

Islamic Republic of Iran

Multi-year Strategy 2025 – 2027



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1.1 Executive Summary

The Islamic Republic of Iran has generously hosted forcibly displaced people for more than 40 years, upholding refugee-inclusive policies and largely ensuring access to essential public services, particularly healthcare and education. According to the information available to UNHCR, Iran (Islamic Republic of) hosts some 773,000 refugees with Amayesh (761,000 Afghans) and Hoviat cards (12,000 Iraqis), which grant foreign nationals temporary residence and provide holders with refugee protection. In 2022, the Government of Iran undertook a headcount of undocumented Afghan nationals in the country, issuing headcount slips to those identified.

UNHCR estimates that around 3.8 million forcibly displaced people of various documentation status reside in Iran (Islamic Republic of) in 2024, making it the largest refugee-hosting country in the world. Looking ahead to 2025, UNHCR Iran (Islamic Republic of) will focus on five strategic priorities: maintaining asylum space and strengthening the protection environment; increasing support to enhance and maintain inclusive services, such as health, education and social protection; promoting the self-reliance of forcibly displaced and stateless people; expanding opportunities for creative and innovative solutions through resettlement and complementary pathways, including voluntary repatriation when the situation in Afghanistan is conducive for return; and reducing and preventing statelessness and protecting stateless people through context-specific advocacy and enhanced partnerships.

Prioritizing assistance and protection for the most vulnerable, particularly women, girls and children, will remain the cornerstone of UNHCR's strategy. In terms of durable solutions, UNHCR will seek to expand the current resettlement programme for the most vulnerable refugees in the country, which was scaled up after August 2021. While other durable solutions remain limited for Afghans, efforts to expand and secure opportunities for complementary pathways in education or employment will continue to be pursued.

To achieve these objectives, UNHCR will continue to coordinate, cooperate, and advocate with key stakeholders, including the Government of Iran, particularly the Center for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs of the Ministry of Interior, along with partner agencies, refugee response plan (RRP) partners and donor states. UNHCR Iran (Islamic Republic of) will streamline its interventions to maximize impact while diversifying funding sources to ensure financial stability through grants, donations, or government support. UNHCR in Iran will also enhance sustainable responses aimed at streamlining and simplifying interventions. UNHCR continues diversifying funding

sources to ensure financial stability, including grants, donations, or government funding. In addition, with Iran being located in a region prone to climate change, to contribute to tackling the environmental and climate crises, UNHCR Iran has been seeking collaboration, and funding opportunities from the private sector, development actors, and donor countries interested in investing in projects in the area of environment and climate action.

In addition, with the launch of UNHCR's Climate Action Fund, the operation will further explore innovative areas to increase its engagement in climate action initiatives. The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), launched in 2012, is central to UNHCR's strategic direction in Iran (Islamic Republic of). The SSAR Support Platform and Core Group will continue to play a vital role convening stakeholders and mobilizing collective efforts to build refugees' self-reliance in 2025. In tandem, UNHCR will leverage the momentum of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF) to deepen engagement with Member States and advance the Global Compact on Refugees, which promotes more sustainable and equitable responsibility-sharing through the systematic involvement of a broader spectrum of stakeholders, including development partners.

1.2 Situation Analysis

Iran (Islamic Republic of) is a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and has upheld inclusive policies for displaced people. For over four decades, the country has generously hosted displaced people, ensuring their access to essential public services such as education and healthcare on par with Iranians. However, the regional geopolitical situation, notably the ongoing humanitarian and human rights crisis in neighboring Afghanistan, coupled with the socioeconomic impact of sanctions and the global economic crisis, are making it harder for Iran (Islamic Republic of) to sustain these inclusive policies and support.

During the 2023 GRF, Iran (Islamic Republic of) called for improved international solidarity and responsibility-sharing to continue assisting Afghan refugees. Following the events of August 2021, Iran (Islamic Republic of) allowed people in need of international protection to access its territory and conducted a headcount exercise in 2022. However, the number of Afghans fleeing to the country continues to rise. This has put immense pressure on existing infrastructure and public services such as education and healthcare given the absence of equitable international support and responsibility-sharing. Overcrowded classrooms and teacher shortages in many schools have compromised the quality of education for both Iranian and Afghan children. According to estimates by the Government of Iran, some 700,000 Afghan and Iraqi children are expected to enroll in primary and secondary schools for the 2024-25 academic year.

Stricter policies combined with limited enrolment capacity in schools, has hampered many Afghan children's access to education. Given the lack of access to education for women and girls in Afghanistan, it is vital that Iran (Islamic Republic of) has the capacity to continue providing them access to education.

Similarly, health facilities have struggled to meet the increasing demand, resulting in significant pressure on facilities serving both host communities and refugees. The situation in Afghanistan is expected to drive further displacement in 2025, with more Afghans likely to seek international protection in Iran (Islamic Republic of), placing additional pressure on already overwhelmed local institutions, including schools and health facilities, and basic infrastructure such as water and electricity. This mounting pressure could lead to heightened anti-Afghan sentiment among the local population and could force Afghans to resort to negative coping mechanisms, result in stricter policies that make it increasingly difficult for Afghans to remain in Iran (Islamic Republic of) or increase the number of deportations.

With limited durable solutions for Afghans in Iran (Islamic Republic of), including few opportunities for voluntary repatriation, resettlement and complementary pathways, supporting Iran's (Islamic Republic of) capacity to continue hosting Afghans while bolstering their self-reliance and reducing their dependency on humanitarian or social assistance will be critical in 2025.

In June 2023, Iran (Islamic Republic of) introduced a new smart governance scheme for foreign nationals to unify their documentation and facilitate their access to services. This new initiative is expected to lead to the consolidation of all types of identification issued to foreign nationals, prioritizing Amayesh card holders for Afghan refugees and Hoviat card holders for Iraqi refugees, followed by students, as well as students, headcount slip and family passport holders. Iran (Islamic Republic of) has indicated that 2 million smart cards have been printed for distribution. In parallel, the Center for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs launched a financial scheme in January 2024 that allows foreign nationals to invest between 1 and 1.5 billion Iranian Rials (US\$2,500 - \$3,750) in the country's infrastructure in order to receive a six-month residence booklet, granting access to services such as banking and insurance.

1.3 Vision and Strategic Orientation

UNHCR's vision for Iran (Islamic Republic of) is that by the end of 2027, "people in need of international protection enjoy a safe and inclusive environment where their fundamental rights are respected. They have access to different solutions and are empowered to contribute to the host country's development. The most vulnerable people can access social protection services while efforts are also made to reduce statelessness." This overarching vision seeks to safeguard the rights of forcibly displaced and stateless people by responding rapidly and effectively to their needs,

promoting their inclusion and self-reliance, empowering them to build their own futures, and pursuing sustainable solutions to displacement and statelessness-related challenges.

A key aspect of this vision is its alignment with global strategic directions for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, recognizing that lasting solutions to refugee situations cannot be achieved without international cooperation. It also complements existing frameworks aimed at addressing the Afghanistan situation, including the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees and the refugee response plan (RRP), which foster coordinated and sustainable approaches to long-term solutions. Although the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework does not specifically refer to refugees, UNHCR's vision is compatible with its broader goals of sustainable development and inclusion.

In support of this vision and aligned with the RRP's strategic priorities, UNHCR has identified five strategic priorities based on an assessment of the most urgent issues facing forcibly displaced and stateless people, as well as an evaluation of UNHCR's capacity, opportunities and lessons learned. Together, these priorities will guide UNHCR's efforts in 2025 to create a more inclusive and resilient future for people forced to flee in Iran (Islamic Republic of) by:

- Maintaining asylum space and strengthening the protection environment
- Increasing support to enhance and maintain inclusive services, such as health, education and social protection
- Promoting self-reliance among forcibly displaced and stateless people
- Expanding avenues for solutions through resettlement and complementary pathways (including voluntary repatriation)
- Reducing and preventing statelessness and protecting stateless people through context-specific advocacy

1.4 Fair Access and Representation

The measures to promote age, gender and diversity (AGD)-sensitive approaches across UNHCR's work in Iran (Islamic Republic of) in 2025 will include:

- Advocating for policies and practices that are sensitive to the particular risks faced by women and girls and other vulnerable groups during discussions with the Center for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs of the Ministry of Interior and local authorities
- Calling for disaggregated data from the authorities to design specific programmes that address diverse needs

- Strengthening UNHCR's collaboration with the State Welfare Organization – the government institution responsible for social protection – by providing technical support and capacity building activities
- Organizing gender-sensitive awareness training for government counterparts, refugee focal points and community leaders on laws and policies affecting vulnerable groups. UNHCR will partner with other UN agencies where appropriate
- Ensuring proportional representation of women and other vulnerable groups in UNHCR surveys and monitoring activities so that their feedback is integrated into programming
- Working with other UN agencies and partners to ensure AGD considerations are included in joint activities and mainstreamed within RRP-related initiatives
- Prioritizing children and women at risk, along with other vulnerable Afghans, for resettlement while supporting female students to access alternative education pathways
- Seeking partnerships with the relevant national entities to enhance child protection activities
- Mobilizing resources to maintain an inclusive policy for Afghans in Iran (Islamic Republic), ensuring they continue to receive the needed support
- Improving UNHCR services despite limited resources and increased needs, while advocating for the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless people in partner programmes and government-provided services, especially those linked to fundamental rights such as access to education, health, justice, and protection from non-refoulement
- Feedback and complaints will be key to ensuring accountability to affected persons (AAP), which is an integral aspect of UNHCR's age, gender, and diversity approach. UNHCR will ensure that the affected population is aware of their right to provide feedback on issues that have an impact on their lives

2. Impact Statements

Impact statement

By 2027, Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons (FDSP) enjoy, in an AGD manner, an improved legislative framework positively implemented by strengthening governmental institutions for the full enjoyment of rights.

Impact area: Attaining favourable protection environments

Outcome statements

Persons under UNHCR mandate benefit of a legal framework closer in line with international standards and of capacitated state institutions that can better respond to their needs

Outcome area: Protection policy and law

Persons under UNHCR mandate are identified, profiled and holistically assisted while protection interventions are supported by evidence based interventions

Outcome area: Safety and access to justice

Impact statement

Persons under UNHCR mandate enjoy enhanced protection and better response to their needs, inclusive policies of GIRI across all public services (health, education, social protection and financial inclusion) will continue to be maintained and become more sustainable for refugees and asylum-seekers

Impact area: Realizing rights in safe environments

Outcome statements

Services and assistance to support the most vulnerable people to cover their basic needs are extended and strengthened through an inclusive approach (where possible) with a particular focus on persons with specific needs

Outcome area: Well-being and basic needs

FDSPs maintain an inclusive and equitable access to the primary and secondary education system in Iran over duration of multi-year plan

Outcome area: Education

FDSPs maintain inclusive and affordable access to primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare over duration of multi-year plan

Outcome area: Healthy lives

By 2027 an increased number of FDSPs enjoy expanded and diversified livelihood opportunities

Outcome area: Self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods

General project management services (including warehousing) provided

Outcome area: Operational support and supply chain

Leverage partnerships among national and international stakeholders to increase knowledge and awareness around the situation of refugees, and asylum-seekers and, in so doing, promote greater collective engagement/tangible responsibility sharing and social cohesion

Outcome area: External engagement and resource mobilization

Impact statement

Durable solutions are secured for refugees and asylum-seekers, through a combination of local solutions/inclusion, voluntary return, complementary pathways, and resettlement, when appropriate

Impact area: Securing solutions

Outcome statements

An increased number of people in need of resettlement (including complementary pathways) identified, and submitted for resettlement

Outcome area: Resettlement and complementary pathways

People returning to country of origin receive counseling and/or information on voluntary repatriation

Outcome area: Voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration

3. Islamic Republic of Iran 2025 Indicators and Targets

Country	Results Level	Result Area	Indicator	Population Type	Baseline	Target 2025
Iran, Islamic Republic of	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	90%	Not applicable
Iran, Islamic Republic of	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	92%	Not applicable
Iran, Islamic Republic of	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.1 Number of refugees who voluntarily return in safety and dignity to their country of origin	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	521	Not applicable
Iran, Islamic Republic of	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.1 Extent participation of displaced and stateless people across programme phases is supported	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	To be confirmed	Moderate: 40-69
Iran, Islamic Republic of	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	33%	30%
Iran,	Outcome	OA11:	11.2 Proportion of children	Refugees and	82%	82%

Islamic Republic of		Education	and young people enrolled in the national education system	Asylum-seekers		
Iran, Islamic Republic of	Outcome	OA14: Return	14.1 Proportion of returnees with legally recognized identity documents or credentials	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Iran, Islamic Republic of	Outcome	OA15: Resettle	15.1 Number of refugees submitted by UNHCR for resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	3,274	To be confirmed