

# NRC's operations in Iran

## Humanitarian overview

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been hosting one of the largest and most protracted refugee crises in the world for the past 40 years, with over 4.4 million Afghans living in Iran today. Only around 758,000 hold the Amayesh card, currently the only legal document that protects from deportation and provides access to basic services. As a result, millions of Afghans were deported to Afghanistan in previous years, a country in no position to receive them, while only thousands were given temporary documentation for a few months. Currently, about 1.4 million Afghans are still at risk of deportation.

Up until mid-2024, Iran's inclusive policies granted primary healthcare access to all Afghans. Afghan children could study in Iranian public schools regardless of their legal status. However, the 2025 and 2026 wars, the deteriorating economic crisis, in addition to western sanctions have drained Iran's public sectors, increasing challenges for both Iranians and refugees.

Psychosocial distress is rising across all age groups. Many people were exposed to aerial attacks near their homes. Economic hardship resulting from the loss of income, rising living costs, loss in value of the Iranian rial make food, rent, and healthcare too costly, pressuring many families to make difficult trade-offs to make ends meet such as cutting expenses on education or legal documentation. Prolonged uncertainty about the future, worsening financial pressure, and disruption to daily routines are driving anxiety and stress.

Iran is also prone to natural hazards, such as earthquakes and floods, risking loss of life, displacement and destruction of property and civilian 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 Iran

Established	2012
International staff	8
National staff	90

## Our areas of operation

- Alborz
- Hormozgan
- Kerman
- Markazi
- Razavi Khorasan
- Sistan and Baluchistan
- Tehran
- Yazd
- Qom



## Our activities in detail

Since 2012, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has been assisting Afghan refugees in Iran as well as affected Iranians. We protect people's rights and deliver essential services to improve living conditions. Together with our partners, we deliver assistance across nine provinces in close coordination with the local authorities. We ensure our response is aligned with the Country Refugee Response Plan led by UNHCR and the OCHA-led wider humanitarian response.

When disasters strike, we expand our programmes to help, and our emergency response team assists people to recover quickly. We promote cash and markets-based interventions, and cash transfers are the default modality for assistance to restore dignity and decide on immediate needs. NRC is uniquely positioned as a primary responder on both sides of the border, linking survival assistance in Iran with sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan, enabling durable solutions for returning Afghans.



33,796 people reached in 2025 ▼

## Education

Education is a fundamental human right for all children and youth. Access to education remains among the main motives for Afghans to flee to Iran. However, socio-economic, legal and cultural barriers remain. To support children and young people to fulfil 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 who face language barriers
- integrates the Better Learning Programme as basic psychosocial support to education activities to reduce stress of students and focus more on subjects
- 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



42,286 people reached in 2025 ▼

## Information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA)

Our ICLA team supports Afghan refugees to claim and exercise their rights, ensuring they have legal documentation and can access their housing, land and property rights and essential services, and make informed decisions. Our experts provide:

- information sessions to enable Afghan refugees to make informed decisions regarding access to essential services, maintain their legal status in Iran and options for returning to Afghanistan
- counselling and legal assistance services integrated with unconditional cash assistance to the most vulnerable refugees to ensure their security of tenure, as well as access to legal stay, legal identity and civil documentation

Cash assistance is always integrated with counselling and/or legal assistance, which helps Afghan refugees decide on how to address their most pressing protection concerns.



20,545 people reached in 2025 ▼

## Livelihoods and food security

Every person has the right to food and livelihood protection. Our support to Afghan refugees promotes lasting solutions for improved economic and social wellbeing and dignity. Our team:

- distributes multi-purpose cash to help cover basic needs
- establishes community income-generating workshops and 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

NRC also supports people affected by crisis with multi-purpose cash assistance.



11,935 people reached in 2025 ▼

## Protection

Protection is about safety, dignity and rights. We work to reduce risks for Afghan refugees and strengthen their capacity for self-protection so they can live in safety and dignity. We provide protection case management and individual assistance for those who need it the most. Our team:

- establishes Child Friendly Spaces for refugee children in settlements
- provides in-kind (and cash) assistance such as wheelchairs for people with disabilities
- conducts psychosocial support for women and girls
- holds awareness raising session for refugees informing them about available service

We also prioritised psychosocial support for children, parents, and teachers after war.

Protection is NRC's newest core competency. It comprises our efforts to prevent violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation, and services that we provide to individuals who mitigate the impact of violence when it does occur. We will continue to be a recognised thought leader on protection, basing our influence on operational expertise and continuous learning.



5,434 people reached in 2025 ▼

## Shelter and settlements

Physical safety enables Afghan refugees to live in dignity. Our shelter team works towards providing safe and suitable living conditions during emergency, and it addresses urgent shelter needs in settlements, urban, peri-urban and rural areas. Our team:

- provides/rehabilitates shelters and civilian infrastructure, including playgrounds, community centres, sport courts, etc.
- supports the expansion and rehabilitation of schools to provide a safe and adequate educational space for students
- establishes community centres designed to serve as hubs delivering services to Afghans and host communities
- supports our emergency response through the distribution of essential 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



8,797 people reached in 2025 ▼

## Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

Access to clear water and appropriate sanitation facilities are amongst the most urgent of all needs. To ensure this, our WASH team:

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

## Our donors

**We are grateful for the generous support from our donors:**

- Norway
- Denmark
- European Union
- Sweden
- Germany - FFO
- Switzerland
- UNICEF
- UNFPA

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REFUGEE COUNCIL

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