreme Leader's decree (granting to all children access to school) has also eased access to undocumented and vulnerable children who have been exposed to multiple protection risks previously. NRC has been seized this opportunity to expand its geographical and thematic coverage of the most vulnerable, in particular the undocumented. NRC's programme contributes to enhance the coping strategies of refugees by increasing their access to livelihoods; providing cash transfer assistance; promoting and supporting initiatives that aim at securing free primary education for all Afghan children; and finally, by improving their living conditions in settlements and urban areas through shelter and WASH assistance. In 2017, NRC will continue to collaborate with UNHCR to protect refugees' rights, and provide relevant information and counselling services to all displaced persons. Besides, NRC

continues to advocate to overcome procedural and policy challenges in order to improve the access of displaced persons to available assistance and increased protection. NRC Iran is also included in the regional response to the Afghan displacement crisis. An the NRC's regional approach include the following components: 1) Cross-border ICLA and livelihoods programming; 2) Cross-border information-exchange and analysis for programming design in each country; 3) Regional advocacy; and 4) Regional contingency planning.

## NRC activities in the field

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### Education

In 2015, the Supreme Leader issued a decree stating that all Afghan children must have access to Education -irrespective of their legal status. But, the implementation of this decree remains challenging, as displaced children encounter various obstacles -such as financial, socio-economic, structural or cultural barriers. So NRC is working and advocating to help overcome those obstacles and to facilitate the implementation of this decree, and Afghan children's integration into the public education system. In line with the Government of Norway's White Paper on education and NRC's 1 Million in School's initiative, NRC Iran is also exploring new possible cooperation with local partners, especially non-governmental organisations to expand its current education programme (to cover more locations and increase the number of beneficiaries). In addition to offering literacy and numeracy courses, NRC also promotes and encourages extracurricular activities for Afghan and vulnerable children such as "Art Education for Peace" initiatives. These pupils-centered activities complement, and sometimes substitute formal education for displaced children. Also, with the support of its Shelter Unit, NRC builds and rehabilitates schools and classrooms in refugee settlements as well as in urban settings

### Food Security and Livelihood

Under the Cash Transfer programme, extremely vulnerable refugee families receive bank cards to cover their basic needs –and they can make their own choices. NRC complements this Cash Transfer programme with basic trainings in nutrition and home-economics to enhance beneficiaries'

nutrition, and encourage consumption choices that can increase households' saving potentials.

NRC's endeavours to enhance refugees' livelihood assets, access to secured and sustainable income and therefore self-reliance through different types of activities. NRC offers technical and vocational trainings for young Afghan refugees in five provinces to increase their access to employment and self-employment opportunities in Iran; and to facilitate their re-integration in case of voluntary repatriation. The courses are offered free of charge and include computer skills; photography and photo editing; arts and handicrafts; tailoring skills; building construction; vehicle repair; office administration and occupational health and safety. Trainees who successfully finish the course receive a graduation certificate, which is valid internationally.

Moreover, NRC continues to explore ways to secure durable solutions and to substantially improve the livelihood strategies of vulnerable families through sustainable income generation methods -including establishment of livelihood workshops and distribution of income generation toolkits/grants which will foster their social and economic integration in Iran.

In addition to the above-mentioned activities, NRC is currently conducting a labour market assessment in the provinces of Kerman and Tehran. The results of the survey will be used to design future livelihood projects and to ensure that they are market-oriented.

### **Information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA)**

Our strategy is two-pronged: providing information and counselling as well as improving access to legal assistance to enable the protection and empowerment of displaced persons, especially in the area of Legal Stay (RSD) and Legal Identity and Civil Documentation (LCD). NRC Iran seeks to ensure that Afghan refugees and people affected by displacement have access to accurate information and legal mechanisms in order to exercise their RSD and LCD rights. The ICLA programme in Iran, in partnership with ICLA Afghanistan, also assist Afghans who are

contemplating return so that they have access to accurate information and legal mechanism to enable them to exercise their rights and make informed decision. In addition, since late 2016, the NRC ICLA team has been providing beneficiaries with unconditional cash assistance for protection, which makes ICLA interventions more effective and sustainable.

### **Shelter**

NRC addresses serious housing deficiencies in refugee camps as well as urban, peri-urban and rural areas in Iran. Our short term goal is to improve the living conditions of displaced persons and to 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 hosts 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 for more educational spaces. Distributions of non-food items and winterization kits are also conducted regularly to improve the living conditions of displaced populations across the country. Training in basic construction practices is carried out to enable more community-based approaches. And energy saving trainings ensures energy efficiency, which leads to reduced 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 in peri-urban facilities -such as playgrounds and schools. The NRC WASH Unit also provides semi-public shower-latrines in remote deprived areas where many displaced persons live, and improves sanitary conditions through the implementation of Surface Water Collection Systems and the utilization of Sewage Treatment Plants. Furthermore, we improve access to safe and

drinkable water for refugees, and regularly provide hygiene kit and trainings on hygiene practices to enable displaced persons to maintain good personal hygiene.

### **Advocacy and Research**

NRC Iran advocates with decision-makers at local, national, regional and international levels for increased humanitarian access and space; improved displaced people's access to legal status, the protection of their rights; and durable solutions for displaced Afghans. At global level, NRC raise awareness about the scale of the impact of the displacement crisis in Iran and related-needs. NRC also plans to release up to five studies in 2017 on various topics – such as the Afghans' access to civil documentation; Youth and labour markets; etc. NRC supports the International Consortium for Refugees in Iran (ICRI) as well as the UNHCR's Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugee (SSAR). We initiate multiple partnerships and coordination initiatives, such as an education working group and a joint NGO needs-assessment. NRC organizes regular capacity-building workshops for Iranian governmental officials, and staff members of local Civil Society Organisations, INGOs and UN agencies.