



UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Vision

UNHCR was established in 1950 by the UN General Assembly with a mandate to lead and coordinate international action for the worldwide protection of refugees and other persons of concern. During its lifetime UNHCR has assisted more than 50 million refugees in addressing their critical needs as well as enabling them to successfully restart their lives.

The legal status of refugees is defined in two international instruments: the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Islamic Republic of Iran acceded to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol on 28 July 1976, with reservations to Article 17 (wage earning employment), Article 23 (public relief), Article 24 (labour legislation and social security) and Article 26 (freedom of movement).

UNHCR has maintained an uninterrupted presence in Iran since it first opened its office in Tehran in 1984. UNHCR expanded its presence and scope of activities to assist the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the massive influx of Iraqi refugees following the Gulf War in 1991. The office then further expanded to facilitate mass voluntary return movement to Afghanistan in 1992.

Today, UNHCR has its country office in Tehran and field presence in Esfahan, Dogharoun, Kerman, Mashhad and Shiraz.

The work of UNHCR is entirely non-political, social and humanitarian. UNHCR's responsibilities include:

- Assist asylum countries' governments with refugee and asylum/migration-related issues in an advisory capacity;
- Protect refugees by ensuring that their basic rights are respected in the host country;
- Ensure that governments respect the rule of *non-refoulement* (not returning refugees to a country where they may be persecuted);
- Find durable solutions to the problems of refugees through:
 - ✓ voluntary repatriation
 - ✓ local integration
 - ✓ resettlement



Refugees learn at school side-by-side with Iranian children. Photo: UNHCR/ S.Rich

Work in Iran

- UNHCR Iran's main governmental counterpart is the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA) of the Ministry of Interior. Together they work closely with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Cooperatives, Labours and Social Welfare, State Welfare Organization, Literacy Movement Organization, Technical and Vocational Training Organization & the Forest Range and Watershed Management Organization.



Afghan refugee participating in decorative woodwork technical and vocational training course in Varamin.
Photo: UNHCR/S.Rich



Afghan refugee children studying at school in Varamin
Photo: UNHCR/S.Rich

- Together with the Government of Iran, UNHCR assists close to 1 million refugees, of which over 951,000 are Afghan refugees and some 28,000 are Iraqi. 97% of Iran's refugee population live in urban areas.
- UNHCR activities for Afghan refugees in Iran are guided by the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries. The SSAR is a regional, multi-year strategy agreed upon by the governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan adopted in May 2012. Five outcomes guide the Strategy in Iran:
 1. Voluntary repatriation
 2. Access to essential services and shelter
 3. Livelihoods and food security
 4. Social and environment protection and resettlement
 5. Coordination and supporting role
- UNHCR promotes refugee rights in Iran and complements government efforts in enhancing protection space for refugees in accordance with international refugee law and relevant Iranian legislation;
- UNHCR maintains advocacy to ensure continued access of all refugees in Iran to valid legal documentation and Temporary Work Permits;
- UNHCR facilitates durable solutions for refugees in Iran, mainly through voluntary repatriation of Afghan and Iraqi refugees in safety and dignity as well as through resettlement to third countries;
- UNHCR develops partnerships with relevant actors including the Government, other UN agencies, NGOs and Community-Based Organizations to mobilize the current mechanism and capacities for enhanced out-reach and service delivery to refugees, including access to primary and secondary education for all refugee children including the undocumented; livelihoods opportunities including skills training; and primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare including the incorporation of refugees in Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI) similar to that received by Iranian nationals;
- UNHCR enhances emergency preparedness and contingency planning jointly with partners including the Government of Iran.