



Iran - Situation of Afghan Refugees



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- Greece, Asylum Processes and Training Department, Greek Asylum Service, Ministry of Migration and Asylum
- Denmark, Danish Immigration Service

The review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but it does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EUAA.





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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (June 2019).¹ It is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

‘Refugee’, ‘risk’ and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither EUAA nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

On 19 January 2022 the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). All references to EASO, EASO products and bodies should be understood as references to the EUAA.

The target users are asylum caseworkers, COI researchers, policymakers, and decision-making authorities.

The first draft of this report was finalised on 21 October 2022. Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 24 November 2022. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#).

¹ EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)



Glossary and Abbreviation

Term	Definition
<i>Amayesh</i>	Refugee registration exercise
<i>Amayesh</i> cardholders	Registered Afghan refugees
ASA	Alternative Stay Arrangement
BAFIA	Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs
CRP	Comprehensive Regularization Plan
DAFI	Deutsche Akademische Flüchtlingsinitiative Albert Einstein
FNECC	Foreign Nationals Executive Coordination Council
Gol	Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Guest town	Also called guest settlement or guest city; term used to mean refugee camp; also called <i>mehmanshahr</i>
IRR	Iranian Rial
LMO	Literacy Movement Organisation of Iran
LP	Laissez-Passer
<i>mohâjer</i>	Muslim involuntary migrant
Mol	Ministry of Interior



Term	Definition
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Iran)
MoRR	Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (Afghanistan)
NGA	No-go areas
<i>panâhandeh</i>	means ‘refugee’, but carries negative nuances and suggests poverty
RRP	Refugee Response Plan



Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide information on the situation of Afghan refugees in Iran, focusing mainly on the situation of registered and unregistered Afghan refugees in the country, relevant for international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection.

Methodology

This report is produced in line with the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019)² and the EASO COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019).³

Defining the terms of reference (ToR)

The Terms of Reference for this report were defined by EUAA based on consultations held and input received from COI experts in the EUAA COI Specialist Network on Iran, including on new developments since the Taliban takeover of power in Afghanistan on 15 August 2021. The terms of reference for this report can be found in [Annex 2](#).

The reference period for this report is 11 October 2020 until 21 October 2022. The drafting period finished on 21 October 2022, and additional information was added to the report as a result of the quality review process during the review implementation up until 24 November 2022.

Collecting information

This report is based on publicly available information in electronic and paper-based sources gathered through desk-based research. This report also contains information from oral sources with ground-level knowledge of the situation of Afghans in Iran who were interviewed specifically for this report. For security reasons, oral sources are anonymised unless they have chosen to be named in relation to the organisation represented.

Sources

In accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology, the content of this report relies on a range of different open-source material which was consulted within the time frame and the scope of the research. The report relies on, amongst others, reports and data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). All sources that are used in this report are outlined in the [Bibliography](#) section.

² EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

³ EUAA, EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Guide, June 2019, [url](#)



Quality control

The report was reviewed by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the Acknowledgements section and internally by EUAA COI sector. All comments made by reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft. Some information was added after the peer review during the finalisation of the report, until 24 November 2022.

Structure and use of the report

This report describes the situation of Afghan refugees in Iran. Afghans living in Iran can be broadly divided into four main groups: *Amayesh* cardholders, Afghan passport holders with Iranian visas, undocumented Afghan refugees and Afghans registered during headcount exercises. Sometimes the sources do not differentiate between the four categories. Where possible the situation for each main group is described. The main focus of this report lies on the Afghan refugees and not the Afghan passport holders with Iranian visa.

The report consists of five main chapters. The first chapter describes the general background of Afghan refugees in Iran. In the first section, the history of Afghan migration from Afghanistan to Iran is discussed. The second section of the first chapter provides information on the legal status, the population and the demography of Afghan refugees in Iran. A third section describes the treatment of Afghan refugees in Iran. A subsection is dedicated to the general attitude of Iran's population towards Afghan refugees, including the extent of their integration into Iranian society. A second subsection discusses the attitude of the Government of Iran towards Afghan refugees, including since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021. A third subsection elaborates on the recruitment of Afghan refugees to fight for Iran in foreign countries. The final section of the first chapter describes other civil documentation for Afghan refugees in Iran.

The second chapter of the report examines the return of registered and unregistered Afghan refugees to Afghanistan. Separate sections in this second chapter are dedicated to forced and other returns, voluntary repatriation and methods used regarding returns. Other sections discuss the situation at official border crossing points and legal requirements to return to/re-entry between Afghanistan and Iran for Afghan refugees, including the situation in practice.

The third chapter provides information about border crossings and human smuggling of Afghan refugees into Iran, including the Afghan refugees' treatment and the prevalence of this phenomenon.

The fourth chapter provides information about the livelihood opportunities for Afghan refugees in Iran, according to their legal status. It examines freedom of movement, access to education, employment, and access to different services such as healthcare, housing, land and property, financial and communication services and access to legal aid.

The fifth chapter of this report examines cross-border ties of Afghans in Iran and their links to family and social networks in Afghanistan.



Map



Map 1: Iran (Islamic Republic of), © United Nations.⁴

⁴ United Nations, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Map No. 3891 Rev, 4, January 2004, [url](#)



1. Background

1.1. Overview of key refugee inflows from Afghanistan to Iran

1.1.1. Overview of Afghan displacement to Iran

According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in August 2022, Iran was hosting ‘one of the largest and most protracted refugee populations in the world, the majority of whom are Afghan refugees’.⁵ While a ‘sizable number of Afghan migrants’ had already been present in Iran since the late 19th century, Afghans began to arrive in large numbers in Iran after the Soviet army occupied Afghanistan in 1979.⁶ The occupation reportedly resulted in 2.9 million Afghans leaving Afghanistan between 1980 and 1989 to enter Iran.⁷ In a 2007 article published in the journal *Iranian Studies*, academics Fariba Adelkhah and Zuzanna Olszewska explained that according to estimates of the Iranian government the number of Afghan refugees in Iran until 1991 had risen to three million, while a 1992 UNHCR publication stated that the number of Afghans in Iran had amounted to 2.8 million.⁸ After the Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, ‘1.4 million Afghans returned from Iran to Afghanistan in 1992’.⁹

From 1989 on, Iranian migration policy gradually changed with the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 and the start of the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani in 1989. In 1989, the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) was created. While early on, the government of Iran had abstained from ‘drastic expulsion/repatriation plans’,¹⁰ in December 1992, a shift occurred when Iran signed a repatriation agreement with the government of Afghanistan and UNHCR.¹¹ The withdrawal of the Soviet army 1989 was followed by a civil war between different *mujahidin* factions¹² from 1992 to 1996, and the conquest of large parts of Afghanistan by Taliban forces. These developments again led to large-scale movements of Afghans into Iran.¹³

⁵ UNHCR Iran, Protection Dashboard - Jan to Jun 2022, 23 August 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁶ Siavoshi, S., Afghans in Iran: the state and the working of immigration policies, 24 August 2022, [url](#)

⁷ Abbasi-Shavazi, M. J. et al., Second-generation Afghans in Iran: Integration, Identity and Return, April 2008, [url](#), p. 4

⁸ Adelkhah, F. and Olszewska, Z., The Iranian Afghans, April 2007, [url](#), p. 141

⁹ Abbasi-Shavazi, M. J. et al., Second-generation Afghans in Iran: Integration, Identity and Return, April 2008, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁰ Siavoshi, S., Afghans in Iran: the state and the working of immigration policies, 24 August 2022, [url](#)

¹¹ Siavoshi, S., Afghans in Iran: the state and the working of immigration policies, 24 August 2022, [url](#); Abbasi-Shavazi, M. J. et al., Kabul. Return to Afghanistan?, October 2005, [url](#), p. 16

¹² Abbasi-Shavazi, M. J. et al., Second-generation Afghans in Iran: Integration, Identity and Return, April 2008, [url](#), p. 5

¹³ Adelkhah, F. and Olszewska, Z., The Iranian Afghans, April 2007, [url](#), p. 142



The Taliban rule and armed conflicts between opposition groups and Taliban forces between 1994¹⁴ and 2001 again caused major displacement movements,¹⁵ as did the bombing of Afghanistan, led by the United States, in late 2001.¹⁶ In the aftermath of the collapse of the Taliban de-facto government in 2001, Mohammad Khatami, then president of Iran, signed a second repatriation agreement with the Afghan government and UNHCR in 2002.¹⁷ While in early 2004 around 1.4 million documented refugees were in Iran, this number was reduced to 743 856 as of October 2005.¹⁸ As reported in an August 2022 article by the news website IranWire,¹⁹ other displacement movements from parts of Afghanistan into Iran occurred after the emergence of the Islamic State (IS) group in Afghanistan²⁰ in 2014²¹.

After the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, again a large number of Afghans fled to Iran²² as the security and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan deteriorated.²³ A local Iranian border guard at the border crossing in Zaranj in October 2021 reportedly stated that 3 000 to 4 000 individuals were trying to enter Iran per day while before the takeover it had been 1 000 to 2 000 individuals. Only those with valid visa (500 to 600 individuals per day) were allowed to cross.²⁴

1.2. Legal status of Afghan refugees

1.2.1. Demography and place of residence

Referring to the latest available data from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Gol), dating from October 2020, UNHCR stated in July 2022 that around 780 000 registered²⁵ Afghan refugees (*Amayesh* cardholders)²⁶ were residing in Iran, alongside some 20 000 Iraqi

¹⁴ The Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. DIIS, *Guests or trash*, 2016, [url](#), p. 10; New York Times (The), *Who Are the Taliban?*, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵ Abbasi-Shavazi, M. J. et al., *Second-generation Afghans in Iran: Integration, Identity and Return*, April 2008, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁶ Adelkhah, F. and Olszewska, Z., *The Iranian Afghans*, April 2007, [url](#), p. 142

¹⁷ Siavoshi, S., *Afghans in Iran: the state and the working of immigration policies*, 24 August 2022, [url](#); Abbasi-Shavazi, M. J. et al., *Kabul. Return to Afghanistan?*, October 2005, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁸ Adelkhah, F. and Olszewska, Z., *The Iranian Afghans*, April 2007, [url](#), pp. 142-143

¹⁹ IranWire is a collaborative news website run by professional Iranian journalists in the diaspora and citizen journalists inside Iran. A high number of the journalists who regularly write for IranWire 'were forced to leave their country of birth'. The news website strongly focusses on 'documenting human rights abuses in Iran, fact-checking official claims and analyzing government competence'; IranWire, *About*, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰ IranWire, *What Treatment Can Fleeing Afghans Expect From Iran?*, 16 August 2021, [url](#)

²¹ USIP, *The Rise and Stall of the Islamic State in Afghanistan*, November 2016, [url](#), p. 1

²² Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Algemeen ambtsbericht Iran* [Country report Iran], May 2022, [url](#), p. 99; UN Human Rights Council, *Visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights*, Alena Douhan [Advanced Unedited Version], A/HRC/51/33/Add.1, 17 August 2022, [url](#), p. 13

²³ UNHCR, *Iran at a glance* (July 2022), 18 August 2022, [url](#), p. 1

²⁴ AFP, *Tausende Afghanen werden täglich an der Grenze zum Iran abgewiesen* [Thousands of Afghans are turned away daily at the border with Iran], 9 October 2021

²⁵ MEI, *The Afghan refugee crisis: What does it mean for Iran?*, 20 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁶ UNHCR, *Afghanistan Situation Regional Response Plan January – December 2022*, 12 January 2022, [url](#), p. 16



refugees. Moreover, as of May 2022, some 586 000 Afghan passport-holders with Iranian visas resided in the country.²⁷

In addition, around 2.1 million undocumented Afghans (including former *Amayesh* cardholders)²⁸ were living in Iran as of 2020,²⁹ while estimates from the second and third quarter of 2022 put this number at 2.2,³⁰ 2.3,³¹ or even 2.6 million.³² However, there was fluctuation in the number of undocumented Afghans, and precise figures on arrivals and circular cross-border flows were unavailable³³ given that Iran lacked a centralised registration system and the situation near the borders was difficult to verify.³⁴

Since the Taliban's takeover of power in Afghanistan in August 2021, the number of Afghan asylum seekers arriving in Iran increased significantly.³⁵ According to various Iranian government estimates drawn upon by UNHCR, between 500 000 and 1 000 000 Afghans arrived in Iran.³⁶ Most of them were thought to be undocumented.³⁷

At the same time, UNHCR estimated that 65 % of all newly arriving Afghans were deported by the Iranian authorities, while smaller numbers returned to Afghanistan voluntarily or travelled onwards to Turkey and the European Union. As of August 2022, the same source estimated that around 274 000 new arrivals would remain in Iran by the end of 2022.³⁸

Of the registered³⁹ refugees living in Iran (including both Afghans and Iraqis), 96 % were living in cities, towns and villages alongside the Iranian host community, while the remaining 4 % were living in 20 refugee settlements operated by BAFIA, an agency of the Ministry of Interior (MoI).⁴⁰ According to ACAPS, a non-profit provider of humanitarian needs assessments, 55 % of the Afghan population in Iran (including Afghan registered refugees and undocumented) lived in Tehran, Isfahan and Razavi Khorasan.⁴¹

The majority of the Afghan asylum-seekers arrived since 2021 were located in urban areas where they were supported by local Afghan residents, while smaller numbers were

²⁷ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet January – May 2022, 6 July 2022, [url](#), p. 1

²⁸ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Response Plan January – December 2022, 12 January 2022, [url](#), p. 16

²⁹ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet January – May 2022, 6 July 2022, [url](#), p. 1; IOM, IOM Comprehensive Action Plan For Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries, 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8

³⁰ UNHCR, Iran (Islamic Republic of), last updated 31 August 2022, [url](#)

³¹ ACAPS, Iran: Afghan refugees – Overview, 4 July 2022, [url](#)

³² UNSG, Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran [Advanced Unedited Version], A/HRC/50/19, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 3

³³ IOM, IOM Comprehensive Action Plan For Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries, 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8

³⁴ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Update – 8 February 2022, 14 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

³⁵ ACAPS, Iran: Afghan refugees – Overview, 4 July 2022, [url](#)

³⁶ UNHCR Iran, Refugees in Iran, n.d., [url](#)

³⁷ TNH, For desperate Afghans, risky crossings into Iran are worth chancing, 17 May 2022, [url](#)

³⁸ UNHCR, Iran (Islamic Republic of), last updated 31 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁹ MEI, The Afghan refugee crisis: What does it mean for Iran?, 20 September 2021, [url](#); UNHCR Iran, Factsheet January – May 2022, 6 July 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁰ UNHCR Iran, Refugees in Iran, n.d., [url](#)

⁴¹ MEI, The Afghan refugee crisis: What does it mean for Iran?, 20 September 2021, [url](#)



accommodated on a temporary basis in transit centres.⁴² Some Afghan families have been transferred from a transit centre setting to refugee settlement shelters.⁴³

1.2.2. Laws and policies

Iran acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol on 28 July 1976, with reservations to the Convention's Article 17 (wage-earning employment), Article 23 (public relief), Article 24 (labour legislation and social security) and Article 26 (freedom of movement).⁴⁴ The right to seek political asylum has been incorporated into Iran's 1979 Constitution⁴⁵ and elaborated in the 1963 'Regulation relating to Refugees'.⁴⁶

According to Article 2(a) of the 1963 Regulation, a person can be identified as a refugee by virtue of having crossed the border into Iran. The lodging and processing of asylum claims after crossing the border is specified in a note to Article 2(a): The refugee [informal translation] 'shall present himself to the first border guard station or competent Government official upon entering the Iranian territory.' The said official [informal translation] 'shall receive the application and refer the refugee to the district border guard. This border guard shall obtain the required information from the applicant and, through the Provincial Governorate or District Governorate Office, shall forward the application to the Ministry of Interior.'⁴⁷

Article 4 then specifies that [informal translation] 'asylum shall be granted if the following conditions have been established: 1. The application has not been made in bad faith; 2. The purpose of the application is not to seek employment.'⁴⁸

Moreover, Article 12 of the Regulations provides that [informal translation] 'a refugee shall not be forcibly returned to a country where their life or freedom is in danger due to political, racial or religious reasons or due to their membership of a particular social group'.⁴⁹

Roger Zetter, an emeritus professor for refugee studies at the University of Oxford, explained in a September 2018 report for the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) that the Foreign Nationals Executive Coordination Council (FNECC), a government entity chaired by Iran's Mol has overall responsibility for the arrival, residency, deportation, education, employment, and medical care of foreign nationals. Individual processing of asylum applications shall be conducted by the FNECC or an FNECC-designated committee. Since the FNECC constitutes a higher-level

⁴² UNHCR Iran, Refugees in Iran, n.d., [url](#)

⁴³ UNHCR, Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and Response in Iran 30 April 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁴ UNHCR Iran, Refugees in Iran, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁵ Iran, Constitution of December 1979 (amended as of 28 July 1989), 2 June 2021, [url](#), Article 155

⁴⁶ Iran, آئین نامه پناهندگان [Regulation relating to Refugees] of 5 December 1963, 27 April 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Iran, آئین نامه پناهندگان [Regulation relating to Refugees] of 5 December 1963, 27 April 2018, [url](#), Article 2(a) and note to Article 2(a)

⁴⁸ Iran, آئین نامه پناهندگان [Regulation relating to Refugees] of 5 December 1963, 27 April 2018, [url](#), Article 4

⁴⁹ Iran, آئین نامه پناهندگان [Regulation relating to Refugees] of 5 December 1963, 27 April 2018, [url](#), Article 12



council that mainly deals with the development of general policies, refugee affairs are effectively administered by BAFIA, an agency affiliated to the Mol⁵⁰ created in 1989.⁵¹

BAFIA's responsibilities include the registration of asylum-seekers, individual processing of asylum applications⁵² and the issuance of refugee ID cards (called '*Amayesh* cards' since 2003).⁵³

From 1978/79 to 1992, the Gol practised an 'open-door' policy towards newly arriving Afghans,⁵⁴ granting them refugee status on a *prima facie* basis.⁵⁵ This meant that holding Afghan citizenship was sufficient for receiving protection in Iran,⁵⁶ and most Afghans were issued 'blue cards' indicating the holder's status as an involuntary migrant (*mohâjer*; plural: *mohâjerin*).⁵⁷ Blue card holders were granted permanent legal residence in Iran.⁵⁸

After 1992, this open-door policy shifted towards a policy that redefined Afghan migrants as *panâhandeh* (plural: *panâhandegân*),⁵⁹ a term which, like *mohâjer*, means 'refugee', but carries negative nuances and suggests poverty.⁶⁰ From 1993 onwards, only temporary registration cards were issued to newly arriving or undocumented Afghans⁶¹ and in some cases, issuance of these cards was refused on unclear grounds.⁶² Moreover, Afghans were now required to prove on an individual basis that they had a well-founded fear of persecution in order to be granted refugee status.⁶³

Concurrently, in 1992, a first formal repatriation programme for Afghans was established in a Tripartite Agreement between Iran, Afghanistan and UNHCR.⁶⁴ From 2001 the Gol intensified efforts to repatriate Afghans,⁶⁵ signing another tripartite agreement with the Afghan government and UNHCR in 2002 to facilitate the voluntary return of millions of Afghans.⁶⁶ Since then, voluntary returns of Afghans have been organised on the basis of this tripartite agreement.⁶⁷ Furthermore, in 2003, the Gol approved a new policy document entitled the 'Regulations about accelerating repatriating of Afghans' which amongst others imposed

⁵⁰ Zetter, R., Protection for forcibly displaced Afghan populations in Pakistan and Iran, DRC, September 2018, [url](#), pp. 59-60

⁵¹ Siavoshi, S., Afghans in Iran: the state and the working of immigration policies, 24 August 2022, [url](#), p. 8

⁵² UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on Services Available for the Undocumented, 26 September 2021, [url](#)

⁵³ Zetter, R., Protection for forcibly displaced Afghan populations in Pakistan and Iran, DRC, September 2018, [url](#), pp. 59-60

⁵⁴ Jauhiainen, J. et al., Afghans in Iran: Migration Patterns and Aspirations, 2020, [url](#), pp. 20-21

⁵⁵ Yarbakhsh, E., Reading Derrida in Tehran: Between an Open Door and an Empty Sofreh, 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁵⁶ Naseh, M. et al., Repatriation of Afghan refugees from Iran: a shelter profile study, 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁷ Jauhiainen, J. et al., Afghans in Iran: Migration Patterns and Aspirations, 2020, [url](#), pp. 20-21

⁵⁸ Rajaee, B., The Politics of Refugee Policy in Post-Revolutionary Iran, 2000, [url](#), p. 56

⁵⁹ Jauhiainen, J. et al., Afghans in Iran: Migration Patterns and Aspirations, 2020, [url](#), pp. 21-22

⁶⁰ Yarbakhsh, E., Reading Derrida in Tehran: Between an Open Door and an Empty Sofreh, 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁶¹ Rajaee, B., The Politics of Refugee Policy in Post-Revolutionary Iran, 2000, [url](#), pp. 56-57

⁶² HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran's Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, November 2013, [url](#), p. 32

⁶³ Naseh, M. et al., Repatriation of Afghan refugees from Iran: a shelter profile study, 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁴ Adelkhah, F. and Olszewska, Z., The Iranian Afghans, April 2007, [url](#), p. 143

⁶⁵ Yarbakhsh, E., Reading Derrida in Tehran: Between an Open Door and an Empty Sofreh, 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁶⁶ HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran's Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, November 2013, [url](#), p. 40

⁶⁷ Iran, Combined reports (twentieth to twenty seventh) submitted by the Islamic Republic of Iran under article 9 of the ICERD, CERD, CERD/C/IRN/20-27, 22 March 2022, [url](#), para. 9



restrictions on hiring Afghans without work permits and on the ability of Afghans without passports and visas to rent housing.⁶⁸

New refugee registration exercises (*Amayesh* in Persian) were conducted by BAFIA in 2001 and 2003.⁶⁹ During these exercises, temporary *Amayesh* cards⁷⁰ were issued to Afghans who had arrived in Iran before 2001⁷¹ and had already been granted residency in Iran on a *prima facie* basis.⁷² After the 2003 exercise, at the beginning of 2004, there were around 1.4 million documented Afghan refugees in the country.⁷³ BAFIA established a process enabling *Amayesh* cardholders to renew their cards on an annual basis.⁷⁴

The *Amayesh* system became the sole system for renewing the statuses of registered Afghans in Iran⁷⁵ and the *Amayesh* card has since been the only valid identity document proving Afghans' refugee status.⁷⁶ According to the researchers Fariba Adelkhah and Zuzanna Olszewska, *Amayesh* exercises were 'largely intended to facilitate repatriation and refugee management by standardizing refugee statuses'.⁷⁷ For more information on *Amayesh* exercises and the rights conferred to *Amayesh* cardholders, see section [1.2.3. Types of legal status](#).

In 2010, the country's Supreme National Security Council passed a law named the 'Plan for Registering Afghan Nationals' (also known as the 'Comprehensive Regularization Plan', CRP).⁷⁸ Under this scheme, implemented between 2010 and 2012,⁷⁹ undocumented Afghans were allowed to register with the Gol and receive an Afghan passport ('family passport') and an Iranian visa.⁸⁰ By July 2012, some 560 000 Afghans had been registered.⁸¹ Since then, visas issued under the CRP have been extended at various intervals.⁸² Those who participated in the 2018 visa extension for family passports have the validity date until 11 March 2023 and those who participated only in 2016 visa extension had the validity date until May 2021.⁸³ New registrations under this scheme were no longer possible.⁸⁴

In January 2017 BAFIA launched an exercise called the 'Headcount of the Undocumented Foreigners' (*sarshomari-e atbâ'-e fâghed-e madrak*). Under this exercise, specific categories

⁶⁸ Jauhiainen, J. et al., *Afghans in Iran: Migration Patterns and Aspirations*, 2020, [url](#), pp. 23-24

⁶⁹ Adelkhah, F. and Olszewska, Z., *The Iranian Afghans*, April 2007, [url](#), p. 142

⁷⁰ Sweden, Lifos, *Afghanen i Iran* [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 10

⁷¹ Swiss Refugee Council, *Iran: Der rechtliche Status von afghanischen Flüchtlingen* [The legal status of Afghan refugees], 4 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4; Norway, Landinfo, *Afghan citizens in Iran*, 14 March 2011, [url](#), p. 7

⁷² Jauhiainen, J. et al., *Afghans in Iran: Migration Patterns and Aspirations*, 2020, [url](#), p. 23

⁷³ Adelkhah, F. and Olszewska, Z., *The Iranian Afghans*, April 2007, [url](#), p. 142

⁷⁴ UNHCR, *Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?*, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁵ HRW, *Unwelcome Guests: Iran's Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights*, November 2013, [url](#), p. 34

⁷⁶ Seddighi, H. et al., *Education of Afghan refugee children in Iran: A structured review of policies*, 11 August 2022, [url](#), p. 2; UNHCR, *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries*, 2014, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁷ Adelkhah, F. and Olszewska, Z., *The Iranian Afghans*, April 2007, [url](#), p. 142

⁷⁸ Zetter, R., *Protection for forcibly displaced Afghan populations in Pakistan and Iran*, DRC, September 2018, [url](#), p. 61

⁷⁹ Sweden, Lifos, *Afghanen i Iran* [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 13

⁸⁰ UNHCR Iran, *Afghan Population Movement Snapshot – June 2021*, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 1

⁸¹ Sweden, Lifos, *Afghanen i Iran* [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 13

⁸² UNHCR Iran, *Afghan Population Movement Snapshot – June 2021*, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 1

⁸³ International organisation, *Correspondence with EUAA*, 17 November 2022

⁸⁴ Sweden, Lifos, *Afghanen i Iran* [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 14



of undocumented Afghans were invited to declare their presence with the authorities. These categories included: holders of expired *Amayesh* cards,⁸⁵ unregistered spouses of *Amayesh* cardholders, unregistered spouses of Iranian nationals, unregistered Afghans whose children were enrolled in Iranian schools,⁸⁶ Afghan passport holders with expired Iranian visas, as well as other groups.⁸⁷ By the end of 2017, the Gol had issued headcount slips to over 804 000 undocumented persons (mostly Afghans) who had taken part in the exercise.⁸⁸ According to UNHCR, these paper slips have ‘proven to offer temporary protection to the participants’.⁸⁹ Another headcount exercise was launched in November 2018 which specifically focused on foreign citizens engaged in informal and formal labour.⁹⁰

Following the August 2021 Taliban takeover of power in Afghanistan and the increased influx of Afghans to Iran,⁹¹ Iran’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) stated that ‘waves of displaced Afghans’ could not continue arriving in Iran because the country’s capacities were limited.⁹² Despite a non-return advisory issued by UNHCR in August 2021,⁹³ there has been an increasing number of deportations of Afghans during the reference period of this report.⁹⁴ For more information regarding returns to Afghanistan, see section [2. Movements of registered and unregistered Afghan refugees](#).

The Gol has also strengthened its efforts to tighten controls along its border with Afghanistan,⁹⁵ essentially closing them for Afghans without passports and visas.⁹⁶ At the same time, the visa renewal process was reportedly made considerably more difficult, with Afghans now required to return to Afghanistan to have their visas renewed at the Iranian embassy or consulate.⁹⁷

Between April and the end of June 2022, the Gol conducted another headcount exercise of undocumented Afghans, including those who arrived since August 2021.⁹⁸ For more information on this headcount, please see section [1.2.3 Types of legal status](#).

⁸⁵ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 28

⁸⁶ Sweden, Lifos, Afghaners i Iran [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 16

⁸⁷ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 28

⁸⁸ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet July – September 2020, 30 September 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁸⁹ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 28

⁹⁰ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet July – September 2020, 30 September 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁹¹ TOLONews, Afghan Refugees in Iran, Pakistan Call for UNHCR to Act, 31 July 2022, [url](#); Switzerland, SEM, Focus Pakistan / Iran / Türkei: Situation afghanischer Migrantinnen und Migranten [Situation of Afghan Migrants], 30 March 2022, [url](#), p. 20

⁹² Diplomat (The), As Iran-Taliban Tensions Rise, Afghan Migrants in Tinderbox, 2 May 2022, [url](#)

⁹³ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan – 2021 Final Report, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁹⁴ UNSG, Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran [Advanced Unedited Version], A/HRC/50/19, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 3; Los Angeles Times, Amid a crackdown, Afghan refugees in Iran fear the ‘unthinkable’: Being sent back, 16 December 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁵ Los Angeles Times, Amid a crackdown, Afghan refugees in Iran fear the ‘unthinkable’: Being sent back, 16 December 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁶ Al, ‘They don’t treat us like humans’: Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁹⁷ MEE, Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home, 12 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁸ UNHCR Iran, Afghanistan Situation Response in Iran – 31 August 2022, 29 September 2022, [url](#), p. 1



1.2.3. Types of legal status

(a) Amayesh cardholders

In legal terms, the *Amayesh* card is a temporary residence permit (Foreign Nationals Temporary Residence Card⁹⁹) that ‘effectively serves as a refugee identification document’. It gives the cardholder the right to remain in the country and access certain benefits.¹⁰⁰ The rights of *Amayesh* cardholders are discussed in more detail in section [1.2.3.Types of legal status](#).

Although during the 2001 and 2003 *Amayesh* exercises the Gol issued almost all *Amayesh* cards without conducting individual processing of asylum applications, *Amayesh* cardholders have been treated by BAFIA as de facto refugees.¹⁰¹ The government considers Afghans who had already been residing in Iran before 2001 as refugees, provided that they have re-registered at every *Amayesh* exercise.¹⁰² According to UNHCR, the *Amayesh* card ‘effectively translates to refugee status’ and ‘provides the holders of the card the protection accorded to refugees’ under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.¹⁰³

The overwhelming majority of Afghans arriving in Iran after the 2003 registration exercise were not permitted to register for an *Amayesh* card.¹⁰⁴ The Gol stopped issuing new *Amayesh* cards after 2007,¹⁰⁵ allowing only renewals of *Amayesh* cards of previously registered Afghans.¹⁰⁶ New *Amayesh* cards have only been issued to newly born Afghan children whose parents are *Amayesh* cardholders.¹⁰⁷ Both parents need to have valid *Amayesh* cards.¹⁰⁸

The *Amayesh* cards have been issued with varying periods of validity.¹⁰⁹ While initially the validity was as short as three months for individuals,¹¹⁰ in 2011, it was extended to one year for the first time.¹¹¹ As of 2021, *Amayesh* cards were valid for one year,¹¹² and cardholders renew their cards regularly upon expiry of their old card.¹¹³

As of November 2021, UNHCR stated that the Gol was conducting *Amayesh* renewal exercises on an annual basis.¹¹⁴ Each of these exercises has been given a number.¹¹⁵ The most recently completed *Amayesh* 16 exercise was conducted from 17 May to 21 November 2021.¹¹⁶

⁹⁹ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran’s Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, November 2013, [url](#), p. 35

¹⁰¹ HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran’s Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, November 2013, [url](#), p. 34

¹⁰² Sweden, Lifos, Afghanen i Iran [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁰³ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran’s Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, November 2013, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁰⁵ Swiss Refugee Council, Iran: Der rechtliche Status von afghanischen Flüchtlingen [The legal status of Afghan refugees], 4 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁰⁶ Naseh, M. et al., Repatriation of Afghan refugees from Iran: a shelter profile study, 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁷ Jauhiainen, J. et al., Afghans in Iran: Migration Patterns and Aspirations, 2020, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁰⁸ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran’s Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, November 2013, [url](#), pp. 34-35

¹¹⁰ Adelkhah, F. and Olszewska, Z., The Iranian Afghans, April 2007, [url](#), p. 142

¹¹¹ HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran’s Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, November 2013, [url](#), p. 36

¹¹² USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 44

¹¹³ HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran’s Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, November 2013, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹⁴ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet July – September 2021, 9 November 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁵ HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran’s Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, November 2013, [url](#), p. 34

¹¹⁶ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet October – December 2021, 14 April 2022, [url](#), p. 2

This exercise renewed cards that had been issued during the *Amayesh* 15 exercise (conducted from July 2020 and February 2021) and had a validity date of 21 June 2021,¹¹⁷ however they remain/considered valid until end of *Amayesh* 17 registration (21 November 2022).¹¹⁸ The *Amayesh* 17 exercise was launched on 11 July 2022¹¹⁹ and was scheduled to be conducted over a four-month period, according to BAFIA.¹²⁰ Cards issued during *Amayesh* 17 exercise in 2022 are valid until 21 June 2023.¹²¹

BAFIA runs a database with information on all registered Afghan refugees.¹²² In the 2019/2020 *Amayesh* 14 exercise, BAFIA started to record individuals and households with *Amayesh* cards in a new integrated database called SIAM (Integrated Database of Immigrants and Foreign Nationals).¹²³ The new BAFIA-SIAM database records individuals and households in a web-based database accessible to all governmental organisations active in the field of foreign nationals and immigrants. Unlike its predecessor (NAJVA), the new database is unified in the whole country with a central server and faster, more secure and accurate data processing, as well as identity verification using biometrics (including fingerprints and iris scanning). During the *Amayesh* registration individuals' biometrics including facial recognition and fingerprints are also collected simultaneously.¹²⁴ More recent information regarding the types of personal data stored in these databases could not be found within the times constraints of this report. However, UNHCR was cited as saying in a November 2010 interview with Landinfo that the registered information included the person's name, age, address in Iran, the parent's names, and the place of origin in Afghanistan. UNHCR also added that the registered data were not always comparable from one round to another, as the types of registered information varied between *Amayesh* registration rounds.¹²⁵

Since 2013, the *Amayesh* registration exercises have been implemented by Gol-designated private institutions called 'Kefalat centres'.¹²⁶ According to a list published in December 2017 by the Young Journalists Club (YJC), a state-linked Iranian news agency,¹²⁷ there were a total of 166 *Kefalat* centres across the country.¹²⁸

Locations of <i>Kefalat</i> centres	
Province	Number of centres
Tehran	47
Isfahan	24 (including 15 in the city of Isfahan)
Qom	18 (all located in the city of Qom)

¹¹⁷ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet January – March 2021, 31 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁸ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 17 November 2022

¹¹⁹ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on the launch of registration for *Amayesh* cards 17 and Hoviat cards 16, 11 July 2022, [url](#); Diaran, کارت آمایش ۱۷ و صدور پروانه کار [Amayesh card 17 and issuance of work permits], 25 July 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁰ Diaran, کارت آمایش ۱۷ و صدور پروانه کار [Amayesh card 17 and issuance of work permits], 25 July 2022, [url](#)

¹²¹ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 17 November 2022

¹²² De Wild, D., Independent Review Cash Based Programming in Iran, June 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹²³ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet January 2020, 1 January 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁴ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 17 November 2022

¹²⁵ Norway, Landinfo, Afghan citizens in Iran, 14 March 2011, [url](#), p. 8

¹²⁶ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁷ YJC, About Us, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁸ YJC, آدرس دفاتر کفالت، اشتغال و اقامت اتباع خارجی سراسر کشور [Addresses of Kefalat, employment and foreigner residence offices across the country], 16 December 2017, [url](#)

Razavi Khorasan	17 (all located in the city of Mashhad)
Fars	14 (including 11 in the city of Shiraz)
Kerman	10 (including 7 in the city of Kerman)
Alborz	10
Markazi	5
Yazd	5
Semnan	5
Qazvin	4
Golestan	3
South Khorasan	2
Bushehr	2

Figure 1: Overview of numbers of *Kefalat* centres by province, based on YJC data¹²⁹

The *Kefalat* centres collect the documents and receipts that are required for the renewal of *Amayesh* cards as well as for the issuance of temporary work permits. As far as UNHCR is aware, only Afghans who have previously been registered in the *Amayesh* database (with the exception of children of *Amayesh* cardholders) were permitted to take part in subsequent *Amayesh* re-registration exercises.¹³⁰

In order to re-register and renew *Amayesh* cards, eligible Afghan heads of household need to contact or approach a *Kefalat* centre to obtain an appointment¹³¹ and all family members must approach *Kefalat* centres with required documents on the appointment date. All ‘refugees’ above ten years old are required to undergo the biometric registration. Biometric registration is used for identification and verification purposes.¹³² If there is no *Kefalat* centre in their province, they need to approach the local BAFIA office. According to BAFIA, holders of the *Amayesh* cards issued during the *Amayesh* 16 exercise would be notified by phone or SMS.¹³³ If the family has a new member (due to childbirth or marriage) or has lost a member (due to marriage, divorce, death, or departure from Iran), the *Kefalat* centre must be notified before an appointment is set. In order to obtain an appointment sheet, only the household head should refer to the *Kefalat* centre, bringing the *Amayesh* cards of all family members (except in Tehran province, where appointments are arranged through a website).¹³⁴

BAFIA informed that applicants for the 2022 *Amayesh* 17 exercise were required to bring the following to the appointment: the *Amayesh* 16 cards of all family members, the appointment sheet, a bank card to pay the fees, a housing contract showing the exact address and postal code, as well as a water bill (or, in the absence of a water bill, a gas, electricity or phone bill) for address verification, a (health) insurance document, a passport (including expired blank

¹²⁹ YJC, آدرس دفاتر کفالت، اشتغال و اقامت اتباع خارجی سراسر کشور [Addresses of *Kefalat*, employment and foreigner residence offices across the country], 16 December 2017, [url](#)

¹³⁰ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

¹³¹ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet April – June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹³² International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 17 November 2022

¹³³ Diaran, کارت آمایش ۱۷ و صدور پروانه کار [Amayesh card 17 and issuance of work permits], 25 July 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁴ Diaran, کارت آمایش ۱۷ و صدور پروانه کار [Amayesh card 17 and issuance of work permits], 25 July 2022, [url](#)

passport¹³⁵) or *tazkera*¹³⁶ issued by the Afghan authorities that proves the holder's identity (unless this document has already been presented at the *Amayesh* 16 exercise), and a COVID-19 vaccination card (not mandatory¹³⁷).¹³⁸ Prior to the starting date of registration, eligible households must report changes to BAFIA (including new-borns with birth certificates, marriage of the children with marriage contract together with pre-marital tests documents, death of a family member with death certificate, divorce with divorce certificate or court order, absence or departure of the head of family or any other family member with documentation of absence, missing ID card or LP). Settlement residents shall provide an 'introduction letter' from the settlement authority.¹³⁹

BAFIA stated that after handing in all these documents, paying the fees and taking a photo and fingerprinting, the *Amayesh* cards would be handed to the applicant or sent by mail to the applicant's address.¹⁴⁰ If the payment of the application fee is done at the registration centre no receipt is required; if the payment is done at the bank, the payment receipt is required.¹⁴¹ According to a January 2022 UNHCR report, *Amayesh* card renewal fees constituted 8 % of Afghans' average annual income.¹⁴² In addition, payment of a municipal tax fee was usually required, the amount of which is set by each city. Exemptions from the municipal tax fee applied for families with members with a disability or incurable disease, female-headed families with no son older than 18, families with a male head of family older than 65 with no son above the age of 18, as well as women without families.¹⁴³ According to a fee table republished by the Iranian news website Shahraranews, the total fees charged during the *Amayesh* 17 exercise were as follows:

Total fees charged during the <i>Amayesh</i> 17 exercise	
Household size	Fee
Single person	4 225 000 rials (EUR 100) and 1 875 000 rials if exempted from municipal tax (EUR 44)
2 persons	6 750 000 rials (EUR 161) and 3 750 000 rials if exempted from municipal tax (EUR 89)
3 persons	9 125 000 rials (EUR 217) and 5 625 000 rials if exempted from municipal tax (EUR 134)
4 persons	11 500 000 rials (EUR 274) and 7 500 000 rials if exempted from municipal tax (EUR 179)
5 persons	13 625 000 rials (EUR 325) and 9 375 000 rials if exempted from municipal tax (EUR 223)

¹³⁵ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 17 November 2022

¹³⁶ A *tazkera* is an ID document for Afghan nationals and serves as proof of Afghan citizenship. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Tazkera, passports and other ID documents, 22 May 2019, [url](#), p. 5

¹³⁷ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 17 November 2022

¹³⁸ Diaran, کارت آمایش ۱۷ و صدور پروانه کار [Amayesh card 17 and issuance of work permits], 25 July 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁹ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 17 November 2022

¹⁴⁰ Diaran, کارت آمایش ۱۷ و صدور پروانه کار [Amayesh card 17 and issuance of work permits], 25 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 17 November 2022

¹⁴² UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Response Plan January – December 2022, 12 January 2022, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁴³ Diaran, کارت آمایش ۱۷ و صدور پروانه کار [Amayesh card 17 and issuance of work permits], 25 July 2022, [url](#)

6 persons	15 750 000 rials (EUR 375) and 11 250 000 rials if exempted from municipal tax (EUR 226)
7 persons	17 625 000 rials (EUR 420) and 13 125 000 rials if exempted from municipal tax (EUR 313)
8 persons	19 500 000 rials (EUR 465) and 15 000 000 rials if exempted from municipal tax (EUR 358)
9 persons	21 375 000 rials (EUR 510) and 16 875 000 rials if exempted from municipal tax (EUR 402)
10 persons	23 250 000 rials (EUR 555) and 18 750 000 rials if exempted from municipal tax (EUR 447)

Figure 2: Overview of total fees in rial (including their equivalent in Euro¹⁴⁴) charged during the *Amayesh* 17 exercise, based on information from Shahraraneews¹⁴⁵

In case a *Amayesh* card is lost or damaged, it must be reported to BAFIA/*Kefalat* centres prior to registration to receive an LP (*laissez-passer*) specifying changes and updates in their information (*Barge-Eslah-va-Taqiraat* in Farsi), for those who have lost their valid *Amayesh* cards (missing *Amayesh* cards) and received an ALP to participate in the next round of *Amayesh*.¹⁴⁶

A cardholder who fails to renew his or her *Amayesh* card loses refugee status¹⁴⁷ and thus may no longer be able to access services.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, he or she faces deportation as an undocumented person.¹⁴⁹ Likewise, crossing the Iran's borders irregularly leads to the *Amayesh* card being cancelled, followed by deportation.¹⁵⁰ However, some former *Amayesh* cardholders who had not taken part in previous re-registration exercises were allowed to re-register during the *Amayesh* exercises held in 2019/2020 (*Amayesh* 14),¹⁵¹ 2020/2021 (*Amayesh* 15)¹⁵² and in 2022 (*Amayesh* 17). In the 2022 *Amayesh* 17 exercise, holders of *Amayesh* cards issued during the *Amayesh* exercises 10 to 15¹⁵³ who had not renewed their cards in subsequent exercises were allowed to renew their cards. These persons needed to show that they had not exited Iran and had no judicial record booked against them.¹⁵⁴ BAFIA informed in this context that former cardholders who were unable to take part in the *Amayesh* 16 exercise first had to refer to BAFIA to change their expired *Amayesh* card into a valid travel paper (*barge-ye taradod*) in order to become eligible to participate in the *Amayesh* 17 exercise.¹⁵⁵ UNHCR stated that renewal applications from former *Amayesh* cardholders were

¹⁴⁴ Exchange rate from European Commission, Exchange rate (InforEuro), n.d., [url](#), accessed on 24 November 2022

¹⁴⁵ Shahraraneews, تعرفه کارت آمایش ۱۷ و هویات ۱۶ اتباع خارجی اعلام شد + جدول [Tariffs for *Amayesh* 17 and *Hoviat* 16 cards for foreign nationals has been announced + table], 19 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 17 November 2022

¹⁴⁷ HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran's Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, November 2013, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁴⁸ UNHCR Iran, Announcement on *Amayesh* 16 Registration, 18 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran's Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, November 2013, [url](#), p. 6;

UNHCR Iran, Announcement on *Amayesh* 16 Registration, 18 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵¹ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet January – March 2020, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁵² USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021–Iran, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 44

¹⁵³ Diaran, کارت آمایش ۱۷ و صدور پروانه کار [Amayesh card 17 and issuance of work permits], 25 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement: For the attention of expired *Amayesh*/*Hoviat* cardholders, 11 September 2022, [url](#); Diaran, کارت آمایش ۱۷ و صدور پروانه کار [Amayesh card 17 and issuance of work permits], 25 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵ Diaran, کارت آمایش ۱۷ و صدور پروانه کار [Amayesh card 17 and issuance of work permits], 25 July 2022, [url](#)



to be assessed by BAFIA case by case.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, in the *Amayesh* 15 exercise, hitherto undocumented spouses and family members of *Amayesh* cardholders were reportedly also able to register as well.¹⁵⁷ In *Amayesh* 16 only those who missed two previous rounds were eligible to participate. In *Amayesh* 17 (2022) holders of *Amayesh* 10 to 15 who have not been able to participate in previous rounds due to justifiable reasons and having a written commitment for regular participation in the future *Amayesh* rounds, as long as they do not have an exit record or a court order on deportation are also eligible to register and review their *Amayesh* cards.¹⁵⁸ During the renewal process, the old *Amayesh* card is collected, and a new card is issued valid for 1 year.¹⁵⁹

Rights and obligations of *Amayesh* cardholders

There is no legal document formally defining the rights or obligations of Afghans with *Amayesh* status. *Amayesh* cards effectively grant the holders temporary residency in their province of registration during the validity period. However, *Amayesh* cardholders must obtain permission for any travel outside the province in which they are registered. Afghans with expired *Amayesh* cards, as well as holders of valid *Amayesh* cards who travel outside their provinces of registration without permission are at risk of being arrested, detained, and deported.¹⁶⁰ Attempts to cross the border from Afghanistan into Iran through irregular channels result in the cancellation of the *Amayesh* card and deportation to Afghanistan.¹⁶¹

The rights conferred to *Amayesh* cardholders also include access to education, healthcare, and health insurance.¹⁶² A policy change in June 2021 also formalised *Amayesh* holders' access to banking services, including debit cards.¹⁶³ For more information on these rights, please refer to the respective subsections of section [4. Internal mobility and socio-economic situation of Afghan refugees in Iran](#).

Amayesh cards also allow holders to apply for temporary work permits¹⁶⁴ and to find employment in predefined fields if a work permit is granted. Meanwhile, persons with *Amayesh* status are not permitted to obtain a driving licence (including for motorcycles)¹⁶⁵ unless they have a family member in need of intensive medical care, e.g. a dialysis patient. According to the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV), a Tehran-based NGO, in such cases the cardholder needs to obtain a letter from the State Welfare Organisation of Iran (*Behzisti*) and approach the nearest BAFIA office to obtain a second letter

¹⁵⁶ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement: For the attention of expired *Amayesh*/Hoviat cardholders, 11 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 44

¹⁵⁸ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 17 November 2022

¹⁵⁹ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 17 November 2022

¹⁶⁰ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶¹ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#); Mielke, K. et al., Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan, TRAFIG working paper no. 7, August 2021, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁶² UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶³ UNHCR, Iran policy change gives refugees access to banking services, 8 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet October – December 2021, 14 April 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁵ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)



and then refer to the Migration Police. A driving license for foreign nationals is the same as the one issued for Iranians, except that it is only valid for one year.¹⁶⁶

(b) Afghan passport holders with Iranian visas

Only Afghans with valid passports and visas are able to enter Iran legally through former border crossings.¹⁶⁷ According to UNHCR, as of June 2021, some 586 000 Afghan passport holders resided in Iran. These included around 275 000 Afghans with so-called ‘family passports’ and 311 000 holders of Afghan passports with valid visas¹⁶⁸ (e.g., student or business visas).¹⁶⁹ As of May 2021, family passport and visa holders seeking to renew their status first needed to extend their family passport at an Afghan consular department in Iran and then renew their Iranian visa at a local *Kefalat* centre.¹⁷⁰

Holders of passports and visas enjoy certain benefits not granted to *Amayesh* cardholders, including the right to obtain a driving license, broader access to jobs, access to university education, and greater freedom of movement inside Iran.¹⁷¹ *Amayesh* cardholders wishing to be awarded these rights can opt to renounce their refugee status and instead apply for a student or work visa through the Alternative Stay Arrangement (ASA),¹⁷² a scheme introduced by the Gol in 2011.¹⁷³ Different types of visas (e.g., work, student, visas) have been issued with different validity periods and at different cost.¹⁷⁴ As of April 2022, Al Jazeera reported that visas to Iran could cost between USD 87 and USD 130 and were issued by the Gol for a maximum period of three months.¹⁷⁵ Visa extensions were made at the discretion of the Iranian authorities¹⁷⁶ and involved separate fees.¹⁷⁷ In the case of work visas, as of March 2018 *Amayesh* cardholders renouncing their refugee status through the ASA were able to submit applications both for first-time visas and extensions without leaving Iran. According to an international NGO interviewed by the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) in March 2018, the following was required when applying for a work visa for the first time: the *Amayesh* cards and valid passports of all family members, a completed application form, and payment of a fee.¹⁷⁸ For information regarding the issuance of student visas, please see section [4.2. Education](#).

However, since the August 2021 Taliban takeover of power in Afghanistan, the Gol has reportedly made the visa renewal process more difficult. In order to extend visas that in the past could be renewed in Iran, Afghans were now required to travel to Afghanistan,¹⁷⁹ where

¹⁶⁶ ODVV, Human Rights Developments in Iran, Newsletter No. 35, June 2022, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁶⁷ UNHCR, Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and Response in Iran 22 – 28 February 2022, 8 March 2022, [url](#), p. 1; HRW, World Report 2022 - Iran, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸ UNHCR Iran, Afghan Population Movement Snapshot – June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁶⁹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen ambtsbericht Iran [Country report Iran], May 2022, [url](#), p. 102

¹⁷⁰ UNHCR, Help Iran: Deadline to extend family visas- Friday 21 May 2021, 19 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷² Sweden, Lifos, Afghaner i Iran [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 13-14

¹⁷³ UNHCR, Health, education, and livelihoods in the Islamic Republic of Iran, September 2013, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁷⁴ Sweden, Lifos, Afghaner i Iran [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁷⁵ Zia, H., I am now one of millions of Afghan refugees [Opinion], Al Jazeera, 16 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶ Sweden, Lifos, Afghaner i Iran [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁷⁷ Zia, H., I am now one of millions of Afghan refugees [Opinion], Al Jazeera, 16 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ Sweden, Lifos, Afghaner i Iran [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁷⁹ MEE, Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home, 12 March 2022, [url](#)



the Iranian consulate is active and open for visa application.¹⁸⁰ Meanwhile, UNHCR informed that as of March 2022, extensions of entry, tourist, pilgrimage and family reunification visas could be obtained at *Kefalat* centres in Iran provided that the visa holder had applied for an appointment through a centralised *Kefalat* centres appointment website at least five days before the expiry date of their visa.¹⁸¹

Reports from 2022 mentioned cases of Afghans who were arrested and detained despite having valid Iranian visas.¹⁸²

Rights and obligations of Afghan passport holders with Iranian visas

Unlike *Amayesh* cardholders, holders of Afghan passports with Iranian visas can obtain a driving licence. Moreover, they have more access to jobs and greater freedom of movement within the country, as well as access to higher education at Iranian universities.¹⁸³ For more information, please refer to the subsections of section [4. Internal mobility and socio-economic situation of Afghan refugees in Iran](#).

(c) Undocumented Afghans

‘Undocumented Afghans’ is a term used to describe a variety of groups, including persons who lost refugee status (*Amayesh*) for various reasons; those with invalid passports and visas, those who hold some type of document (e.g. an Afghan *tazkera*) but do not have legal residency in Iran; and those who do not have any type of document.¹⁸⁴ Undocumented Afghans who never possessed legal documents may have lived in Iran for decades or have arrived recently.¹⁸⁵

In 2020, some 2.1 million undocumented Afghans (including former *Amayesh* cardholders)¹⁸⁶ were estimated to live in Iran. From August 2021 onwards, there has been a constant influx of Afghans to the country, predominantly through irregular channels.¹⁸⁷ Estimates from the second and third quarter of 2022 put the number of undocumented Afghans at 2.2,¹⁸⁸ 2.3,¹⁸⁹ or even 2.6 million.¹⁹⁰ However, the number of undocumented Afghans fluctuates, and precise figures on arrivals and circular cross-border flows were unavailable.¹⁹¹

Undocumented immigration is addressed in the 1931 ‘Act on the Entry and Residence of Foreign Nationals in Iran’. According to its Article 15(3), ‘anyone who deliberately enters Iran without holding the required documents and permits, as well as anyone who enters the

¹⁸⁰ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 17 November 2022

¹⁸¹ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on visa extension, 18 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸² AI, ‘They don’t treat us like humans’: Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 31; TNH, For desperate Afghans, risky crossings into Iran are worth chancing, 17 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸³ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸⁴ UNHCR Iran, Afghan Population Movement Snapshot – June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁸⁵ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Response Plan January – December 2022, 12 January 2022, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁸⁷ IOM, IOM Comprehensive Action Plan For Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries, 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁸⁸ UNHCR, Iran (Islamic Republic of), last updated 31 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹ ACAPS, Iran: Afghan refugees – Overview, 4 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ UNSG, Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran [Advanced Unedited Version], A/HRC/50/19, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 3

¹⁹¹ IOM, IOM Comprehensive Action Plan For Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries, 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8



country through unauthorised roads and forbidden borders shall be punished with imprisonment of three months up to one year and/or a fine unless his/her crime is subject to laws that stipulate a harsher punishment'. Article 15(5) provides the same punishment for 'any foreign national who hides in order to avoid deportation or re-enters Iran without permission after having been expelled from the country'.¹⁹²

The GoI, through BAFIA, is responsible for registering asylum-seekers and conducting individual processing of asylum applications, as dictated by Article 5 of the 1963 'Regulation relating to Refugees'.¹⁹³ Thus, UNHCR, which in Iran is primarily concerned with *Amayesh* cardholders, does not have the to accept asylum applications or decide on asylum claims.¹⁹⁴ However, the organisation states that it may consider undocumented Afghans as 'other' people of concern (i.e. outside the primary group of concern).¹⁹⁵ Therefore, UNHCR collects data on both newly arrived and long-term Afghan residents in Iran for the purpose of counselling and advocacy 'on behalf of all persons in need of international protection'¹⁹⁶ and has been advocating for a full-fledged asylum mechanism to identify protection needs at the individual level.¹⁹⁷

Following headcount exercises conducted in 2017¹⁹⁸ and 2018,¹⁹⁹ the GoI conducted a new headcount of all undocumented Afghans between April 2022 the end of June 2022, and included those who arrived in Iran since the Taliban takeover of power in Afghanistan in August 2021.²⁰⁰ This exercise involved the following: 1) a 're-headcount' of Afghans with headcount slips issued in 2017, 2) the registration of undocumented Afghans who had not taken part in the 2017 headcount but were in possession of a 'Vaccination Introduction Letter' issued by a *Kefalat* centre, and 3) the registration of undocumented foreign citizens who had not taken part in any headcount or vaccination scheme. Those wishing to participate in the exercise had to visit a *Kefalat* centre (if they held a vaccination certificate) or otherwise a *Pishkhan* centre that was able to process national ID cards.²⁰¹ *Pishkhan* are local service centres set up by Iran's National Organization for Civil Registration (NOCR) in cooperation with private actors.²⁰² Amongst others, they are responsible for civil registration and the issuance, renewal, and replacement of health insurance documents.²⁰³ The official fees for registration and participation in the 2022 headcount were 310 000 rials per person at a *Kefalat* centre and 270 000 rials at a *Pishkhan* centre.²⁰⁴

¹⁹² Iran, قانون راجع به ورود و اقامت اتباع خارجه در ايران [Act on the Entry and Residence of Foreign Nationals in Iran], 10 May 1931, archived page from 14 May 2021, [url](#), Article 15 (3), (5)

¹⁹³ UNHCR, Help Iran: How can I seek asylum in Iran?, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on Services Available for the Undocumented, 26 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ UNHCR Iran, Afghan Population Movement Snapshot – June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁹⁶ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on Services Available for the Undocumented, 26 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷ UNHCR Iran, Afghanistan Situation Response in Iran – 31 August 2022, 29 September 2022, [url](#), pp. 1-2

¹⁹⁸ Sweden, Lifos, Afghaners i Iran [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁹⁹ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet July – September 2020, 30 September 2020, [url](#), p. 3

²⁰⁰ UNHCR Iran, Afghanistan Situation Response in Iran – 31 August 2022, 29 September 2022, [url](#), p. 1

²⁰¹ UNHCR, Help Iran: Headcount Exercise, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰² Norway, Landinfo, Report Iran - Passports, ID and civil status documents, 5 January 2021 [url](#), p. 23

²⁰³ MyPishkhan, آشنایی با وظایف و خدمات دفاتر پیشخوان دولت [Presentation of the responsibilities and services of the government's Pishkhan offices], n.d., [url](#)

²⁰⁴ UNHCR, Help Iran: To the attention of undocumented Afghan nationals, 31 May 2022, [url](#)



According to BAFIA figures quoted by UNHCR, some 2.2 million Afghans were registered during this exercise and were issued headcount laissez-passers with a validity date of 22 October 2022.²⁰⁵

Rights and obligations of undocumented Afghans

Undocumented Afghans have limited access to rights and services compared to *Amayesh* cardholders and Afghan passport holders with Iranian visas.²⁰⁶ Besides being at risk of arrest and deportation,²⁰⁷ they are not permitted to open bank accounts, purchase SIM cards²⁰⁸ or obtain health insurance in Iran. However, primary healthcare is available free of charge regardless of documentation status.²⁰⁹ Hospital treatments are also accessible, but at higher fees than for Iranian nationals.²¹⁰ For more information on healthcare access for undocumented Afghans, see section [4.4 Healthcare](#).

Undocumented Afghans cannot apply for temporary work permits that allow holders access to regular employment,²¹¹ which makes them particularly vulnerable for various forms of exploitation.²¹² For more information regarding the situation of Afghans with respect to labour, see section [4.3 Employment and livelihoods](#).

Since 2015, Iran started to allow school-aged children to attend both primary and secondary schools irrespective of their documentation status²¹³ and – since 2016 – without charging refugee-specific tuition fees.²¹⁴ In order to enrol in schools, undocumented Afghan children need a special education protection paper ('blue card') issued by BAFIA. It exclusively permits enrolment in schools in the province of issuance. This document is valid for one year and contains personal information as declared by the applicant.²¹⁵ For more information regarding the situation of Afghans with respect to education, see section [4.2 Education](#).

(d) Afghans registered during headcount exercises

According to an international NGO interviewed by the Swedish Migration Agency in Tehran in November 2017, headcount slips issued during the 2017 headcount exercise offered temporary protection from deportation.²¹⁶ UNHCR noted that laissez-passers issued during the 2022 headcount exercise also seemed to provide holders temporary protection against

²⁰⁵ UNHCR Iran, Afghanistan Situation Response in Iran – 31 August 2022, 29 September 2022, [url](#), p. 1

²⁰⁶ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on Services Available for the Undocumented, 26 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁷ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰⁸ Al Jazeera, What does the future hold for Afghan refugees in Iran?, 12 June 2022, [url](#)

²⁰⁹ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on Services Available for the Undocumented, 26 September 2021, [url](#); Tehran Times, Health insurance provided for 170,000 refugees, 11 February 2022, [url](#)

²¹⁰ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on Services Available for the Undocumented, 26 September 2021, [url](#)

²¹¹ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on Services Available for the Undocumented, 26 September 2021, [url](#)

²¹² UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Response Plan January – December 2022, 12 January 2022, [url](#), p. 18

²¹³ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on Services Available for the Undocumented, 26 September 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁴ UNHCR, Iran at a Glance (August 2022), 18 September 2022, [url](#)

²¹⁵ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

²¹⁶ Sweden, Lifos, Afghane i Iran [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 16



deportation.²¹⁷ However, there were some reported instances of Afghans being allegedly deported despite having obtained such laissez-passers.²¹⁸

According to a BAFIA notification quoted by UNHCR, Afghans who were registered during the 2022 headcount were only allowed to stay within their registered province. BAFIA has warned that any travel to other areas and provinces would ‘result in the deportation of the concerned individuals through legal procedures’.²¹⁹

1.2.4. Restrictions to obtaining legal status

(a) Refugee status

In recent years, levels of participation in *Amayesh* renewal exercises decreased, which according to UNHCR indicated that refugees faced greater difficulties in affording the renewal fees.²²⁰ According to NGO sources consulted by the USDOS in 2021, these fees have increased.²²¹ Some 26 % of the 585 000 undocumented Afghans in Iran who have been addressed in the United Nations’ 2022 Refugee Response Plan (RRP) were former *Amayesh* cardholders who had lost their *Amayesh* status. This loss of status could be attributed to households prioritising other expenses over the renewal of their cards. UNHCR stated that *Amayesh* renewal fees constituted 8 % of Afghan refugees’ average annual income.²²²

With regard to individual processing of asylum applications, UNHCR noted that the Gol did not assess the international protection needs of most Afghans arriving in Iran.²²³ Amnesty International (AI) reported that of a total of 67 documented cases of Afghans who were forcibly returned between April 2021 and May 2022, there was not a single case in which the Iranian authorities assessed a person’s individual circumstances and protection needs. The same source noted that numerous pushbacks at the border prevented Afghans from lodging a claim for international protection in Iran.²²⁴ Moreover, the Iranian authorities reportedly did not inform Afghans who were apprehended after crossing the border about their right to seek asylum. Concerns about violent treatment by the security forces made detained Afghans afraid of speaking and asking for international protection.²²⁵

²¹⁷ UNHCR Iran, Afghanistan Situation Response in Iran – 31 August 2022, 29 September 2022, [url](#), p. 1

²¹⁸ Salaam Times, Promising residence permits, Iran lures Afghans for deportation instead, 9 June 2022, [url](#)

²¹⁹ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement: For the attention of undocumented Afghan nationals who participated in the headcount exercise, 3 August 2022, [url](#)

²²⁰ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Response Plan January – December 2022, 12 January 2022, [url](#), p. 18

²²¹ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 44

²²² UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Response Plan January – December 2022, 12 January 2022, [url](#), p. 18

²²³ UNHCR Iran, Afghanistan situation update – 21 February 2022, 27 February 2022, [url](#), p. 3

²²⁴ AI, ‘They don’t treat us like humans’: Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6, 27, 29

²²⁵ AI, ‘They don’t treat us like humans’: Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 43

UNHCR noted that Iran lacked a ‘functioning asylum system’.²²⁶ Although BAFIA is responsible for examining asylum requests,²²⁷ its asylum procedures were described by UNHCR as being ‘not systematic, transparent, and accessible to all asylum seekers’.²²⁸

The Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) noted in March 2022 that the Gol had been pursuing a restrictive policy with regard to granting refugee status under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.²²⁹ According to UNHCR, the international protection needs of most Afghans arriving in Iran were not assessed.²³⁰ After the Taliban’s announcement of a ‘general amnesty’ on 17 August 2021 for former employees of the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,²³¹ the Gol stated that it had not found any convincing reports about the ‘existence of systematic, pre-mediated and imminent risk of irreparable harm and grave human rights violations’ in Afghanistan. The Gol declared that none of the Afghans who had arrived since August 2021 and were subsequently deported had applied for asylum based on the existing Iranian laws. According to the Gol, only 505 Afghans arriving after the Taliban takeover had applied for asylum in Iran.²³²

Several policies implemented since the early 2000s have also reshaped the status of Afghans²³³ in domains other than protection and residency status. In 2007, implementing a policy adopted in 2001,²³⁴ the Supreme National Security Council of Iran designated some provinces – or cities within a province – as No-Go Areas (NGAs) for foreigners, including Afghan refugees.²³⁵ The legal basis for this policy was Article 13(b) of the 1931 ‘Act on the Entry and Residence of Foreign Nationals in Iran’, which states that the Gol can prohibit residency in or travel through certain areas of the country on grounds of security, public interest or health.²³⁶ As of September 2022, UNHCR indicated that roughly two-thirds of Iran’s territory were no-go-districts for Afghan *Amayesh* cardholders.²³⁷ Moreover, the Gol regulated Afghans’ travel to other provinces, requiring them to inform the authorities and obtain travel authorisation prior to starting their journey.²³⁸ Generally, Afghans are not allowed to live in no-go zones, still there are some exceptions such as for those residing in the settlements in no-go areas and cases of Afghans who are married to Iranian nationals²³⁹. For more information

²²⁶ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet January – May 2022, 6 July 2022, [url](#), p. 1

²²⁷ Al, ‘They don’t treat us like humans’: Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 15

²²⁸ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan – 2021 Final Report, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 6

²²⁹ Switzerland, SEM, Focus Pakistan / Iran / Türkei: Situation afghanischer Migrantinnen und Migranten [Situation of Afghan Migrants], 30 March 2022, [url](#), p. 18

²³⁰ UNHCR Iran, Afghanistan situation update – 21 February 2022, 27 February 2022, [url](#), p. 3

²³¹ Al Jazeera, Taliban announces ‘amnesty,’ reaches out to women, 17 August 2021, [url](#)

²³² Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva, Comment by the Islamic Republic of Iran concerning the risk of refoulement and obstacles faced by Afghan nationals seeking asylum, 14 February 2022, [url](#), p. 3

²³³ Jauhiainen, J. et al., Afghans in Iran: Migration Patterns and Aspirations, 2020, [url](#), pp. 22-23

²³⁴ UNHCR, Iran Set Global Precedent by Opening Refugees’ Access to Healthcare: UNHCR Rep, 17 October 2017, [url](#)

²³⁵ Farzin, F. and Jadali, S., Freedom of movement of Afghan refugees in Iran, September 2013, [url](#), p. 86

²³⁶ Iran, قانون راجع به ورود و اقامت اتباع خارجه در ايران [Act on the Entry and Residence of Foreign Nationals in Iran] of 10 May 1931, archived page from 14 May 2021, [url](#), Article 13(b)

²³⁷ UNHCR, Help Iran: Islamic Republic of Iran: No-go districts for Amayesh and Hoviyat card holders [Map], 19 September 2022, [url](#)

²³⁸ Jauhiainen, J. et al., Afghans in Iran: Migration Patterns and Aspirations, 2020, [url](#), p. 22

²³⁹ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 17 November 2022

regarding restrictions on movement for Afghan refugees, see section [4.1. Freedom of movement](#).

The Gol also restricted Afghans' access to services, including education in Iranian schools.²⁴⁰ Restrictions on education had been eased following an edict of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in 2015.²⁴¹ Another policy, implemented since 2007, required Afghans to work in specific types of jobs.²⁴² For more information regarding these policies, see sections [4.2. Education](#) and [4.3. Employment and livelihoods](#).

(b) Passports and visas

Following the Taliban's takeover of power in Afghanistan in August 2021, there were reports of long delays and interruptions in the processing of passport applications in Afghanistan,²⁴³ as well as unwillingness on the part of Afghan passport authorities to renew passports.²⁴⁴ Afghans interviewed by Amnesty International mentioned lack of access to passport offices, high costs and delays as barriers to obtaining an Afghan passport. The same source reported in August 2022 that many Afghan migrants who had not obtained passports prior to August 2021 did not hold passports,²⁴⁵ although a senior Taliban passport official stated the same month that over 700 000 passports had been issued to Afghan citizens since the Taliban took power.²⁴⁶

Some Afghans with passports did not have the financial means to cover the visa fees.²⁴⁷ According to a March 2022 article by Middle East Eye, the Gol has reportedly made the visa renewals much more difficult since the Taliban takeover in August 2021. Afghans seeking to extend visas that in the past could be renewed while staying in Iran were now required to return to Afghanistan to complete this process²⁴⁸ (although extensions of entry, tourist, pilgrimage and family reunification visas could be obtained at *Kefalat* centres in Iran as of March 2022).²⁴⁹ Those who did not want to take this step were reportedly charged one million rials (EUR 24.5)²⁵⁰ for each day they overstayed their visas.²⁵¹

Amnesty International cited Afghan interviewees saying that they had been unable to access Iranian consulates in Afghanistan, that visas were issued only after long delays, or that they were unable to afford the cost.²⁵² Some Iranian consular departments in Afghanistan (e.g. in

²⁴⁰ Jauhiainen, J. et al., *Afghans in Iran: Migration Patterns and Aspirations*, 2020, [url](#), p. 23

²⁴¹ Zetter, R., *Protection for forcibly displaced Afghan populations in Pakistan and Iran, DRC*, September 2018, [url](#), p. 60

²⁴² Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, J., *Afghan migrants in Iran in modern times*, 2020, [url](#), p. 17

²⁴³ TOLONews, *Passport Processing Resumes in Kabul*, 9 April 2022, [url](#); AFP, *Taliban govt resumes issuing Afghan passports in Kabul*, 18 December 2021

²⁴⁴ TOLONews, *Passport Processing Resumes in Kabul*, 9 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁵ AI, *'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 12

²⁴⁶ VOA, *Taliban Make Millions From Passports Issued to Fleeing Afghans*, 24 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁷ Sweden, *Lifos, Afghan i Iran [Afghans in Iran]*, 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

²⁴⁸ MEE, *Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home*, 12 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁹ UNHCR, *Help Iran: Announcement on visa extension*, 18 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁵⁰ Exchange rate from European Commission, *Exchange rate (InforEuro)*, n.d., [url](#), accessed on 13 October 2022

²⁵¹ MEE, *Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home*, 12 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁵² AI, *'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 12



Herat) suspended their services in the aftermath of the August 2021 Taliban takeover. While they later resumed processing visa applications,²⁵³ a series of anti-Iran protests in Afghanistan in April 2022 prompted Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to announce that all work at Iranian consulate offices would be halted until further notice.²⁵⁴ Updated information on whether Iranian consular offices in Afghanistan have resumed work in the meantime could not be found during the time constraints of this report.

A humanitarian source told Amnesty International that an Iranian visa costs as much as USD 800 (EUR 824)²⁵⁵ on the black market in Afghanistan,²⁵⁶ while an Afghan who had emigrated to Iran after obtaining a three-month visa in autumn 2021 was quoted as saying that she had to pay 1 100 euros in 'bribes' to have her visa application fast-tracked. Middle East Eye referred to reports about an increase in 'bribery' at Iran's embassy and consulates since growing numbers of people started to leave Afghanistan after the Taliban's takeover of power.²⁵⁷

(c) Headcount registrations

According to Afghan deportees quoted by Salaam Times in June 2022, Iranian police arrested undocumented Afghans while they were standing in queue to be registered under the 2022 headcount exercise, thus preventing them from obtaining a laissez-passer.²⁵⁸ Corroborating information on such cases could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

1.2.5. Access to Iranian citizenship for Afghan refugees, including prevalence

(a) Naturalisation

Iranian citizenship can be acquired by naturalisation if the applicant meets certain formal requirements set out in Articles 979 and 980 of the Iranian Civil Code.²⁵⁹ According to Article 979, 'persons can obtain Iranian nationality if they: 1- Have reached the full age of 18. 2- Have resided five years, whether continuously or intermittently, in Iran. 3 - Are not deserters from military service. 4 - Have not been convicted in any country of non - political major misdemeanours or felonies.'²⁶⁰

Article 980 stipulates that exemptions from the five-year residency requirement may be granted for certain individuals, including for persons who have 'rendered services or notable assistance to public interests in Iran' and foreign men who have an Iranian wife by whom they

²⁵³ Switzerland, SEM, Focus Pakistan / Iran / Türkei: Situation afghanischer Migrantinnen und Migranten [Situation of Afghan Migrants], 30 March 2022, [url](#), p. 20

²⁵⁴ Al-Monitor, Iran closes Afghanistan consulates after angry protests, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁵⁵ Exchange rate from European Commission, Exchange rate (InforEuro), n.d., [url](#), accessed on 13 October 2022

²⁵⁶ AI, 'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 12

²⁵⁷ MEE, Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home, 12 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁵⁸ Salaam Times, Promising residence permits, Iran lures Afghans for deportation instead, 9 June 2022, [url](#)

²⁵⁹ Delavari, E., Report on Citizenship Law: Iran, EUI, September 2020, [url](#), p. 11

²⁶⁰ Iran, The Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran [unofficial translation], 23 May 1928, [url](#), Article 979



have children. However, this is subject to the approval of the Council of Ministers and the Gol must consider the naturalisation to be ‘advisable’.²⁶¹

The procedure of naturalisation is laid out in Article 983 of the Civil Code: ‘An application for naturalization must be submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs direct or through the Governors or Governors General, and be accompanied by the following documents[:]
1 - Certified copy of the identity papers of the applicant, his wife and children. 2 - Certificate from the police stating the period of residence in Iran of the applicant, his clean record, possession of sufficient property or of employment which ensures a livelihood.’²⁶²

Article 983 further states that ‘the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will complete, if necessary, the particulars concerning the applicant and will send the papers to the Council of Ministers for an appropriate decision rejecting or accepting the application. If the application is accepted a document of nationality will be delivered to the applicant.’²⁶³

As of October 2021, the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs specified that the following documents were required when applying for citizenship: a completed and signed application form; originals and copies of the most recent academic diplomas, the ID and nationality documents of the applicant and his/her spouse, and their marriage documents; and photographs of the applicant, the spouse and/or the children.²⁶⁴

(b) Acquisition of Iranian citizenship through marriage

According to Article 976(6) of the Civil Code, ‘Every woman of foreign nationality who marries an Iranian husband’ is considered to be an Iranian subject.²⁶⁵ On the other hand, the law does not automatically grant Iranian citizenship to foreign men married to Iranian women,²⁶⁶ although (under Article 980 of the Civil Code)²⁶⁷ it allows for facilitated naturalisation for foreign men who have children from their Iranian wife.²⁶⁸

(c) Access to Iranian citizenship for children from mixed marriages

Article 976(2) of the Civil Code states that ‘those born Iran or outside whose fathers are Iranian’ are ‘considered to be Iranian subjects’.²⁶⁹ It is required that the parents’ marriage is valid and legitimate.²⁷⁰ Regarding children born in Iran to foreign fathers, Article 976(5) stipulated until its amendment in 2019²⁷¹ that these persons attained Iranian citizenship if they had ‘resided at least one more year in Iran immediately after reaching the full age of 18’.²⁷² (It was irrelevant here whether the mother had Iranian or foreign citizenship.)²⁷³ In many cases of

²⁶¹ Iran, The Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran [unofficial translation], 23 May 1928, [url](#), Article 980

²⁶² Iran, The Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran [unofficial translation], 23 May 1928, [url](#), Article 983

²⁶³ Iran, The Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran [unofficial translation], 23 May 1928, [url](#), Article 983

²⁶⁴ Iran, MoFA, Citizenship, 27 October 2021, [url](#).

²⁶⁵ Iran, The Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran [unofficial translation], 23 May 1928, [url](#), Article 976(6)

²⁶⁶ Delavari, E., Report on Citizenship Law: Iran, EUI, September 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²⁶⁷ Iran, The Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran [unofficial translation], 23 May 1928, [url](#), Article 980

²⁶⁸ Delavari, E., Report on Citizenship Law: Iran, EUI, September 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²⁶⁹ Iran, The Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran [unofficial translation], 23 May 1928, [url](#), Article 976(2)

²⁷⁰ Delavari, E., Report on Citizenship Law: Iran, EUI, September 2020, [url](#), p. 7

²⁷¹ Delavari, E., Report on Citizenship Law: Iran, EUI, September 2020, [url](#), p. 20

²⁷² Iran, The Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran [unofficial translation], 23 May 1928, [url](#), Article 976(5)

²⁷³ Delavari, E., Report on Citizenship Law: Iran, EUI, September 2020, [url](#), p. 8



mixed marriage between Iranian women and foreign men, the children not only lacked Iranian citizenship, but also did not have the citizenship of their father's country²⁷⁴ if the father was undocumented.²⁷⁵

A new law that was adopted in parliament in 2019²⁷⁶ and came into effect in June 2020²⁷⁷ allowed Iranian women who were married to foreign men to apply for citizenship for their under-eighteen-year-old children²⁷⁸ even if they were born outside of Iran,²⁷⁹ provided that their marriage has been officially registered.²⁸⁰ However, despite the new law, children of Iranian women married to undocumented foreign men were still at risk of statelessness as they were not conferred citizenship automatically (unlike children born to Iranian fathers).²⁸¹ Moreover, it was reported that some couples struggled to register their marriage, as this required clearance from the Mol.²⁸²

In December 2020, UNHCR reported that out of nearly 75 000 children (of Iranian mothers and foreign fathers) who were assessed by the Gol to be at risk of becoming stateless, around 10 000 had their citizenship applications accepted and been issued an Iranian ID document (*shenasnameh*).²⁸³ More recent information on this matter could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

1.3. Access to other civil documentation

1.3.1. Birth and marriage certificates

According to the Iranian Civil Registration Law of 1976, registration of births is mandatory for children of Iranian parents as well as foreigners at the National Organization for Civil Registration (NOCR).²⁸⁴ Citing the NOCR, Landinfo stated in January 2021 that new-borns of foreigners living in Iran can be registered at NOCR offices, provided a passport and/or other identification document confirming legal residence in Iran as well as a birth note from the hospital can be presented. 'These children will then receive a birth certificate for foreigners in Iran.'²⁸⁵ UNHCR lists the necessary steps for birth registration: Individuals with documentation (*daraye madarek eqamati motabar* meaning 'valid document of residence') have to approach BAFIA with the birth note that they received at the hospital to obtain a birth certificate for their

²⁷⁴ InfoMigrants, Iranian citizenship law for children of foreign fathers approved, 5 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁵ Delavari, E., Report on Citizenship Law: Iran, EUI, September 2020, [url](#), p. 20

²⁷⁶ Delavari, E., Report on Citizenship Law: Iran, EUI, September 2020, [url](#), p. 20

²⁷⁷ Radio Farda, Children With Iranian Mothers, Foreign Fathers To Receive Citizenship, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁸ Radio Farda, Children With Iranian Mothers, Foreign Fathers To Receive Citizenship, 4 June 2020, [url](#); UNHCR, 75,000 children in Iran to gain nationality under new law, 1 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁹ Delavari, E., Report on Citizenship Law: Iran, EUI, September 2020, [url](#), p. 20

²⁸⁰ InfoMigrants, Iranian citizenship law for children of foreign fathers approved, 5 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁸¹ Delavari, E., Report on Citizenship Law: Iran, EUI, September 2020, [url](#), p. 20

²⁸² Washington Post (The), Breaking with some Mideast neighbors, Iran now lets mothers give their citizenship to their children, 26 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁸³ UNHCR, 75,000 children in Iran to gain nationality under new law, 1 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁴ Iran, Civil Registration Law, 7 July 1976 [English translation published on the website of the National Organization for Civil Registration of the Iranian Ministry of Interior], [url](#), art. 12; Norway, Landinfo, Report Iran - Passports, ID and civil status documents, 5 January 2021 [url](#), p. 9

²⁸⁵ Norway, Landinfo, Report Iran - Passports, ID and civil status documents, 5 January 2021 [url](#), p. 16



new-born. Iranian health centres and hospitals are also required to issue birth notes to those without papers, however, in practice, undocumented persons may not receive a birth note and birth certificate until they have valid residency documents.²⁸⁶ Many children of undocumented Afghans in Iran reportedly were not registered²⁸⁷ or faced difficulties obtaining legal documentation.²⁸⁸

Afghan nationals are eligible to marry in Iran irrespective of their residency status,²⁸⁹ provided they have a valid identity document. Their marriage is subject to Afghan laws and is registered with the Afghan Embassy.²⁹⁰ In 2019, Lifos stated in a report (based on interviews with personnel of the Afghan mission in Iran from November 2017) that marriages are registered based on the *nikah*²⁹¹ contract or through testimonies at the Embassy and are also reported to the headquarters in Kabul. Recognising a marriage that took place a long time ago and for which no documents are available might reportedly prove difficult.²⁹² In cases where an Afghan national wants to marry an Iranian, identity documents and a legal residency in Iran are required.²⁹³ According to a June 2020 newspaper article, a foreign man must go through many security checks to register a marriage between an Iranian woman and an Afghan national in Iran, and ultimately ‘may not be allowed to marry in the end’.²⁹⁴

While Amayesh cardholders living in Iran are not permitted to obtain driving licenses (even for motorcycles), passport/visa holders are allowed to do so.²⁹⁵

1.3.2. Afghan ID documents

The UNHCR assistance website for refugees and asylum seekers in Iran refers individuals who do not have a *tazkera* and/or valid passport to the Afghan Embassy in Tehran or the Consulate in Mashhad ‘for counselling and support in obtaining identity documents’.²⁹⁶ According to a May 2022 report by IOM, Afghans who want to apply for a *tazkera* sometimes have to wait two months or longer for the first appointment at the Afghan Embassy in Iran. The lack of a trusted or available person in Afghanistan to complete the necessary paperwork is one of the biggest challenges for applicants.²⁹⁷ In addition, in its 2019 report Lifos mentioned (based on a 2017 interview with an international NGO in Tehran) that applying for Afghan ID documents is particularly challenging for Afghans who do not reside in Tehran nor Mashad:

²⁸⁶ UNHCR, Help Iran: Birth Registration, n.d., [url](#)

²⁸⁷ Norway, Landinfo, Report Iran - Passports, ID and civil status documents, 5 January 2021 [url](#), p. 16

²⁸⁸ USDOS, Country Report on Trafficking in Persons for 2021– Iran, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁸⁹ IOM, Information on the socio-economic situation for Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran requested by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 4 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4; Sweden, Lifos, Afghaners i Iran [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 32

²⁹⁰ IOM, Information on the socio-economic situation for Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran requested by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 4 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

²⁹¹ *Nikah* is the Islamic wedding ceremony performed by a mullah. Sweden, Lifos, Afghaners i Iran [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 31

²⁹² Sweden, Lifos, Afghaners i Iran [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 31-32

²⁹³ IOM, Information on the socio-economic situation for Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran requested by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 4 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

²⁹⁴ InfoMigrants, Iranian citizenship law for children of foreign fathers approved, 5 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁵ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

²⁹⁶ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on Services Available for the Undocumented, 26 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁷ IOM, Information on the socio-economic situation for Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran requested by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 4 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4



Due to travel restrictions, they must first apply for a permit to leave their province and travel to one of the branches of the diplomatic mission (embassy or consulate). The costs of this, as well as the costs of transport depict additional obstacles for many Afghans to access documents.²⁹⁸

In May 2022, IOM stated that a *tazkera* is required to apply for an Afghan passport,²⁹⁹ while in September 2020 Migrationsverket³⁰⁰ referred to information from the Afghan Embassy in Tehran as of February 2019 indicating that there are exemptions for Afghans without a *tazkera* residing in Iran³⁰¹. Afghans applying for a passport at the Iranian diplomatic mission who do not have a *tazkera* reportedly can apply instead for the issuance of an ID number document, a process called ‘verification of identity’,³⁰² (*tasbit-e hoveiyat*), for which they have to present the *tazkera* of their father, grandfather, or paternal cousin. When the applicant's identity can be verified at the *tazkera* office in Afghanistan, the Afghan Embassy issues an ID number document, on the basis of which a passport can be issued.³⁰³

1.4. Treatment of Afghan refugees in Iran

1.4.1. Social attitudes and treatment of registered, unregistered, and undocumented Afghans, including extent of integration into Iranian society

In an August 2021 interview published by the German political foundation Friedrich Eberhart Stiftung (FES), analyst and consultant David Ramin Jalilvand stated that Afghan refugees in Iran were confronted with various forms of discrimination and barriers. According to Jalilvand, openly ‘xenophobic’ attitudes towards Afghans were common in Iranian society.³⁰⁴ In a June 2022 article, Al Jazeera reported that ‘anti-Afghan sentiment’ was growing in the light of a difficult economic situation in Iran.³⁰⁵ The social scientist Amin Saikal was quoted in an April 2022 article by Asia Times saying that the capability of Iran to provide for the Afghan refugees was shrinking in the face of the effects of US-led sanctions on the country's economy. According to Saikal, the growing unemployment rate among Iranians coupled with the ‘availability of cheap labour by the Afghan refugees’ was another reason that led many Iranians to regard the ‘refugees as a costly burden’.³⁰⁶ In mid-April 2022, Fair Planet³⁰⁷

²⁹⁸ Sweden, Lifos, *Afghaner i Iran* [Afghans in Iran], 18 February 2019, [url](#), p. 29

²⁹⁹ IOM, Information on the socio-economic situation for Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran requested by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 4 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

³⁰⁰ Please note that the information cited in the Migrationsverket report predates the Taliban's return to power in August 2021.

³⁰¹ Sweden, Migrationsverket, *Afghanistan – Medborgarskap, folkbokföring och identitetshandlingar* [Citizenship, registration and identity documents], 22 September 2020, [url](#), p. 25

³⁰² Norway, Landinfo, *Afghanistan: Tazkera, passports and other ID documents*, 22 May 2019, [url](#), p. 7

³⁰³ Sweden, Migrationsverket, *Afghanistan – Medborgarskap, folkbokföring och identitetshandlingar* [Citizenship, registration and identity documents], 22 September 2020, [url](#), pp. 25-26

³⁰⁴ FES, *Afghanische Geflüchtete sind in Iran mit vielfältigen Diskriminierungen konfrontiert* [Afghan refugees face multiple forms of discrimination in Iran], 26 August 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁵ Al Jazeera, *What does the future hold for Afghan refugees in Iran?*, 12 June 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁶ Asia Times, *Anti-Afghan sentiment undercuts Iran-Taliban ties*, 29 April 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁷ FairPlanet is a global ‘non-profit social enterprise and independent media organisation’ with a focus on human rights and the nature; Fair Planet, *About Fair Planet*, n.d., [url](#)



reported that there was a ‘general resentment on the streets in Iran’ against Afghan refugees.³⁰⁸ An Afghan returnee, who had left for Iran at the end of 2021, was quoted by TOLONews in April 2022 saying that he had decided to go back to Afghanistan due to ‘their bad treatment even with people who had visas’.³⁰⁹ At the same time, an April 2022 article by the Deutsche Welle (DW) reported that NGOs and activists from civil society have been offering support to undocumented Afghans in Iran for a number of years, particularly to those at the periphery of major cities. They have been collecting warm clothes and food and supporting women and children and their education.³¹⁰ The same month, the New York Times reported that there were many Iranians ‘who welcome, assist and employ Afghans’. However, the undocumented Afghans faced ‘many challenges and hurdles for assimilation’, for example when it came to finding a job or school enrolment and ‘many are subject to ethnic profiling’ and ‘treated as suspects when crimes occur in their neighborhoods’.³¹¹

On 28 January 2022, AFP reported about a demonstration in the Iranian Sistan-Baluchestan province in southeast Iran over water rights for the Helmand River flowing from Afghanistan. With reference to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), the article described how protestors attacked Afghan vehicles that were placed at the border crossing. Iranian security forces reportedly intervened.³¹²

In the first week of April 2022, two Iranian Shia scholars were killed and another one was injured at the Imam Reza Shrine, an important Shia shrine in the pilgrimage city of Mashhad, in a knife attack during the Muslim month of Ramadan.³¹³ Reportedly, the attack unleashed concerns of a rise in negative sentiment against Afghans and refugees across Iran.³¹⁴ On 6 April 2022, the Iranian ‘semi-official’³¹⁵ Tasnim News Agency, believed to be close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC),³¹⁶ reported that the attacker originated from Uzbekistan and had entered Iran via the Pakistani border a year before.³¹⁷ According to Al-Monitor as of 7 April 2022, Iranian media had not specified whether the attacker was from ‘Uzbekistan or of Uzbek ethnicity from Afghanistan’.³¹⁸ Based on videos of the attack which were taken by pilgrims, initially many Iranians had taken the attacker for an Afghan, which had prompted ‘a deluge of racist hatred about Afghans’.³¹⁹ However, according to an article by Iran

³⁰⁸ Fair Planet, Refugees face increased racism and discrimination, 15 April 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁹ TOLONews, Afghan Refugees in Iran Complain of Harassment, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

³¹⁰ DW, Afghanen fliehen in den Iran trotz verstärkter Abschiebungen [Afghans flee to Iran despite a rise in deportations], 8 April 2022, [url](#)

³¹¹ New York Times (The), Afghan Immigrant's Deadly Knife Attack on Clerics in Iran Fuels a Crisis, 29 April 2022

³¹² AFP, Iran water protesters attack Afghan vehicles: state media, 28 January 2022

³¹³ Al Jazeera, What does the future hold for Afghan refugees in Iran?, 12 June 2022, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan Immigrant's Deadly Knife Attack on Clerics in Iran Fuels a Crisis, 29 April 2022; AFP, Iran hangs extremist accused of murdering Shiite clerics, 20 June 2022

³¹⁴ Al Jazeera, What does the future hold for Afghan refugees in Iran?, 12 June 2022, [url](#); Asia Times, Anti-Afghan sentiment undercuts Iran-Taliban ties, 29 April 2022, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan Immigrant's Deadly Knife Attack on Clerics in Iran Fuels a Crisis, 29 April 2022

³¹⁵ Arab News, Iran's Guard fires cruise missiles in military exercise, 21 December 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁶ Arab News, Iran's Guard fires cruise missiles in military exercise, 21 December 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁷ Tasnim News Agency, اختصاصی تسنیم/ جزئیاتی از هویت ضارب سه روحانی در حرم رضوی (ع) [Tasnim exclusive: Details on the identity of attacker of three clerics in the holy Shrine of Reza], 6 April 2022, [url](#)

³¹⁸ Al-Monitor, Three Iranian clerics stabbed, one killed in attack at shrine, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

³¹⁹ Asia Times, Anti-Afghan sentiment undercuts Iran-Taliban ties, 29 April 2022, [url](#)

International³²⁰ of 6 April 2022, Iranian parliamentary speaker Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf had ‘indirectly confirmed’ the attacker’s Afghan nationality by stating in parliament that the attack should not negatively affect the friendly relationship between nations followed by a comment on the contribution of Afghans to the Iran-Iraq war and the Syrian war.³²¹ The New York Times reported that the shrine attack ‘set off a chain of events that has spiralled into ethnic tensions in Iran and Afghanistan and a diplomatic crisis between the two countries.’³²²

Reportedly, days after the incident in Mashhad, a group of peacefully gathered Afghans in the city of Karaj was attacked by vigilantes with ‘knives, axes and bats’ and Afghan workers reported of being short-changed on their payments.³²³ Furthermore, in the first half of April 2022, several sources reported about a number of videos which had circulated on social media allegedly showing how Afghan persons were mistreated by Iranian civilians.³²⁴ For instance, Fair Planet reported about videos which were showing cases of physical abuse, ‘threatening and dishonoring’ in Iran of mostly younger refugees by authorities and in some cases by civilians.³²⁵ One video allegedly showed how a young Afghan man was beaten by a group of Iranian men, while police officers, who were present at the scene, did not intervene. Two other videos purportedly showed how Afghan individuals were humiliated by Iranian individuals who, among others, forced them to utter profanities against themselves or against Afghans in general. Another video reportedly showed the ‘aftermath of an alleged mob attack on a car carrying Afghan migrants’ in the city of Yazd.³²⁶ As of early April 2022, the authenticity of these videos according to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)³²⁷ and Reuters could not be verified.³²⁸

Sources reported of demonstrations in Kabul³²⁹ and Herat³³⁰ in reaction to the videos. According to a TOLONews article, the protestors ‘urged the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to review the videos showing the alleged harassment and even killing of Afghan refugees in Iran’. Furthermore, one protestor was quoted to have said that ‘an Afghan child was killed in Iran by a punch’.³³¹ Reportedly, Iranian officials denied the allegations³³² and

³²⁰ According to the German radio broadcaster Radio Eins, Iran International is a London-based TV broadcaster funded with money from Saudi-Arabia; Radio Eins, Afghanistan International mit Hörfunkübertragung, 5 June 2022, [url](#)

³²¹ Iran International, Iran Officials Blame Sunni ‘Takfiris’ For Knife Attack On Clerics, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

³²² New York Times (The), Afghan Immigrant’s Deadly Knife Attack on Clerics in Iran Fuels a Crisis, 29 April 2022

³²³ New York Times (The), Afghan Immigrant’s Deadly Knife Attack on Clerics in Iran Fuels a Crisis, 29 April 2022

³²⁴ RFE/RL, ‘Disgusting And Heartbreaking’: New Videos Put Spotlight On Mistreatment Of Afghan Refugees In Iran, 8 April 2022, [url](#); Fair Planet, Refugees face increased racism and discrimination, 15 April 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Iran summons Afghan envoy after protesters throw rocks at diplomatic missions, 12 April 2022, [url](#); TOLONews, Kabul Residents Protest Abuse of Afghans in Iran, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

³²⁵ Fair Planet, Refugees face increased racism and discrimination, 15 April 2022, [url](#)

³²⁶ RFE/RL, ‘Disgusting And Heartbreaking’: New Videos Put Spotlight On Mistreatment Of Afghan Refugees In Iran, 8 April 2022, [url](#)

³²⁷ RFE/RL, ‘Disgusting And Heartbreaking’: New Videos Put Spotlight On Mistreatment Of Afghan Refugees In Iran, 8 April 2022, [url](#)

³²⁸ Reuters, Iran summons Afghan envoy after protesters throw rocks at diplomatic missions, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

³²⁹ Reuters, Iran summons Afghan envoy after protesters throw rocks at diplomatic missions, 12 April 2022, [url](#); TOLONews, Kabul Residents Protest Abuse of Afghans in Iran, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

³³⁰ Reuters, Iran summons Afghan envoy after protesters throw rocks at diplomatic missions, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

³³¹ TOLONews, Kabul Residents Protest Abuse of Afghans in Iran, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

³³² Reuters, Iran summons Afghan envoy after protesters throw rocks at diplomatic missions, 12 April 2022, [url](#); TOLONews, Afghan Refugees in Iran Complain of Harassment, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

claimed that the videos were distributed by individuals ‘attempting to sever ties between the people of the two countries’³³³ and that the videos were ‘fake’.³³⁴

(a) Extent of integration into Iranian society

In May 2022 and May 2021, respectively, the Austrian BFA and the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) with reference to the German Foreign Ministry reported that the extent of integration of refugees in Iran was limited.³³⁵ According to the German Foreign Ministry, this was the case although Afghans were in part already living in Iran for the second generation.³³⁶ An Iran International article of April 2022 mentioned that many Afghans were living in the city of Mashhad, where they could mostly be found in the ‘poverty-stricken neighborhoods’.³³⁷

Afghans in Iran were often found to work in low-grade and ill-paid jobs, such as in the fields of construction, garbage collection or agriculture.³³⁸ In its Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 on Iran, USDOS found that there were significant numbers of children in Iran, in particular Afghan children, were working as vendors in the streets of major cities.³³⁹ While an August 2021 IranWire article reported that Afghans were ‘widely regarded in Iran as hard workers, with a high degree of indefatigability and often, physical strength’ and that their ‘simple, low-cost lifestyle is also a source of admiration’,³⁴⁰ IranWire also stated that employers often did not treat Afghans equally to Iranians.³⁴¹ Afghans (and other migrants) were reportedly sometimes subjected to abusive conditions, for example by being paid less, not being paid at all,³⁴² or being compelled to do compulsory overtime.³⁴³ According to IranWire, many ended up in debt slavery to human traffickers.³⁴⁴ USDOS also stated that Afghans were sometimes subjected to summary deportation by employers. The source further elaborated that while Iranian law prohibited and criminalised forced or compulsory labour in all its forms, the Government of Iran ‘did not effectively enforce the law and made no significant effort to address forced labor’ during 2021.³⁴⁵

³³³ TOLONews, Kabul Residents Protest Abuse of Afghans in Iran, 11 April 2022, [url](#); TOLONews, Afghan Refugees in Iran Complain of Harassment, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

³³⁴ TOLONews, Afghan Refugees in Iran Complain of Harassment, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

³³⁵ Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Iran Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 5, [source: Austrian Embassy in Tehran], 23 May 2022, [url](#); Germany, BAMF, Länderreport 35: Iran: Aktuelle Lage vor den Präsidentschaftswahlen: Die hybride Staatsordnung, Strafrecht, Menschenrechtslage und Ausblick [Current situation before the presidential elections: The Hybrid State Order, Criminal Law, Human Rights Situation and Outlook], May 2021, [url](#), p. 17

³³⁶ Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Iran Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 5, [source: Austrian Embassy in Tehran], 23 May 2022, [url](#)

³³⁷ Iran International, Iran Officials Blame Sunni ‘Takfiris’ For Knife Attack On Clerics, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

³³⁸ Germany, BAMF, Länderreport 35: Iran: Aktuelle Lage vor den Präsidentschaftswahlen: Die hybride Staatsordnung, Strafrecht, Menschenrechtslage und Ausblick [Current situation before the presidential elections: The Hybrid State Order, Criminal Law, Human Rights Situation and Outlook], May 2021, [url](#), p. 17

³³⁹ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 77

³⁴⁰ IranWire, What Treatment Can Fleeing Afghans Expect From Iran?, 16 August 2021, [url](#)

³⁴¹ IranWire, What Treatment Can Fleeing Afghans Expect From Iran?, 16 August 2021, [url](#)

³⁴² USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022; [url](#), p. 79; IranWire, What Treatment Can Fleeing Afghans Expect From Iran?, 16 August 2021, [url](#)

³⁴³ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022; [url](#), p. 79

³⁴⁴ IranWire, What Treatment Can Fleeing Afghans Expect From Iran?, 16 August 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁵ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022; [url](#), p. 79



According to the Austrian Embassy in Tehran in November 2021, referred to by the Austrian BFA, Afghans in Iran have sometimes experienced discrimination and have been protested against. For example, protests were being held against the enrolment of Afghan children in schools.³⁴⁶ For a 2020 academic paper co-authored by Abbas Deilamizade and other researchers, 27 interviews with Afghan male drug addicts in Iran with an average age of 26 years, who had completed detoxification, were conducted³⁴⁷ on the issues of ‘stigma’ and drug addiction. The ‘stigma’ of being a refugee was experienced by the interviewees, in particular at school (including in childhood), at workplace including ‘harder work, low wages, night shifts, and job insecurity’.³⁴⁸

According to the Austrian Embassy in Tehran, marriages between Iranians and Afghan refugees were not infrequent. However, they were difficult to establish because Iranian authorities requested documents from the embassy or the Afghan authorities.³⁴⁹

1.4.2. Treatment by authorities, including since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021

Policies of the Iranian government of the late 1980s dealt with the statuses of refugees and focussed on their legalisation in Iran, while the policies of the 1960s and 70s had focussed on the return of Afghans to Afghanistan. In a February 2021 article, the Khaama Press News Agency further claimed that state media reports on issues related to immigration became more positive, particularly in comparison with those of the 1970s. The presence of Afghan artists on state television became a normality and the discourse of high-ranking officials became softer and more tolerant towards refugees in the years preceding the reporting.³⁵⁰

In an article published on 9 September 2022 by the state-run³⁵¹ Tehran Times, UNHCR representative Ivo Freijsen was quoted saying that Iran provided ‘wide-ranging services for refugees’ and that it was an ‘exemplary country that has acted very well in hosting refugees’³⁵² while, according to UNHCR and NGOs, it has not received much international support.³⁵³ In a June 2022 article, Al Jazeera quoted UN spokesperson Duniya Aslam Khan saying that the Iranian policy was ‘commendable’ and among the ‘most inclusive’ because it allowed refugees access to a number of legal services. According to her, the UN had not seen ‘a major shift in

³⁴⁶ Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Iran Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 5, [source: Austrian Embassy in Tehran], 23 May 2022, [url](#)

³⁴⁷ The paper has not clearly stated when the interviews were conducted. However, it indicated that the study participants were ‘recruited from two midterm residential drug treatment centers [...] in Tehran, where they had been admitted in 2013 to 2014 and that the participants were interviewed in residential centres; Deilamizade, A. et al., The sources of stigma and the impacts on Afghan refugees with substance abuse disorders: A qualitative study in Iran, 2020, [url](#), p. 613

³⁴⁸ Deilamizade, A. et al., The sources of stigma and the impacts on Afghan refugees with substance abuse disorders: A qualitative study in Iran, 2020, [url](#), p. 618

³⁴⁹ Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Iran Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 5, [source: Austrian Embassy in Tehran], 23 May 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁰ The Khaama Press News Agency, مهاجران افغانی در ایران و مشکلاتی که دهه‌های متمادی گریبانگیر آن‌هاست [Afghan refugees in Iran and the problems they have faced for decades], 18 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁵¹ AFP, Thousands of Afghans deported from Iran to Taliban rule, 11 November 2021

³⁵² Tehran Times, UNHCR is honored to support Iran's efforts regarding refugees, 9 September 2022, [url](#)

³⁵³ Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Iran Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 5, [source: Austrian Embassy in Tehran], 23 May 2022, [url](#)



government policy' after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan.³⁵⁴ The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) on its website also describes the country's refugee policies as 'inclusive'. NRC elaborated that Iran was granting all Afghans access to primary health care and all Afghan children access to public schools, while it was possible for Afghans with *Amayesh* cards and visas to work in certain fields.³⁵⁵

After a visit to Iran, the UN Special Rapporteur Alena Douhan stated that the country's government had 'expressed its commitment to continue implementing inclusive policies, including by offering access to primary healthcare and education', despite its restricted capacity to provide assistance due to the difficult economic situation, the economic impact of sanctions, the COVID-19 pandemic and a rise in humanitarian assistance costs.³⁵⁶ Social scientist Amin Saikal was quoted in an April 2022 Asia Times article stating that the Government of Iran had been 'tightening its belt' on Afghan refugees as a result of the country's difficult economic situation and growing unemployment rate.³⁵⁷ In October 2021, Iran's Deputy Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic to the UN, Zahra Ershadi, stated, with reference to the country's difficult economic situation, that Iran had hosted more than 300 000 new asylum seekers 'in recent months' and it 'cannot host the displaced populations any longer'. However, she closed by saying that the Islamic Republic of Iran 'will continue to play its role in addressing the problems of refugees'.³⁵⁸ For further information on the situation for Afghan refugees in Iran regarding healthcare, education and employment, please refer to section [4. Internal mobility and socio-economic situation of Afghan refugees in Iran](#).

IranWire reported in August 2021 that the presence of Afghans in Iran has been subjected to 'negative, often subliminal propaganda by state institutions and media' for a long time, which 'began to change in recent years after the formation of the Fatemiyoun Brigade'.³⁵⁹

In March 2022, the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) reported that a number of NGOs existed in Iran, which took care of Afghan refugees. However, Iranian authorities have reduced the scope of these organisations in the years preceding the reporting, namely the Imam Ali Society³⁶⁰, which offered support to Afghan refugees and was once one of Iran's major NGOs. As described by SEM the NGO's leader was arrested in 2020 and the organisation was legally dissolved in 2021.³⁶¹ In a May 2022 report, the Country of Origin Information (COI) unit of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum indicated with

³⁵⁴ Al Jazeera, What does the future hold for Afghan refugees in Iran?, 12 June 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁵ NRC, NRC in Iran, n.d., [url](#)

³⁵⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Alena Douhan [Advanced Unedited Version], A/HRC/51/33/Add.1, 17 August 2022, [url](#), pp. 12-14

³⁵⁷ Asia Times, Anti-Afghan sentiment undercuts Iran-Taliban ties, 29 April 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁸ Iran, Envoy: Iran to continue to play its role in addressing refugees' problems, 30 October 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁹ For further information on the Fatemiyoun Brigade, please refer to section [1.4.3 Recruitment of Afghan refugees to fight for Iran in foreign countries](#).

³⁶⁰ Also: Imam Ali Popular Students Relief Society; Imam Ali Society, (معرفی جمعیت امام علی (ع) [About the Imam Ali Society, Image 1], n.d., [url](#); Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Iran Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 5, [source: Austrian Embassy in Tehran], 23 May 2022, [url](#)

³⁶¹ Switzerland, SEM, Focus Pakistan / Iran / Türkei: Situation afghanischer Migrantinnen und Migranten [Situation of Afghan Migrants], 30 March 2022, [url](#), p. 23



reference to the Austrian Embassy in Tehran that the NGO was banned in March 2021.³⁶² The NGO appeared to be still active as of March 2022.³⁶³ According to the December 2021 Humanitarian Access Overview by ACAPS, after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021 and the subsequent displacement movements into Iran, '[h]umanitarian access in Iran has deteriorated'. The source further stated that in theory healthcare and educational services were available for all refugees in Iran, including the undocumented, but many found it challenging to enjoy these services, because they were afraid to be returned.³⁶⁴

On 15 August 2021, the day of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, the Independent reported that Iran had established temporary camps for refugees in three provinces along the border to Afghanistan for newly arriving Afghans. The source further quoted an official of Iran's interior ministry stating that the government expected those refugees to return upon improvement of the situation in Afghanistan.³⁶⁵ The establishment of camps in border areas for the accommodation of new arrivals appears to be the common strategy of the Government of Iran according to IOM.³⁶⁶ According to a November 2021 article by AsiaNews,³⁶⁷ the Government of Iran reacted to Afghans entering Iran after August 2021 'with push backs, expulsions, alleged abuse and violence'.³⁶⁸ In March 2022, Middle East Eye (MEE) reported, with reference to statements made by Afghans from the cities of Mashhad and Tehran, that the 'Islamic Republic has made the visa renewal process extremely difficult'. While before the Taliban takeover, it was possible for Afghans to renew their visas inside Iran, after the takeover, they had to travel to Afghanistan to renew or extend their visas, which for many Afghans remained 'a dangerous proposition'.³⁶⁹ As of 15 April 2022, the entry into Iran continued to be allowed exclusively for holders of Afghan passports with valid Iranian visas.³⁷⁰

Between April and June 2022, Iranian authorities carried out a headcount exercise for undocumented Afghans.³⁷¹ Individuals who took part in the headcount received headcount slips valid until at least 22 October 2022. Holders of these slips are understood to be offered temporary protection against forced returns. The government of Iran has indicated their intention to forcibly return those who have not participated in the headcount.³⁷² According to a member of an international humanitarian organisation delivering relief, assistance and protection to people of concern, interviewed by Ridgeway and Stop the Traffik for its

³⁶² Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Iran Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 5, [source: Austrian Embassy in Tehran], 23 May 2022, [url](#)

³⁶³ Switzerland, SEM, Focus Pakistan / Iran / Türkei: Situation afghanischer Migrantinnen und Migranten [Situation of Afghan Migrants], 30 March 2022, [url](#), p. 23

³⁶⁴ ACAPS, Humanitarian Access Overview, December 2021, [url](#), p. 18

³⁶⁵ Independent (The), Iran sets up refugee camps along border as Afghans flee Taliban rule, 15 August 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁶ IOM, Information on the socio-economic situation for Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran requested by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 4 May 2022, [url](#), p. 1

³⁶⁷ 'AsiaNews gives particular attention to the theme of religious freedom [...] but also to the concrete life of the Christian communities of Asia'; AsiaNews, About Us, n.d., [url](#)

³⁶⁸ AsiaNews, Hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees in Iran, a humanitarian time-bomb also for Europe, 11 November 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁹ MEE, Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home, 12 March 2022, [url](#)

³⁷⁰ IOM, Information on the socio-economic situation for Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran requested by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 4 May 2022, [url](#), p. 1

³⁷¹ Another headcount exercise for undocumented individuals in Iran was carried out in 2017; UNHCR, Global Focus: 2018 Planning Summary – Operation: Islamic Republic of Iran, 14 November 2017, [url](#), p. 4

³⁷² UNHCR, Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and Response in Iran 16 May – 30 June 2022, 30 June 2022, [url](#), pp. 1-2



September 2022 report on Afghan Nationals in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia, ‘this may have serious implications for the safety of Afghan nationals who arrive in Iran after the completion of the headcount, as they will not benefit from the same protections’.³⁷³

In its April 2022 report, the US Department of State (USDOS) stated that Iranian authorities were routinely arresting Afghans who do not hold *Amayesh* cards and in some cases ‘threatened them with deportation’. Referencing IOM, USDOS also reported that some undocumented Afghans who had returned to Afghanistan claimed to have been ‘pressured to leave or left due to abuse by police or state authorities’. Furthermore, there were reports on mistreatment of ‘many Afghans’ by authorities, such as ‘physical abuse by security forces, deportations, forced recruitment to fight in Syria, detention in unsanitary and inhuman conditions, forced payment for transportation to and accommodation in deportation camps, forced labor, forced separation from families, restricted movement within the country’.³⁷⁴ In a February 2022 article, TOLONews reported that in less than six months Iranian security forces had killed around 100 Afghan refugees, whose bodies were transferred to Afghanistan, and at least 460 persons with injuries had entered Afghanistan from Iran through the border of Islam Qala. Some people ‘have been beaten, their arms and legs have been broken’.³⁷⁵ Sources further reported about the alleged ill-treatment of Afghan refugees by Iranian authorities in April 2022.³⁷⁶ On 15 April 2022, Fair Planet reported that circulating videos allegedly showed how Iranian authorities were ‘physically abusing, threatening and dishonoring mostly younger refugees who seem to have taken shelter in Iran’.³⁷⁷ Iranian officials denied that Afghan refugees were mistreated in Iran.³⁷⁸

In November 2021, AFP spoke to around 20 Afghan returnees that stated they were ‘held in crowded, filthy detention camps [in Iran] where some were beaten before being transported to the border crossing’. Individuals who could not afford to pay for the transportation back to Afghanistan were reportedly held in detention camps.³⁷⁹

There were reports of at least five Afghan citizens among a minimum of 251 individuals executed in Iran between 1 January and 30 June 2022.³⁸⁰ In June 2022 an Afghan sentenced to death for killing two clerics was executed,³⁸¹ and in July 2022, an Afghan woman was reportedly executed for killing her husband.³⁸²

³⁷³ Ridgeway and Stop the Traffik, Afghan Nationals in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia, September 2022, [url](#), p. 18

³⁷⁴ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 46

³⁷⁵ TOLONews, Scores of Iran-Bound Afghan Refugees Killed, 100s Beaten: Locals, 8 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁷⁶ AA, ‘Cruel’ action on Afghan refugees in Iran sparks outrage, 26 April 2022, [url](#); Fair Planet, Refugees face increased racism and discrimination, 15 April 2022, [url](#); TOLONews, Afghan Refugees in Iran Complain of Harassment, 7 April 2022, [url](#); RFE/RL, ‘Disgusting And Heartbreaking’: New Videos Put Spotlight On Mistreatment Of Afghan Refugees In Iran, 8 April 2022, [url](#)

³⁷⁷ Fair Planet, Refugees face increased racism and discrimination, 15 April 2022, [url](#)

³⁷⁸ Reuters, Iran Summons Afghan Envoy After Protesters Throw Rocks at Diplomatic Missions, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

³⁷⁹ AFP, Thousands of Afghans deported from Iran to Taliban rule, 11 November 2021

³⁸⁰ UN General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Javid Rehman, A/77/181, 18 July 2022, [url](#), para. 10

³⁸¹ The Khaama Press News Agency, Man Hanged in Iran for Stabbing Three Clerics, 20 June 2022, [url](#)

³⁸² Iran Human Rights, Three Women Executed in a Day; Afghan Senobar Jalali Executed for Murder, 29 July 2022, [url](#)



For further information on treatment of Afghans at the border and upon entry into Iran, please refer to section [3. Border crossings and human smuggling/trafficking of Afghan refugees, including prevalence and treatment.](#)

1.4.3. Recruitment of Afghan refugees to fight for Iran in foreign countries

The Iranian Fatemiyoun Brigade (also called Fatemiyoun military division,³⁸³ FB,³⁸⁴ Liwa³⁸⁵ Fatemiyoun³⁸⁶), which came into existence in 2013³⁸⁷ or 2014,³⁸⁸ was made up of Afghan fighters,³⁸⁹ of which some were undocumented.³⁹⁰ There are sources which report that the brigade was first deployed to Syria in 2013.³⁹¹ The Atlantic Council reported in October 2021 that many ethnic Hazara men have joined the brigade³⁹² and other sources indicated that the brigade was mainly composed of Hazara.³⁹³ While sources reported that the brigade was primarily composed of individuals residing in Iran,³⁹⁴ the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) stated that the Fatemiyoun Brigade drew its ‘membership primarily from Shia Afghan communities in Iran and Afghanistan’.³⁹⁵ In an April 2021 article, Arian Sharifi, former Senior Adviser to Afghanistan's Foreign Minister, stated that fighters for the Fatemiyoun Brigade were predominantly ‘recruited from among Shia Afghan refugees in Iran’.³⁹⁶ The Fatemiyoun Brigade was established in the aftermath of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ in the Middle East as one of four Iranian Shia militant groups.³⁹⁷ More specifically, Arian Sharifi mentions that ‘the origins of the Fatemiyoun traces to the now defunct “Mohammad Corp” and the “Abuzar Division,” both Afghan Shia militant groups commissioned by Iran to fight in the Iran-Iraq war in

³⁸³ Guardian (The), Afghan refugees in Iran being sent to fight and die for Assad in Syria, 5 November 2015, [url](#)

³⁸⁴ Schwartz, K. L., “Citizen Martyrs”: The Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Iran, April 2022, [url](#), p. 94

³⁸⁵ Meaning ‘brigade’ in Arabic. Karatas, I., Iran’s Use of Afghan Shiite Migrants as Proxies: The Case of Liwa Fatemiyoun, 27 May 2021, [url](#), p. 39

³⁸⁶ Karatas, I., Iran’s Use of Afghan Shiite Migrants as Proxies: The Case of Liwa Fatemiyoun, 27 May 2021, [url](#), p. 39

³⁸⁷ Sharifi, A., The Fatemiyoun Army: Iran’s Afghan Crusaders in Syria, The Diplomat, 23 April 2021, [url](#); Majalla, ‘I am Burning’: The Deadly Treatment of Afghan Refugees in Iran, 19 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁸ France, OFPRA, Iran: La Force Al-Qods du Corps des Gardiens de la Révolution islamique (CGRI), 13 December 2021, [url](#), p. 3; Siavoshi, S., Afghans in Iran: the state and the working of immigration policies, 24 August 2022, [url](#); Karatas, I., Iran’s Use of Afghan Shiite Migrants as Proxies: The Case of Liwa Fatemiyoun, 27 May 2021, [url](#), p. 33

³⁸⁹ Sharifi, A., The Fatemiyoun Army: Iran’s Afghan Crusaders in Syria, The Diplomat, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 1; Majalla, ‘I am Burning’: The Deadly Treatment of Afghan Refugees in Iran, 19 June 2020, [url](#); Schwartz, K. L., “Citizen Martyrs”: The Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Iran, April 2022, [url](#), p. 93; USIP, The Fatemiyoun Army: Reintegration into Afghan Society, March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; France, OFPRA, Iran: La Force Al-Qods du Corps des Gardiens de la Révolution islamique (CGRI), 13 December 2021, [url](#), p. 3; IranWire, Prominent Shia Afghan Accuses Iran of Exploiting His Countrymen, 13 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁰ Majalla, ‘I am Burning’: The Deadly Treatment of Afghan Refugees in Iran, 19 June 2020, [url](#); Schwartz, K. L., “Citizen Martyrs”: The Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Iran, April 2022, [url](#), p. 100

³⁹¹ Schwartz, K. L., “Citizen Martyrs”: The Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Iran, April 2022, [url](#), p. 96; USIP, The Fatemiyoun Army: Reintegration into Afghan Society, March 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³⁹² Atlantic Council, The Hazara community in Afghanistan is stuck in the middle between Iran and the Taliban, 22 October 2021, [url](#)

³⁹³ Schwartz, K. L., “Citizen Martyrs”: The Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Iran, April 2022, [url](#), p. 96; IranWire, Prominent Shia Afghan Accuses Iran of Exploiting His Countrymen, 13 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁴ Schwartz, K. L., “Citizen Martyrs”: The Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Iran, April 2022, [url](#), p. 94; IranWire, Prominent Shia Afghan Accuses Iran of Exploiting His Countrymen, 13 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁵ USIP, The Fatemiyoun Army: Reintegration into Afghan Society, March 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³⁹⁶ Sharifi, A., The Fatemiyoun Army: Iran’s Afghan Crusaders in Syria, The Diplomat, 23 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁷ The others being the Zainabiyoun, the Aliyoun and the Haidariyoun, composed of fighters from, Pakistan, Iraq and Syria, respectively’. Sharifi, A., The Fatemiyoun Army: Iran’s Afghan Crusaders in Syria, The Diplomat, 23 April 2021, [url](#)



the 1980s and later against the Taliban in the '90s'.³⁹⁸ The brigade was restructured as a professionalised proxy force with the onset of ISIL in Syria and Iraq³⁹⁹ and sent to Syria in support of the Syrian government.⁴⁰⁰ The brigade was reportedly considered a proxy fighting force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) in Syria,⁴⁰¹ more precisely the IRGC's Quds Force branch⁴⁰² that 'focuses on operations, threats, and strategic objectives outside of the country's borders'⁴⁰³ and is 'responsible for unconventional warfare and military intelligence'.⁴⁰⁴

Kevin L. Schwartz, Research Fellow and Deputy Director of Research at the Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences,⁴⁰⁵ reported in his abovementioned article, that recruitment for the brigade appeared to have stopped by 2018, 'perhaps reflecting the brigade's decreased combat role following Tehran's declaration of victory' over ISIL.⁴⁰⁶ However, a December 2021 article by Diyaruna, a USCENTCOM-sponsored website,⁴⁰⁷ indicated with reference to the Fatemiyoun's 'active media presence on Telegram and its posting of current events in Iran and Syria' that Iran kept recruiting Afghans into the Fatemiyoun.⁴⁰⁸ In its July 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report on Iran, USDOS stated, with reference to 'several credible sources,' that the IRGC and the Basij⁴⁰⁹ continued to recruit Afghan men and boys who live in Iran as fighters for the Fatemiyoun Brigade.⁴¹⁰

In March 2019, USIP reported that most recruits were 'in their twenties and thirties' and 'motivated mainly by economic deprivation and vulnerabilities due to their migrant status and, to a lesser degree, by religious sentiments and a sense of youthful military adventurism'.⁴¹¹ Furthermore, sources reported on the alleged recruitment of children and adolescents into the Fatemiyoun Brigade.⁴¹²

³⁹⁸ Sharifi, A., The Fatemiyoun Army: Iran's Afghan Crusaders in Syria, The Diplomat, 23 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁹ Atlantic Council, The Hazara community in Afghanistan is stuck in the middle between Iran and the Taliban, 22 October 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰ France, OFPRA, Iran: La Force Al-Qods du Corps des Gardiens de la Révolution islamique (CGRI), 13 December 2021, [url](#), p. 3; TOLONews, Transcript of TOLONews Interview with Iran's Javad Zarif [direct quote of Iran's then Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif], 22 December 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰¹ IranWire, What Treatment Can Fleeing Afghans Expect From Iran?, 16 August 2021, [url](#); Atlantic Council, The Hazara community in Afghanistan is stuck in the middle between Iran and the Taliban, 22 October 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰² France, OFPRA, Iran: La Force Al-Qods du Corps des Gardiens de la Révolution islamique (CGRI), 13 December 2021, [url](#), p. 3; IranWire, Prominent Shia Afghan Accuses Iran of Exploiting His Countrymen, 13 April 2021, [url](#); Sharifi, A., The Fatemiyoun Army: Iran's Afghan Crusaders in Syria, The Diplomat, 23 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰³ Schwartz, K. L., "Citizen Martyrs": The Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Iran, April 2022, [url](#), p. 97

⁴⁰⁴ Sharifi, A., The Fatemiyoun Army: Iran's Afghan Crusaders in Syria, The Diplomat, 23 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁵ New Arab (The), Kevin Schwartz and Olmo Gözl, 17 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶ Schwartz, K. L., "Citizen Martyrs": The Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Iran, April 2022, [url](#), p. 97

⁴⁰⁷ Diyaruna, About Us, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸ Diyaruna, Shadow of Fatemiyoun militia looms over Afghanistan's future, 26 December 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁹ The Basij is a militia created as a 'paramilitary volunteer militia' by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979. Since 1981 they operate under the IRGC's organisational structure. They consist mainly of individuals from 'poor, rural backgrounds'. 'In peacetime, they enforce Iran's Islamic social codes, acting as a morality police at checkpoints and parks, at other times crushing protests.' The Basij is also involved when natural disasters occur and is present in government institutions. VOA, Iran's Basij Force: Specialists in Cracking Down on Dissent, 22 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹⁰ USDOS, Country Report on Trafficking in Persons for 2021 – Iran, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹¹ USIP, The Fatemiyoun Army: Reintegration into Afghan Society, March 2019, [url](#), p. 1

⁴¹² FES, „Afghanische Geflüchtete sind in Iran mit vielfältigen Diskriminierungen konfrontiert" ["Afghan refugees face multiple forms of discrimination in Iran"], 26 August 2021, [url](#); USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 31, 66



Sources moreover indicated that recruits signed up for the brigade based on promises of citizenship⁴¹³ (this was reportedly not complied to),⁴¹⁴ obtaining legal immigration status in Iran,⁴¹⁵ for the fighter and/or his family,⁴¹⁶ promises of a monthly salary,⁴¹⁷ free schooling for children, health insurance, and social status upon return⁴¹⁸ as well as threats of deportation⁴¹⁹ and detention.⁴²⁰ According to USDOS in July 2022, Afghan fighters who had returned from war were refused residency in Iran. They remained undocumented in Iran or went back to Afghanistan, 'where they fear persecution by the Taliban for alleged association with the Fatemiyoun Brigade'.⁴²¹ Reportedly, the Iranian government claimed that the fighters joined the brigade 'voluntarily' while Afghan officials⁴²² contested this view.⁴²³

According to Arian Sharifi in his April 2021 article, as the fighting in Syria became more intense, 'the Quds Force began reaching out to the Shia Hazara population inside Afghanistan too, establishing recruiting networks in multiple provinces, including the capital Kabul'. The transport of recruits was organised 'under the guise of pilgrimage trips to holy shrines in Syria and Iraq, using travel agencies with close connections to the Iranian Embassy in Kabul'. The source elaborated that the recruits were then trained in Iran.⁴²⁴ USDOS, with reference to media sources reporting in 2021, mentioned that upon recruitment, the fighters were sent to Lebanon for the military training.⁴²⁵

Schwartz reported that the exact number of members of the Fatemiyoun Brigade was 'difficult to determine'.⁴²⁶ In a February 2021 article, IranWire reported that it was unknown how many Fatemiyoun fighters had fought in Syria.⁴²⁷ However, in March 2019, USIP stated that around

⁴¹³ IranWire, What Treatment Can Fleeing Afghans Expect From Iran?, 16 August 2021, [url](#); FES, Afghanische Geflüchtete sind in Iran mit vielfältigen Diskriminierungen konfrontiert [Afghan refugees face multiple forms of discrimination in Iran], 26 August 2021, [url](#)

⁴¹⁴ IranWire, What Treatment Can Fleeing Afghans Expect From Iran?, 16 August 2021, [url](#)

⁴¹⁵ Crawley, H. and Kaytaz E. S., Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Afghan Migration to Europe From Iran, 27 July 2022, [url](#), p. 8; USDOS, Country Report on Trafficking in Persons for 2021 – Iran, 29 July 2022, [url](#); FES, „Afghanische Geflüchtete sind in Iran mit vielfältigen Diskriminierungen konfrontiert“ [“Afghan refugees face multiple forms of discrimination in Iran”], 26 August 2021, [url](#); Sharifi, A., The Fatemiyoun Army: Iran's Afghan Crusaders in Syria, The Diplomat, 23 April 2021, [url](#); Majalla, 'I am Burning': The Deadly Treatment of Afghan Refugees in Iran, 19 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴¹⁶ Schwartz, K. L., "Citizen Martyrs": The Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Iran, April 2022, [url](#), p. 98

⁴¹⁷ USDOS, Country Report on Trafficking in Persons for 2021 – Iran, 29 July 2022, [url](#); Schwartz, K. L., "Citizen Martyrs": The Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Iran, April 2022, [url](#), pp. 102-103; Sharifi, A., The Fatemiyoun Army: Iran's Afghan Crusaders in Syria, The Diplomat, 23 April 2021, [url](#); Majalla, 'I am Burning': The Deadly Treatment of Afghan Refugees in Iran, 19 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴¹⁸ Sharifi, A., The Fatemiyoun Army: Iran's Afghan Crusaders in Syria, The Diplomat, 23 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴¹⁹ Schwartz, K. L., "Citizen Martyrs": The Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Iran, April 2022, [url](#), pp. 96, 98; FES, Afghanische Geflüchtete sind in Iran mit vielfältigen Diskriminierungen konfrontiert [Afghan refugees face multiple forms of discrimination in Iran], 26 August 2021, [url](#)

⁴²⁰ Crawley, H. and Kaytaz E. S., Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Afghan Migration to Europe From Iran, 27 July 2022, [url](#), p. 8; Sharifi, A., The Fatemiyoun Army: Iran's Afghan Crusaders in Syria, The Diplomat, 23 April 2021, [url](#); USDOS, Country Report on Trafficking in Persons for 2021 – Iran, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴²¹ USDOS, Country Report on Trafficking in Persons for 2021 – Iran, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴²² Please note that 'Afghan officials' here refers to officials of the Ashraf Ghani government before the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021.

⁴²³ AA, Fatemiyoun, refugees trouble Iran-Afghanistan relations, 24 December 2020, [url](#)

⁴²⁴ Sharifi, A., The Fatemiyoun Army: Iran's Afghan Crusaders in Syria, The Diplomat, 23 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴²⁵ USDOS, Country Report on Trafficking in Persons for 2021 – Iran, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴²⁶ Schwartz, K. L., "Citizen Martyrs": The Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Iran, April 2022, [url](#), pp. 96-97

⁴²⁷ IranWire, Afghan Migrants in Iran Get a Simple Choice: Fight in Syria or be Deported, 4 February 2021, [url](#)



50 000 Fatemiyoun fighters had been deployed to Syria since 2013.⁴²⁸ According to Schwartz estimates of the Fatemiyoun's size ranged from 5 000 to 20 000 fighters.⁴²⁹ In 2015, the brigade was upgraded to a military division⁴³⁰ or army,⁴³¹ which was 'supposed to have between 10,000 to 12,000 members' at the time.⁴³² In its February 2022 report, Freedom House stated that 'thousands of Afghan migrants living in Iran' had been recruited by the IRGC 'to fight in Syria'.⁴³³

In an April 2021 article, IranWire reported that the Iranian government had never revealed any numbers or names related to casualties among the Fatemiyoun. With reference to Afghan officials, the source further indicated that a minimum of 5 000 Afghans had died in the Syrian conflict 'for the Islamic Republic'.⁴³⁴ An Anadolu Agency (AA) article published in December 2020 indicated that around 2 000 fighters of the brigade had died in Syria 'according to rough estimates'.⁴³⁵

As mentioned before, the Fatemiyoun Brigade was first deployed in Syria to support the Syrian government.⁴³⁶ After the conflict in Syria quieted down, some Fatemiyoun fighters were reportedly deployed in Yemen to support the Houthis, while many went back to Afghanistan and some to Iran. However, Sharifi indicated in April 2021 that around 8 000 Fatemiyoun fighters were still kept in Syria and that the Quds Force maintained contact with the fighters in Afghanistan.⁴³⁷ In October 2021, the ACLED reported that the Syrian Tiyas airbase was held by the Syrian government and partially by 'pro-Iran militias, including the Fatemiyoun Brigade'.⁴³⁸

In a TV interview with TOLONews in December 2020, Javad Zarif, the then Foreign Minister of Iran, stated that the Iranian government was prepared to 'help the Afghan government regroup these forces [the Fatemiyoun Brigade] under the leadership of the Afghan National Army' in order to support the fight against ISIL inside Afghanistan.⁴³⁹ In December 2021, Diyaruna⁴⁴⁰ reported that the activities of the Fatemiyoun Brigade were 'mainly focused on projects and objectives in Syria'. However, the source further indicated that 'worries continue to grow' related to the Iranian government's plan for the Fatemiyoun Brigade in Afghanistan'.⁴⁴¹ In an August 2022 article by Grant Farr, Professor Emeritus at Portland State University, who has lived and worked in Afghanistan, the author indicated that there was 'an expectation that the Fatemiyoun may be sent to Afghanistan by Iran to protect the Afghan Shia' and that this had not occurred yet.⁴⁴²

⁴²⁸ USIP, The Fatemiyoun Army: Reintegration into Afghan Society, March 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁴²⁹ Schwartz, K. L., "Citizen Martyrs": The Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Iran, April 2022, [url](#), p. 97

⁴³⁰ Guardian (The), Afghan refugees in Iran being sent to fight and die for Assad in Syria, 5 November 2015, [url](#)

⁴³¹ USIP, The Fatemiyoun Army: Reintegration into Afghan Society, March 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁴³² Guardian (The), Afghan refugees in Iran being sent to fight and die for Assad in Syria, 5 November 2015, [url](#)

⁴³³ Freedom House, Freedom House: Freedom in the World 2022 - Iran, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

⁴³⁴ IranWire, Prominent Shia Afghan Accuses Iran of Exploiting His Countrymen, 13 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴³⁵ AA, Fatemiyoun, refugees trouble Iran-Afghanistan relations, 24 December 2020, [url](#)

⁴³⁶ TOLONews, Transcript of TOLONews Interview with Iran's Javad Zarif, 22 December 2020, [url](#)

⁴³⁷ Sharifi, A., The Fatemiyoun Army: Iran's Afghan Crusaders in Syria, The Diplomat, 23 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴³⁸ ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East (2-8 October 2021), 13 October 2021, [url](#)

⁴³⁹ TOLONews, Transcript of TOLONews Interview with Iran's Javad Zarif, 22 December 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁰ Diyaruna is a news website sponsored by USCENTCOM; Diyaruna, About Us, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁴¹ Diyaruna, Shadow of Fatemiyoun militia looms over Afghanistan's future, 26 December 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁴² Farr, G., Iran and Afghanistan: Growing Tensions after the Return of the Taliban, E-International Relations, 23 August 2022, [url](#), p. 4



In April 2022, Iranian media reported on the arrest of a former Afghan official for allegedly attempting to recruit Afghan refugees to fight against Russia in Ukraine.⁴⁴³ In October and November 2022, various sources reported attempts by Russian military⁴⁴⁴ or mercenary forces⁴⁴⁵ to recruit US-trained Afghan commandos and other security forces who had fled to Iran after the Taliban takeover to join their ranks in Ukraine.⁴⁴⁶ As of November 2022, RFE/RL reported that about 15 former Afghan commandos had already joined the mercenary group.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴³ Iran International, Former Afghan Official Reportedly Detained In Iran For Recruiting Fighters, 10 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁴ Al Jazeera, Russia recruiting US-trained Afghan commandos for Ukraine: Report, 1 November 2022, [url](#); FP, Russia's Recruiting Afghan Commandos, 25 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan General Says Russia's Vagner Group Recruiting His Former Troops For Ukraine War, 1 November 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁶ Al Jazeera, Russia recruiting US-trained Afghan commandos for Ukraine: Report, 1 November 2022, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan General Says Russia's Vagner Group Recruiting His Former Troops For Ukraine War, 1 November 2022, [url](#); FP, Russia's Recruiting Afghan Commandos, 25 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁷ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan General Says Russia's Vagner Group Recruiting His Former Troops For Ukraine War, 1 November 2022, [url](#)



2. Movements of registered and unregistered Afghan refugees

2.1. Overview

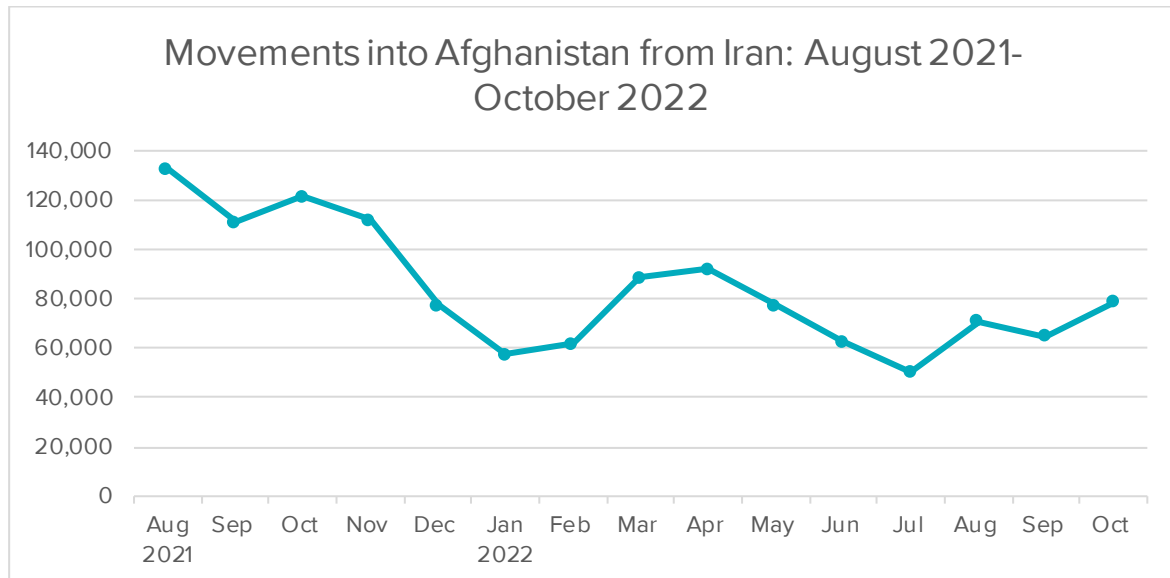


Figure 3: Overview of movements into Afghanistan from Iran: August 2021-October 2022, based on IOM data.⁴⁴⁸

Figure 3 shows movements into Afghanistan from Iran between August 2021 and October 2022, as recorded by IOM.

According to UNOCHA, in the period between January and September 2022, 597 100 people returned to Afghanistan from Iran,⁴⁴⁹ while 1 240 000 returned in 2021, 420 000 in 2020, and 264 000 in 2019.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁸ EUAA analysis based on IOM reports: IOM, Movement in and out of Afghanistan Snapshot (16 - 31 October 2022), 9 November 2022, [url](#), p. 2; IOM, Movements in and out of Afghanistan Snapshot (16 - 31 August 2022), 2 September 2022, [url](#), p. 1; IOM, Movements in and out of Afghanistan Snapshot (16 - 31 July 2022), 4 August 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Snapshot of Population Movements, January - September 2022 (As of 22 September 2022), 22 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Snapshot of Population Movements, January - December 2021 (As of 06 January 2022), 6 January 2022, [url](#)

Media sources cited numbers released by Afghan *de facto* Taliban authorities between June and August 2022,⁴⁵¹ including the return of 7 100 persons over the period of one week in June 2022,⁴⁵² and 7 000 persons over the course of two weeks in July 2022.⁴⁵³

There are three official border crossing points between Iran and Afghanistan. Milak in the province of Sistan and Baluchestan, the Mahiroud border crossing in South Khorasan Province, and the Dogharoon border crossing in Razavi Khorasan Province.⁴⁵⁴ The designations/names for the three major border crossing points between Iran and Afghanistan - or respectively the names of the border towns on the Afghanistan side - were Islam Qala (Dogharoon⁴⁵⁵) in Herat Province, Abu Nasr Farahi⁴⁵⁶ in Farah Province, and Zaranj (Milak⁴⁵⁷ or Silk Bridge⁴⁵⁸ or Abresham crossing⁴⁵⁹) in Nimroz Province.⁴⁶⁰

In February 2022, media sources reported daily return rates between 1 000 and over 2 000 persons at Islam Qala border crossing.⁴⁶¹ Taliban *de facto* authorities, cited by media, in June and July 2022 mentioned returns from Iran via Zaranj (Milak) border crossing,⁴⁶² including 7 000 Afghan returnees over the course of two weeks.⁴⁶³

2.2. Cross-border ties and links to family/social network in Afghanistan

Afghan nationals living in Iran faced several restrictions on their physical⁴⁶⁴ and digital⁴⁶⁵ mobility. While these restrictions depended on the migrants' respective legal status, they had an impact on their ability to move or communicate across the border.⁴⁶⁶ Almost 80 % of respondents of the study on transnational digital practices who used social media at least occasionally, did so to stay connected with friends and/or family members in Afghanistan.

⁴⁵¹ Mehr News Agency, Thousands of Afghan refugees return home each day: Taliban, 18 June 2022, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Iran deports thousands of Afghan immigrants, 4 July 2022, [url](#); Bakhtar News, Thousand Refugees Head Back Home from Iran, 16 July 2022, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Iran, Turkey deport hundreds of Afghan refugees, 27 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵² Mehr News Agency, Thousands of Afghan refugees return home each day: Taliban, 18 June 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵³ Bakhtar News, Thousand Refugees Head Back Home from Iran, 16 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁴ IRNA, Milak border crossing between Iran, Afghanistan reopened, 11 August 2021, [url](#); Tehran Times, Iran-Afghanistan trade ties to be expanded, 11 December 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁵ IOM, Movements in and out of Afghanistan Snapshot (16 – 31 August 2022), 2 September 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁵⁶ UNHCR, Afghanistan situation update – 1 August 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁵⁷ IOM, Movements in and out of Afghanistan Snapshot (16 – 31 August 2022), 2 September 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁵⁸ Mehr News Agency, Iran, Afghanistan to build new transit route, 18 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁹ The Khaama Press News Agency, Abresham Crossing Between Afghanistan & Iran Reopens After Nearly Two Weeks, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁰ Farr, G., Iran and Afghanistan: Growing Tensions after the Return of the Taliban, E-International Relations, 23 August 2022, [url](#); UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Update – 1 September 2022, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁶¹ TOLONews, Officials: 1000s of Afghans Cross Border With Iran Each Day, 27 February 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶² Afghanistan Times, Iran deports thousands of Afghan immigrants, 4 July 2022, [url](#); Bakhtar News, Thousand Refugees Head Back Home from Iran, 16 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶³ Bakhtar News, Thousand Refugees Head Back Home from Iran, 16 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁴ Such as no-go-areas or limitations in leaving one's registered province (see above, section [4.1 Freedom of movement](#)).

⁴⁶⁵ Such as, e.g., the ban on buying a SIM card (see above, section [4.6 Financial and communications services](#)).

⁴⁶⁶ Jauhiainen, J. et al., Digital divides, the Internet and social media uses among Afghans in Iran, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2

Travel to Afghanistan, however, had been restricted for some groups such as refugees whose status used to be tied to their actual presence in Iran.⁴⁶⁷ Undocumented migrants, on the other hand, engaged in irregular circular migration, illegally commuting between Iran and Afghanistan.⁴⁶⁸

Similarly, Afghans moved back and forth between Iran and Afghanistan depending on employment opportunities and the chance to send home remittances.⁴⁶⁹ According to Landinfo, contact with extended family, relatives and networks was important for all Afghans, also for those living abroad. An Afghan living in Kabul interviewed by Landinfo in March 2022 claimed that it was impossible to prevent Afghans from traveling, and he pointed to the strong family ties within Afghan families.⁴⁷⁰ During Nowruz holidays (mid-March – April) the returns (usually for seasonal workers) increase.⁴⁷¹ Another form of cross-border ties were Afghan families paying for their children's student visa,⁴⁷² or supporting them during their studies from abroad.⁴⁷³

Sussan Siavoshi noted that in the context of restrictive migration policies, human smuggling played an important role and involved 'a complex mix of both cross-border familial social relations and for-profit enterprise'. Such networks included, among others, persons with 'communal ties' to potential migrants in Afghanistan and family members already in Iran who would pay a part of the smuggling costs.⁴⁷⁴

2.3. Situation at border crossing points

In June 2022 the UN Secretary General reported that 'Iran closed its borders to Afghanistan on 16 August 2021, but subsequently re-opened them for Afghan passport-holders with valid visas for Iran.' Most Afghans, however, fled to Iran through unofficial border crossings.⁴⁷⁵

The Islam Qala border crossing is used extensively for travel and trade activities.⁴⁷⁶ According to statements by the *de facto* Afghan Foreign Ministry, as of May 2022, approximately 1 400 people travelled to Iran on a daily basis at Islam Qala crossing, while 1 000 Afghans returned

⁴⁶⁷ Jauhiainen, J. et al., Digital divides, the Internet and social media uses among Afghans in Iran, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 8. In order to renew their *Amayesh* card, card holders had to show that they have not left Iran (and had no judicial records). UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement: For the attention of expired *Amayesh/Hoviat* cardholders, 11 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁸ Jauhiainen, J. et al., Digital divides, the Internet and social media uses among Afghans in Iran, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁶⁹ MEE, 'Nothing is certain': The precarious lives of Afghans in Iran, 18 September 2021, [url](#); Atlantic Council, Afghan migrants: Unwanted in Iran and at home, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁰ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Utreise og retur etter Taliban's maktovertakelse [Departure and return after the Taliban's takeover], 29 September 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁷¹ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 24 November 2022

⁴⁷² MEE, Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home, 12 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷³ Kazemi, S. R., "A Future of One's Own": One young woman's struggle to thrive in modern Herat, AAN, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁴ Siavoshi, S., Afghans in Iran: the state and the working of immigration policies, 24 August 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁴⁷⁵ UNSG, Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran [Advanced Unedited Version], A/HRC/50/19, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 3

⁴⁷⁶ AA, Iran closes Afghan border crossing after skirmishes with Taliban, 23 April 2022, [url](#)



daily at Islam Qala crossing point.⁴⁷⁷ According to an update by IOM covering the second half of July 2022, at Islam Qala crossing point a higher number of persons moved out of Afghanistan than at the Zaranj crossing, while inflow figures into Afghanistan were similar at both crossing points.⁴⁷⁸

In March 2022 Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported that 5 000 to 6 000 people were leaving Afghanistan daily at Zaranj city, however the Taliban reportedly denied the numbers.⁴⁷⁹ According to AFP smugglers at Zaranj reportedly charge six million Iranian toman for driving migrants across the border into Iran and Taliban charge vehicles 1 000 Afghani each.⁴⁸⁰ In April 2022 Al Jazeera published an article written by an Afghan who described his journey to Iran in January 2022. He entered Iran via the Islam Qala border crossing point and notes that a visa to Iran costs between USD 87 and 130. According to the article, Afghans also need a Covid-19 test in order to cross the border which costs another USD 10.⁴⁸¹

In December 2021 the Iranian government closed the Islam Qala border crossing point due to the outbreak of a new Covid-19 variant, resulting in hundreds of Afghans with visas being stranded,⁴⁸² and in April 2022, following skirmishes between Iranian border guards and Taliban forces, the Islam Qala border crossing was temporarily closed.⁴⁸³ As of May 2022, Taliban – cited by Hasht-e Subh - said activities at the border crossing were back to normal.⁴⁸⁴ The Zaranj (Silk bridge) border crossing was reopened on 18 July 2022 after it had been closed for two weeks following a skirmish between Taliban forces and Iranian border guards, Taliban officials cited by the Khaama Press News Agency said.⁴⁸⁵

2.4. Enforced returns

According to UNHCR, Afghans who lacked valid documentation were at risk of deportation. Between January and June 2022, law enforcement authorities targeted Afghans without valid documentation in roundup operations. Informants told UNHCR that detainees were not deported immediately but screened and, in some cases, allowed to remain in the country. An increase in numbers of deportations is thought to be linked to perceptions of a negative impact in the economy and job market by Afghans.⁴⁸⁶

According to the June 2022 report of the UN Secretary General (covering the period between 11 June 2021 and 20 March 2022), there was an increase in deportations of Afghans from

⁴⁷⁷ Hasht-e Subh, Daily, 1,400 Passengers Travel to Iran Legally from Islam Qala Port in Herat, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁸ IOM, Movements in and out of Afghanistan Snapshot (16 – 31 July 2022), 4 August 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁷⁹ AFP, Freedom's choice for Afghans: Over the wall or through the desert, 16 March 2022

⁴⁸⁰ AFP, Freedom's choice for Afghans: Over the wall or through the desert, 16 March 2022

⁴⁸¹ Zia, H., I am now one of millions of Afghan refugees [Opinion], Al Jazeera, 16 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁸² TOLONews, Hundreds Of Afghans Waiting at Islam Qala Port to Enter Iran, 28 December 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁸³ AA, Iran closes Afghan border crossing after skirmishes with Taliban, 23 April 2022, [url](#); The Khaama Press News Agency, Iran-Afghan Border Closes by Iran after Skirmishes with Taliban, 24 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁴ Hasht-e Subh, Daily, 1,400 Passengers Travel to Iran Legally from Islam Qala Port in Herat, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁵ The Khaama Press News Agency, Abresham Crossing Between Afghanistan & Iran Reopens After Nearly Two Weeks, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁶ UNHCR Iran, Protection Dashboard - Jan to Jun 2022, 23 August 2022, [url](#), p. 4



Iran,⁴⁸⁷ although UNHCR in August 2021 had advised to not return Afghans.⁴⁸⁸ According to UNHCR, in January 2022, the average daily deportation rate was lowest at 1 000. In March 2022, UNHCR recorded an increase of the average rate to over 2 200 Afghans deported from Iran.⁴⁸⁹ According to IOM, 50 % (13 622) of all crossings of Afghans to Afghanistan in the second half of July 2022,⁴⁹⁰ 47% (13 447) in the first two weeks of August 2022,⁴⁹¹ and 44 % (18 775) in the second half of August 2022 were deportations.⁴⁹² According to findings by Pajhwok Afghan News published in September 2022, 231 000 Afghans returned from Iran since March 2022. 58.5 % of the returnees had been forced to return.⁴⁹³ UNHCR estimated that 65 % of all Afghan asylum seekers newly arriving were deported.⁴⁹⁴

Media sources cited numbers released by Afghan *de facto* authorities in August and July 2022 on the forced return of Afghans from Iran,⁴⁹⁵ including the forcible return of 5 600 persons over the period of one week in the end of July 2022.⁴⁹⁶

According to sources interviewed by Amnesty International (AI) for an August 2022 report on unlawful returns of Afghans from Iran and Turkey, Iranian security forces transferred Afghan deportees by bus to the official border crossings in Dogharoon (Islam Qala) or Milak (Zaranj). Before transferring deportees to the border, they were held in detention centres.⁴⁹⁷ Forcibly returned Afghans were also brought to irregular border crossings by Iranian security forces, where they had to climb over fences or crawl underneath them. Regarding immediate pushbacks at the border, AI documented four cases of Afghans being pushed back immediately or shortly after they had crossed the border into Iran.⁴⁹⁸

During a visit at Islam Qala border crossing in March 2022, AI researchers witnessed buses arriving from Iran and forcibly returned Afghans disembarking on the Afghan side of the border. According to the Afghans interviewed by AI, security forces transferred Afghans who were held in detention centres further inland to facilities near the border before they were returned. Buses with deportees contained approximately 40 persons each and in some cases several buses transferred a large group of people to the border. Armed members of the security forces reportedly escorted the buses and some interviewees told AI that handcuffs or blindfolds were used during their transfer. In some cases, AI was told that children were among the groups of deportees to Afghanistan. Persons forcibly returned by bus were forced to pay a fee for each journey between detention centres, according to sources interviewed by

⁴⁸⁷ UNSG, Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran [Advanced Unedited Version], A/HRC/50/19, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 3

⁴⁸⁸ UNHCR, UNHCR issues a non-return advisory for Afghanistan, 17 August 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁹ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Update – 15 April 2022, 26 April 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁹⁰ IOM, Movements in and out of Afghanistan Snapshot (16 – 31 July 2022), 4 August 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁹¹ IOM, Movements in and out of Afghanistan Snapshot (1 – 15 August 2022), 23 August 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁹² IOM, Movements in and out of Afghanistan Snapshot (16 – 31 August 2022), 2 September 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Iran forcibly expels over 135,000 Afghans in 6 months, 11 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁴ UNHCR Iran, Afghanistan Situation Response in Iran – 31 August 2022, 29 September 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁹⁵ Afghanistan Times, Iran, Turkey deport hundreds of Afghan refugees, 27 July 2022, [url](#); TOLONews, Afghan Officials: Iran Deported 5,600 Afghans in Past Week, 28 July 2022, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4,010 Afghans return, deported from Iran: MoRR, 2 August 2022, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 1863 Afghan refugees return from Iran in single day, 26 August 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁶ TOLONews, Afghan Officials: Iran Deported 5,600 Afghans in Past Week, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁷ AI, 'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 34

⁴⁹⁸ AI, 'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 28



AI. According to the testimonies documented by AI, the amount of money demanded by the security forces varied significantly. Between USD 16 and 278 were charged for the transfer to the Afghan border. Persons who could not pay were held or others had to pay for them.⁴⁹⁹ The information above could not be corroborated by other sources.

In January 2022, Al-Mashareq, a news website sponsored by the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), cited a resident of Balkh Province in Afghanistan who had been deported from Iran via the Islam Qala border crossing, stating that there were 40 buses with deportees and the Iranian police made several stops on the way to the border, forcing deportees to buy goods in Iranian shops. According to the aforementioned source, the deportee had worked for a company in Isfahan for four months without being paid. The deportee reportedly had asked for his wages, but the employer refused to pay. The cited resident of Balkh further claimed that on the way to the Afghan border, Iranian soldiers extorted money from deportees.⁵⁰⁰

2.5. Voluntary repatriation

UNHCR facilitated the voluntary return of 868 Afghan refugees to Afghanistan from Iran in 2021 and 939 in 2020. In the period between 15 August and 31 December 2021, only 103 Afghan refugees returned voluntarily from Iran, despite the end of larger conflict events following the Taliban takeover. Compared to the 447 returnees recorded during the same period in 2020, UNHCR stated that this figure is ‘very low’ by comparison. UNHCR attributes this decline to temporary border crossing point closures, the political context and the deteriorating economic situation in Afghanistan.⁵⁰¹

Between January and July 2022, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 225 people from Iran to Afghanistan. Compared to the period between January and July 2021, voluntary repatriations declined by 70 % ‘due to instability and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Afghanistan’. In the year 2021 the highest number of repatriates was recorded in March with 177, and the lowest number in August with 16.⁵⁰²

Media sources cited numbers released by Taliban *de facto* authorities in July and August 2022 on the voluntary return of Afghans from Iran,⁵⁰³ including 1 325 persons on 25 August 2022 and 381 on 23 August 2022.⁵⁰⁴

⁴⁹⁹ AI, ‘They don’t treat us like humans’: Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 35

⁵⁰⁰ Al-Mashareq, Afghans in limbo as Iran bans them from entering even with legal documents, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰¹ UNHCR, Afghanistan: Voluntary Repatriation Update (January - December 2021), 21 February 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁰² UNHCR Iran, Voluntary Repatriation Dashboard – July 2022, 23 August 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁰³ Afghanistan Times, Iran, Turkey deport hundreds of Afghan refugees, 27 July 2022, [url](#); TOLONews, Afghan Officials: Iran Deported 5,600 Afghans in Past Week, 28 July 2022, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4,010 Afghans return, deported from Iran: MoRR, 2 August 2022, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 1863 Afghan refugees return from Iran in single day, 26 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 1863 Afghan refugees return from Iran in single day, 26 August 2022, [url](#)



2.6. Legal requirements to return to Afghanistan and back to Iran for Afghan refugees

As noted above, Iran re-opened its borders to Afghanistan for Afghan holders of passports and valid visas after closing them on 16 August 2021.⁵⁰⁵

Holders of *Amayesh* cards must obtain permission for ‘any travel outside the province of registration.’ Attempted irregular crossing of borders leads to the cancellation of the *Amayesh* card and deportation. UNHCR also noted that Afghans with expired *Amayesh* cards were at risk of arrest, detention and deportation.⁵⁰⁶

For information on requirements to reside and move legally in Iran, please see section [1.2. Legal status of Afghan refugees](#) and section [4.1. Freedom of movement](#).

For information on returning to Afghanistan, please also see section ‘1.5. Leaving and returning to Afghanistan’ of the August 2022 EUAA COI report on [Afghanistan: Targeting of individuals](#), and section 10.1 Travel requirements and restrictions of the August 2022 EUAA COI report on [Afghanistan: Key socio-economic indicators in Afghanistan and in Kabul City](#).

No further information on requirements to enter Afghanistan and return to Iran for Afghan citizens since the Taliban took power could be found.

⁵⁰⁵ UNSG, Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran [Advanced Unedited Version], A/HRC/50/19, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 3

⁵⁰⁶ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)



3. Border crossings and human smuggling/trafficking of Afghan refugees

The border between Iran and Afghanistan has three official crossing points (Dogharoun/Islam Qala in the north, Abu Nasr-e-Farahi⁵⁰⁷ in the centre, and Zaranj/Milak or Silk Bridge⁵⁰⁸ or Abresham crossing⁵⁰⁹ in the south⁵¹⁰).⁵¹¹ The border contains active smuggling routes,⁵¹² all reportedly sustained and operated by smuggling networks.⁵¹³ It passes through high mountains and rough terrain, making it difficult for Iranian authorities to secure it.⁵¹⁴ There are various unofficial border crossings between the two countries, which often change.⁵¹⁵ For further information on the official border crossings, please refer to section [2.3. Situation at border crossing points](#).

All official border crossings between Iran and Afghanistan were reportedly closed on 16 August 2021 for Afghans, except for those holding valid passports and Iranian visas.⁵¹⁶ This was reportedly still the case as of November 2021.⁵¹⁷ In April 2022, DW further reported that Afghans were sent back to Afghanistan at the three official border crossings.⁵¹⁸ UNHCR indicated that most Afghans crossed the border irregularly⁵¹⁹ through unofficial border crossings.⁵²⁰ UNHCR reported that irregular border crossings had increased since July 2021. A majority of new Afghan arrivals into Iran reportedly occurred via informal crossing points in the eastern border provinces of Sistan and Baluchestan, South Khorasan, and Khorasan Razavi.⁵²¹

⁵⁰⁷ UNHCR, Afghanistan situation update – 1 August 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁰⁸ Mehr News Agency, Iran, Afghanistan to build new transit route, 18 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁹ The Khaama Press News Agency, Abresham Crossing Between Afghanistan & Iran Reopens After Nearly Two Weeks, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹⁰ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Update – 1 August 2022, 17 August 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁵¹¹ AsiaNews, Hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees in Iran, a humanitarian time-bomb also for Europe, 11 November 2021, [url](#); DW, Afghanen fliehen in den Iran trotz verstärkter Abschiebungen [Afghans flee to Iran despite a rise in deportations], 8 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹² Ridgeway and Stop the Traffik, Afghan Nationals in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia [source: local NGO worker], September 2022, [url](#), p. 16; Reuters, Iran Summons Afghan Envoy After Protesters Throw Rocks at Diplomatic Missions, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹³ Ridgeway and Stop the Traffik, Afghan Nationals in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia [source: local NGO worker], September 2022, [url](#), p. 16

⁵¹⁴ DW, Afghanen fliehen in den Iran trotz verstärkter Abschiebungen [Afghans flee to Iran despite a rise in deportations], 8 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹⁵ Ridgeway and Stop the Traffik, Afghan Nationals in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia [sources: local NGO worker in August 2022 and member of an international humanitarian organisation in August 2022], September 2022, [url](#), p. 16

⁵¹⁶ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022; [url](#), p. 45

⁵¹⁷ BNN Bloomberg, Europe Urged to Do More to Help Afghan Refugees Arriving in Iran, 11 November 2021, [url](#)

⁵¹⁸ DW, Afghanen fliehen in den Iran trotz verstärkter Abschiebungen [Afghans flee to Iran despite a rise in deportations], 8 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹⁹ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Update – 15 February 2022, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 3; TNH, For desperate Afghans, risky crossings into Iran are worth chancing, 17 May 2022, [url](#)

⁵²⁰ UNHCR Iran, New Arrivals from Afghanistan – 29 January 2022, 31 January 2022, [url](#); USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022; [url](#), p. 45; WSJ, Iran Steps Up Deportations of Afghans Trying to Flee Taliban and Poverty, 12 December 2021, [url](#)

⁵²¹ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan – 2021 Final Report, 31 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7



Most refugees crossed the border ‘with the help of smugglers’.⁵²² Media sources reported of Afghan men, women⁵²³, young men⁵²⁴, and children,⁵²⁵ who had crossed or attempted to cross the border into Iran.⁵²⁶

Sources indicated that the Afghan city of Zaranj in Nimroz province was a hub for human smuggling.⁵²⁷ According to independent researcher David Mansfield⁵²⁸ interviewed in July 2021 by RFE/RL’s Gandhara, 450 pickup vehicles carrying around 10 000 people were leaving Zaranj daily, which amounted to almost a ‘doubling of departures since the announcement of the U.S. withdrawal, with significant increases following the Taliban’s advance’.⁵²⁹ According to human smugglers in Zaranj, 5 000 to 6 000 individuals were daily crossing the border, amounting to a fourfold of the numbers before the Taliban takeover in August 2021.⁵³⁰ In November 2021, NRC reported with reference to ‘locally reported figures’ that between 4 000 and 5 000 Afghans were crossing Iran daily via informal border crossings.⁵³¹ UNHCR in September 2022 also reported with reference to authorities, that 4 000 to 5 000 irregular arrivals of Afghans into Iran had been reported, indicating in a map legend that this was ‘up to three times the previously estimated daily average’.⁵³² However, NRC’s Jan Egeland in November 2021 reportedly pointed out that it was not possible to track or register the crossings due to insufficient resources.⁵³³

According to a December 2021 WSJ article, many Afghans entered Iran via smuggling routes through the desert in Nimroz province at the meeting point of the borders of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.⁵³⁴ The most common trafficking route started at the Zaranj border crossing and continued to the Pakistani border and then into Iran,⁵³⁵ and in some cases via northwest Iran into Van province in Turkey.⁵³⁶ From Zaranj, the vehicles drove to the Pakistani border city

⁵²² USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022; [url](#), p. 45

⁵²³ Akins, Matthieu, ‘We’ve Never Been Smuggled Before’, New York Times (The), 14 February 2022, [url](#); Guardian (The), ‘I will reach Europe or die’: three stories of Afghan refugees in Turkey, 7 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵²⁴ Print (The), Heroin and human trafficking are the only two sectors of Afghanistan economy still thriving, 19 December 2021, [url](#)

⁵²⁵ Guardian (The), ‘I will reach Europe or die’: three stories of Afghan refugees in Turkey, 7 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵²⁶ Akins, Matthieu, ‘We’ve Never Been Smuggled Before’, New York Times (The), 14 February 2022, [url](#); Guardian (The), ‘I will reach Europe or die’: three stories of Afghan refugees in Turkey, 7 September 2022, [url](#); Print (The), Heroin and human trafficking are the only two sectors of Afghanistan economy still thriving, 19 December 2021, [url](#)

⁵²⁷ AFP, Freedom’s choice for Afghans: Over the wall or through the desert, 16 March 2022; RFE/RL/Gandhara, ‘We Don’t Have A Choice’: Thousands Of Afghans Fleeing Abroad Daily As Taliban Violence Soars, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

⁵²⁸ Mansfield, D. authored an upcoming report for the Overseas Development Institute, a Britain-based think tank that maps the revenue sources of different actors in the Afghan conflict, including the lucrative people-smuggling trade; RFE/RL/Gandhara, ‘We Don’t Have A Choice’: Thousands Of Afghans Fleeing Abroad Daily As Taliban Violence Soars, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

⁵²⁹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, ‘We Don’t Have A Choice’: Thousands Of Afghans Fleeing Abroad Daily As Taliban Violence Soars, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

⁵³⁰ AFP, Freedom’s choice for Afghans: Over the wall or through the desert, 16 March 2022

⁵³¹ NRC, Humanitarian needs in Iran rise as 300,000 Afghans arrive since Taliban takeover, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

⁵³² UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Update – 1 September 2022, 27 September 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁵³³ BNN Bloomberg, Europe Urged to Do More to Help Afghan Refugees Arriving in Iran, 11 November 2021, [url](#)

⁵³⁴ WSJ, Iran Steps Up Deportations of Afghans Trying to Flee Taliban and Poverty, 12 December 2021, [url](#)

⁵³⁵ AFP, Freedom’s choice for Afghans: Over the wall or through the desert, 16 March 2022; TNH, For desperate Afghans, risky crossings into Iran are worth chancing, 17 May 2022, [url](#); Mansfield, D., People smuggling is booming in Afghanistan, 14 October 2021, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, ‘We Don’t Have A Choice’: Thousands Of Afghans Fleeing Abroad Daily As Taliban Violence Soars, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

⁵³⁶ Ridgeway and Stop the Traffik, Afghan Nationals in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia [sources: local NGO worker, member of an international humanitarian organisation, and research specialist in Turkey working for an



Dak in Baluchistan province. There, the refugees were reportedly transferred into new vehicles. Then, they were driven to Iran through the Baluchistan desert and across the reportedly inhospitable⁵³⁷ Mashkel Mountains.⁵³⁸ Other sources reported that the refugees were handed over to other traffickers upon arrival at the Pakistani border, where they would walk to the Iranian border by foot.⁵³⁹ Crossing the Pakistani desert was dangerous for Hazaras because of activities of fighters of the radical Sunni group Jundallah in the desert.⁵⁴⁰ A Hazara man interviewed by AFP in March 2022 claimed that the group had beheaded individuals in the past, before having switched to abducting people in demand for a ransom. A September 2021 MEE article mentions that so-called 'Shootis, usually domestically manufactured Peugeot 405s', transported 'undocumented migrants between the Iran-Pakistan border and large Iranian cities such as Zahedan, Kerman, Yazd and Tehran'.⁵⁴¹

A September 2022 report by Ridgeway and Stop the Traffik indicated that 'a smaller number of Afghan nationals [...] directly cross the Afghanistan-Iran border' instead of taking the journey to Iran via Pakistan.⁵⁴² AFP mentioned that some Afghans crossed the border wall in Zaranj at night into Iran. The wall was five metres high and protected at the top with barbed wire and watchtowers with armed border guards.⁵⁴³ In an August 2022 report, AI mentioned that the wall in Nimroz province was two metres high.⁵⁴⁴ AFP reported that traffickers bribed border guards 'to turn a blind eye to those scaling the walls at night'. However, the traffickers sometimes reportedly deceived the refugees. Citing several Taliban fighters from the region, AFP reported, that between September 2021 and March 2022, in the area, around 70 to 80 people had been 'killed by Iranian bullets'.⁵⁴⁵ According to AI, some Afghans attempted to cross the border by crawling underneath a fence near the official Islam Qala border crossing in Herat province.⁵⁴⁶

David Mansfield stated that the journey through Pakistan into Iran was hard. There were reports of Afghans having been 'arrested, beaten, shot at, and even killed by border guards, smugglers, and criminal gangs. Others have drowned or died of illness and exhaustion'.⁵⁴⁷ As reported by Ridgeway and Stop the Traffik in September 2022, 'Afghan nationals attempting to cross the Iranian border face a number of dangers and challenging conditions including a

international NGO in August 2022], September 2022, [url](#), p. 16; AI, 'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁵³⁷ RFE/RL/Gandhara, 'We Don't Have A Choice': Thousands Of Afghans Fleeing Abroad Daily As Taliban Violence Soars, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

⁵³⁸ RFE/RL/Gandhara, 'Escaping Afghanistan: People-Smuggling Thrives On Bribes To Taliban', 27 May 2022, [url](#); Mansfield, D., 'People smuggling is booming in Afghanistan', 14 October 2021, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, 'We Don't Have A Choice': Thousands Of Afghans Fleeing Abroad Daily As Taliban Violence Soars, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

⁵³⁹ TNH, 'For desperate Afghans, risky crossings into Iran are worth chancing', 17 May 2022, [url](#); AFP, 'Freedom's choice for Afghans: Over the wall or through the desert', 16 March 2022

⁵⁴⁰ AFP, 'Freedom's choice for Afghans: Over the wall or through the desert', 16 March 2022; Akins, Matthieu, 'We've Never Been Smuggled Before', New York Times (The), 14 February 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴¹ MEE, 'Nothing is certain': The precarious lives of Afghans in Iran, 18 September 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁴² Ridgeway and Stop the Traffik, 'Afghan Nationals in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia' [local NGO worker, member of an international humanitarian organisation, and research specialist in Turkey working for an international NGO in August 2022], September 2022, [url](#), p. 16

⁵⁴³ AFP, 'Freedom's choice for Afghans: Over the wall or through the desert', 16 March 2022

⁵⁴⁴ AI, 'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁴⁵ AFP, 'Freedom's choice for Afghans: Over the wall or through the desert', 16 March 2022

⁵⁴⁶ AI, 'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁴⁷ RFE/RL/Gandhara, 'We Don't Have A Choice': Thousands Of Afghans Fleeing Abroad Daily As Taliban Violence Soars, 26 July 2021, [url](#)



lack of food and potable water, poor accommodation, dangerous transportation, a lack of gender sensitivity and privacy for washroom facilities, and lack of access to healthcare.⁵⁴⁸ Reuters further reported frequent clashes between Taliban forces and Iranian forces at the border of the two countries.⁵⁴⁹ On 26 August 2021, analyst and consultant David Ramin Jalilvand stated in an interview with FES that Afghan refugees were sometimes prevented from crossing the border with the use of force, which had repeatedly led to fatalities.⁵⁵⁰ USDOS reported in July 2022 that the Government of Iran had introduced legislation allowing security officers to 'open fire on vehicles suspected of transporting' undocumented migrants.⁵⁵¹ Iranian authorities have been accused of mistreating Afghans at the border⁵⁵², such as by beating,⁵⁵³ harassment,⁵⁵⁴ shooting⁵⁵⁵ or threatening to shoot⁵⁵⁶ and taking away money.⁵⁵⁷ There were also reports of killings of Afghan individuals by Iranian authorities.⁵⁵⁸ Torture by human traffickers⁵⁵⁹ and road accidents⁵⁶⁰ as well as sexual harassment by 'bandits' of women and girls travelling alone⁵⁶¹ were also reported. Thieves posed another security threat in the border area.⁵⁶² The New Humanitarian, in May 2022, also mentioned reports of migrants who had been robbed while on the road in Pakistan.⁵⁶³ As for potential victims of human trafficking, USDOS, in its July 2022 Human Trafficking Report on Iran, stated that the Iranian government 'did not make efforts to screen for or identify trafficking victims [...] prior to detainment or deportation' of Afghan refugees. Afghan children, aged 14 to 17, who

⁵⁴⁸ Ridgeway and Stop the Traffik, Afghan Nationals in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia [source: member of international humanitarian organisation on 18 August 2022], September 2022, [url](#), p. 17

⁵⁴⁹ Reuters, One dead in clashes between Taliban, Iran border forces, Afghan police official says, 31 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁰ FES, „Afghanische Geflüchtete sind in Iran mit vielfältigen Diskriminierungen konfrontiert“ [“Afghan refugees face multiple forms of discrimination in Iran”], 26 August 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁵¹ USDOS, Country Report on Trafficking in Persons for 2021 – Iran, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵² Al, 'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 5; Al Jazeera, What does the future hold for Afghan refugees in Iran?, 12 June 2022, [url](#); Arab News, Taliban raise concerns over 'brutal treatment' of Afghan refugees in Iran, 13 April 2022 [url](#); RFE/RL, 'Disgusting And Heartbreaking': New Videos Put Spotlight On Mistreatment Of Afghan Refugees In Iran, 8 April 2022, [url](#); MEE, Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home, 12 March 2022, [url](#); TOLONews, Scores of Iran-Bound Afghan Refugees Killed, 100s Beaten: Locals, 8 February 2022, [url](#); AFP, Afghans flock to Iranian border, but few can cross, 9 October 2021

⁵⁵³ Al Jazeera, What does the future hold for Afghan refugees in Iran?, 12 June 2022, [url](#); Arab News, Taliban raise concerns over 'brutal treatment' of Afghan refugees in Iran, 13 April 2022 [url](#); RFE/RL, 'Disgusting And Heartbreaking': New Videos Put Spotlight On Mistreatment Of Afghan Refugees In Iran, 8 April 2022, [url](#); MEE, Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home, 12 March 2022, [url](#); TOLONews, Scores of Iran-Bound Afghan Refugees Killed, 100s Beaten: Locals, 8 February 2022, [url](#); AFP, Afghans flock to Iranian border, but few can cross, 9 October 2021

⁵⁵⁴ RFE/RL, 'Disgusting And Heartbreaking': New Videos Put Spotlight On Mistreatment Of Afghan Refugees In Iran, 8 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁵ Al, 'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 5; MEE, Afghan refugees routinely killed by gunfire while trying to cross into Iran and Turkey, report says, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁶ Arab News, Taliban raise concerns over 'brutal treatment' of Afghan refugees in Iran, 13 April 2022 [url](#)

⁵⁵⁷ AFP, Afghans flock to Iranian border, but few can cross, 9 October 2021

⁵⁵⁸ Al, 'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 5; TNH, For desperate Afghans, risky crossings into Iran are worth chancing, 17 May 2022, [url](#); TOLONews, Scores of Iran-Bound Afghan Refugees Killed, 100s Beaten: Locals, 8 February 2022, [url](#); AFP, Afghans flock to Iranian border, but few can cross, 9 October 2021

⁵⁵⁹ TOLONews, Afghan Migrants Murdered, Abused by Human Traffickers: Officials, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁰ WSJ, Iran Steps Up Deportations of Afghans Trying to Flee Taliban and Poverty, 12 December 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁶¹ Guardian (The), 'I will reach Europe or die': three stories of Afghan refugees in Turkey, 7 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶² Ridgeway and Stop the Traffik, Afghan Nationals in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia [source: member of international humanitarian organisation on 18 August 2022], September 2022, [url](#), p. 17

⁵⁶³ TNH, For desperate Afghans, risky crossings into Iran are worth chancing, 17 May 2022, [url](#)



entered Iran with the help of smugglers in the hope to find work, were turned over by the latter 'to employers who force them to work'. USDOS further indicated that the 'increase in Afghan migrants entering Iran, following the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, likely includes a greater number of unaccompanied and undocumented Afghan children seeking employment in Iran, which may increase their vulnerability to exploitation'.⁵⁶⁴

According to a September 2021 article by MEI, it was not difficult for refugees to cross the Turkish border from Iran under 'normal circumstances,' because Iranians did not require a visa to enter the country. However, Turkey had finished large parts of a planned '241-km, three-meter-high concrete wall' along the border to Iran to prevent Afghan refugees from entering into Turkey.⁵⁶⁵ According to AI, it was common for Afghans who attempted to cross the Iranian-Turkish border, to experience 'pushbacks and other violations by Turkish security forces',⁵⁶⁶ such as beatings.⁵⁶⁷ The source reported that Turkish security forces used firearms and shot at people who tried to cross the border,⁵⁶⁸ which had resulted in instances of killing by Turkish security forces, including of teenagers. Furthermore, AI had documented 'instances of torture or other ill-treatment by Turkish security forces'.⁵⁶⁹ According to an Afghan official of the department of Refugees and Repatriation of Herat cited by TOLONews in August 2022, Afghans in Turkey were furthermore harassed by thieves.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁴ USDOS, Country Report on Trafficking in Persons for 2021 – Iran, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁵ MEI, The Afghan refugee crisis: What does it mean for Iran?, 20 September 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁶ AI, 'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁶⁷ AI, 'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 8; RFE/RL/Gandhara, Fleeing Afghans Who Reach Turkey Get No Respite From Violence, Persecution, 5 September 2022, [url](#); WSJ, Iran Steps Up Deportations of Afghans Trying to Flee Taliban and Poverty, 12 December 2021, [url](#); MEE, Afghan refugees routinely killed by gunfire while trying to cross into Iran and Turkey, report says, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁸ AI, 'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), pp. 20-23; MEE, Afghan refugees routinely killed by gunfire while trying to cross into Iran and Turkey, report says, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁹ AI, 'They don't treat us like humans': Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), pp. 5, 7, 8

⁵⁷⁰ TOLONews, Afghan Migrants Murdered, Abused by Human Traffickers: Officials, 11 August 2022, [url](#)



4. Internal mobility and socio-economic situation of Afghan refugees in Iran

4.1. Freedom of movement

Iran acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention in 1976, however, made reservations to four articles, including Article 17 (wage-earning employment) and 26 (freedom of movement), considering them ‘recommendations only’.⁵⁷¹ Already in 2001, the Iranian government had decided to restrict the freedom of movement of foreign nationals, including Afghans, who until then had been able to move freely in Iran. According to a report on Afghans in Iran by the University of Turku, Finland, of February 2020, the policy foresaw the establishment of full and partial no-go areas (NGAs), banning Afghans from living or travelling in these provinces, or restricting their presence there. This policy has reportedly been implemented since 2007, turning 17 of Iran’s 31 provinces into full NGAs, and 11 provinces into partial NGAs.⁵⁷² No information could be found on whether these figures correspond to the actual number of full and partial no-go areas in place in the reference period of this report. According to a map published by UNHCR on its website showing the no-go areas for Afghan nationals in Iran as of 19 September 2022, such areas did appear to extend over a considerable part of the country, however, no exact figures were provided. Afghans were not allowed to travel or reside in these areas.⁵⁷³ Afghans holding an *Amayesh* card and wishing to travel outside the province where they were registered, had to obtain permission first,⁵⁷⁴ and apply for a temporary Laissez-passer (LP) document at their respective provincial office of the Iranian Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA).⁵⁷⁵

Similarly, researchers Jussi Jauhiainen from the University of Turku, Finland, and Davood Eyvazlu from the Iranian Sharif University of Technology, noted in an October 2020 peer-reviewed article about social media use by Afghans in Iran, that refugees living in government-run settlements, so-called guest cities or ‘guest settlements’ (also called ‘guest towns’ or ‘guest cities’), needed permission by the settlement’s manager if they wanted to leave the area where the guest settlement was located and travel to another county or province. Moreover, they needed permission from the central authorities if they wanted to permanently leave the guest settlement.⁵⁷⁶ Similar information was reported by Afghans born in guest cities who were interviewed in an article by September 2021 Middle East Eye.⁵⁷⁷ According to information provided by UNHCR on its website, *Amayesh* card holders were not allowed to obtain a driving licence, including for a motorcycle. It was therefore illegal for a refugee to drive a vehicle. Persons holding an Afghan passport and an Iranian visa, however,

⁵⁷¹ UNHCR, State parties, including reservations and declarations, to the 1951 Refugee Convention, September 2019, [url](#), p. 9

⁵⁷² Jauhiainen, J. et al., Afghans in Iran: Migration Patterns and Aspirations, 2020, [url](#), p. 22

⁵⁷³ UNHCR, Help Iran: What are the movement restrictions for Afghan and Iraqi nationals in Iran?, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁷⁴ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 44

⁵⁷⁵ UNHCR, Help Iran: What are the movement restrictions for Afghan and Iraqi nationals in Iran?, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁷⁶ Jauhiainen, J. and Eyvazlu, D., Entrepreneurialism through Self-Management in Afghan Guest Towns in Iran, 22 October 2020, [url](#), p. 8;

⁵⁷⁷ MEE, ‘Nothing is certain’: The precarious lives of Afghans in Iran, 18 September 2021, [url](#)



were entitled to obtain a driving licence and also enjoyed greater freedom of movement within Iran.⁵⁷⁸

Undocumented Afghan nationals who had participated in the 2022 ‘headcount exercise’ were only permitted to stay and travel within their registered province and were banned from travelling to other areas and provinces.⁵⁷⁹ The headcount exercise was a census scheme for undocumented Afghans in Iran to register until 30 June 2022 and upon payment of a fee with the authorities. They would then receive a temporary residence slip⁵⁸⁰ granting them some access to services and protection against deportation.⁵⁸¹ By the end of August 2022, approximately 2.2 million Afghan nationals had been registered and received temporary headcount LPs.⁵⁸²

4.2. Education

More than 470 000 Afghan children, including 138 000 undocumented children, were enrolled in primary and secondary schools during the 2020-21 academic year. However, while the Iranian government claimed that Afghan children’s access to schools was granted, media reports indicated that Afghans continued to face difficulties in getting access to education⁵⁸³ Moreover, many Afghan refugee children were unable to obtain identity documents although they were born in Iran. These children were often not able to attend schools or get access to other basic government services. School enrolment among refugees was in general higher outside the 20 refugee settlements, where more resources were available,⁵⁸⁴ and where 96 % of the refugees lived.⁵⁸⁵

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) noted in November 2021 that Afghan children in Iran were able to enrol in public schools regardless of the legal status of their parents.⁵⁸⁶ UNHCR Iran informed on its website that Iran began to allow the access of undocumented Afghan children to primary and secondary education in 2015. To enrol in a school, undocumented foreign nationals needed a special education protection paper – a so-called ‘education support card’ or ‘blue card’ - that was issued by the BAFIA and which served only for enrolment in schools in the province where it was issued. The document contained personal information as declared by the applicant and was valid for one year, according to UNHCR.⁵⁸⁷ Blue card holders had to register with a government website in order to receive an appointment for the renewal of their cards. They could, however, still enrol with the old blue

⁵⁷⁸ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁷⁹ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement: For the attention of undocumented Afghan nationals who participated in the headcount exercise, 3 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁰ UNHCR, Help Iran: Headcount Exercise, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁸¹ UNHCR, Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and Response in Iran 16 May – 15 June 2022, 5 July 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁸² UNHCR Iran, Afghanistan Situation Response in Iran – 31 August 2022, 29 September 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁸³ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 47

⁵⁸⁴ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 67

⁵⁸⁵ UNHCR, Islamic Republic of Iran – 2021 Plan Summary, 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁶ NRC, Humanitarian needs in Iran rise as 300,000 Afghans arrive since Taliban takeover, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁷ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)



card for the new school year and obtain a new card for the current year afterwards.⁵⁸⁸ Pupils who were registered in the latest headcount plan (see above) were required to register at a school at their place of residence with the headcount slip and the results of a medical examination, after which they would receive an educational support card.⁵⁸⁹ The card prevented the child's parents from being deported from Iran, according to a country report by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs of May 2022. Afghan children were allowed to attend primary and secondary school without having to pay any school fees, although sometimes schools might ask parents to contribute to school uniforms, textbooks or other items.⁵⁹⁰ Researcher Hamed Seddighi noted in a co-authored article that some Afghan families hardly could afford such contributions as well as other costs related to schooling, including the necessary equipment to attend online-classes introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic.⁵⁹¹ Similarly, UNHCR reported in April 2022 on Afghan refugees struggling to pay for school-related expenses increasing the risk of children being taken out of school and sent to work. The UN World Food Programme's (WFP) school feeding programme reportedly provided daily school meals to 7 500 refugee pupils in 20 settlements across the country.⁵⁹² Other UNHCR-supported educational programmes reportedly included literacy training for 7 000 refugees by the Literacy Movement Organisation of Iran (LMO) and the DAFI⁵⁹³ scholarship programme providing financial assistance to about 510 refugee students.⁵⁹⁴

A law in 2020 allowed Iranian women married to foreigners to pass their citizenship to their children, thus giving the children of Iranian women and Afghan men access to education similar to Iranian children.⁵⁹⁵ Until then, children of mixed marriages had been granted citizenship only in case the father was Iranian. The new law allows Iranian mothers to apply for citizenship for their children until they reached the age of 18 years. Children over 18 years could apply for citizenship themselves. In both cases, a security check is required.⁵⁹⁶ In the first six months since the law was passed in May 2020, about 75 000 people had reportedly applied for ID cards based on the new law. In total, between 50 000 and 200 000 children of non-Iranian fathers may have been affected by the lack of identity documents, who until then had been deprived of many basic rights, including the right to attend school.⁵⁹⁷

Access to higher education remained restricted. *Amayesh* card holders who wanted to study at an Iranian university had to renounce their refugee status and obtain an Afghan passport

⁵⁸⁸ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on enrolment of foreign students nationals without documents, 14 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁹ UNHCR, Help Iran: BAFIA announcement: School registration of students who participated in the Headcount plan, 21 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁰ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen ambtsbericht Iran [Country report Iran], May 2022, [url](#), p. 103

⁵⁹¹ Seddighi, H. et al., Education of Afghan refugee children in Iran: A structured review of policies, 11 August 2022, [url](#), p. 11; UNHCR, Afghan girl who waited years for school refuses to let her enthusiasm wane, 2 September 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁹² UNHCR Iran, UNHCR and WFP help refugee children stay in school and reach for their dreams, 10 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁹³ Deutsche Akademische Flüchtlingsinitiative Albert Einstein (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative)

⁵⁹⁴ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet January – May 2022, 6 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁵⁹⁵ Seddighi, H. et al., Education of Afghan refugee children in Iran: A structured review of policies, 11 August 2022, [url](#), pp. 6, 9-10

⁵⁹⁶ Radio Farda, Children With Iranian Mothers, Foreign Fathers To Receive Citizenship, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁷ MEE, Iran issues first ID cards to children born to foreign fathers, 5 December 2020, [url](#)



with student visa.⁵⁹⁸ This required male Afghan aspiring students to return to Afghanistan and apply from there for a student visa before being able to re-enter Iran as students. Female Afghan students had the alternative option to go to the Iranian Kish Island to obtain a student visa.⁵⁹⁹ According to a October 2021 announcement by the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research and Technology and given the ‘still volatile’ situation in Afghanistan, *Amayesh* card holders, including males, who needed to replace their card with a passport and student visa, no longer had to return to Afghanistan, but could do so from Kish Island.⁶⁰⁰ Nevertheless, UNHCR noted in a report covering the period January to May 2022, that it had facilitated the repatriation of 124 Afghans, with 29 % of these returnees being individuals who were returning to Afghanistan to obtain student visas to enrol at an Iranian university.⁶⁰¹ In a separate report and with reference only to January 2022, UNHCR suggested the return of some Afghan refugees to Afghanistan to get a student visa for Iran – instead of going to Kish Island - could be associated with the voluntary package assistance they received.⁶⁰² As of 17 November 2022, Afghan students could still apply for a student visa in Kish Island.⁶⁰³

4.3. Employment and livelihoods

According to USDOS, only refugees with work permits issued by the government were able to work.⁶⁰⁴ Similarly, UNHCR noted that *Amayesh* card holders – who were entitled to stay in a province for a limited period of time – could apply for a work permit. If a permit was granted, *Amayesh* card holders were allowed to work in certain predefined fields. Passport and visa holders had more access to job opportunities,⁶⁰⁵ while undocumented immigrants were not permitted to apply for a temporary work permit and thus not able to seek legal employment in Iran.⁶⁰⁶ According to information provided on the website of the e-visa department of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), two documents were needed by individuals applying for a temporary work visa, including a labour certificate from a ‘sponsor employer’ in Iran, approved by the Labour Ministry, and the visa application. Eligible for submitting an application were specific professional groups such as skilled workers, medical or industrial specialists, and engineers.⁶⁰⁷

Employment restrictions for Afghan refugees were introduced in 2004, according to an article from August 2022 by Sussan Siavoshi, Professor of International Affairs at Trinity University, Texas. Only four categories of menial jobs were subsequently available to Afghan refugees.⁶⁰⁸ ACAPS noted in March 2021 that *Amayesh* card holders were limited to work in 87 different

⁵⁹⁸ Seddighi, H. et al., Education of Afghan refugee children in Iran: A structured review of policies, 11 August 2022, [url](#), p. 12; UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁹⁹ Jauhainen, J. et al., Afghans in Iran: Migration Patterns and Aspirations, 2020, [url](#), p. 26; ODVV, Human Rights Developments in Iran. Newsletter No. 31, November 2021, [url](#), p. 5

⁶⁰⁰ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on Student Visas, 26 October 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰¹ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet January – May 2022, 6 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁰² UNHCR, Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran 23 January 2022, 23 January 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁰³ International organisation, Correspondence with EUAA, 24 November 2022

⁶⁰⁴ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2021 – Iran, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 47

⁶⁰⁵ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁰⁶ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on Services Available for the Undocumented, 26 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁷ Iran, MoFA, E-Visa New Application – Directory of Visa Categories, 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁸ Siavoshi, S., Afghans in Iran: the state and the working of immigration policies, 24 August 2022, [url](#), p. 5



employment types, including construction, agriculture and other vocational industries. These job sectors in many cases offered only seasonal employment and were particularly vulnerable with regard to economic sanctions against Iran. In an article from September 2021, MEE reported that sectors open for employment to Afghan refugees also included lime and brick kilns and other jobs such as handling sewage, garbage, chemical waste or chemical fertilisers. These were jobs that Iranian citizens had little interest in doing, as MEE observed, while many Afghan refugees were not able to find employment related to their skills or education.⁶⁰⁹ Moreover, the fact that *Amayesh* card holders could only leave their province of residence for work if they had a temporary Laissez-passer (LP) further complicated their search for work, while some areas of residence were so small that it was difficult to find a job within that area.⁶¹⁰

An article by The New Humanitarian on Afghans trying to enter Iran noted that most undocumented Afghans took jobs in the fields of agriculture and construction.⁶¹¹ According to Fatemeh Aman, a non-resident senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, many undocumented Afghans were employed as seasonal workers by Iranian entrepreneurs, including for example pistachio producers, as cheap labourers for jobs where technology or equipment was not available. Seasonal workers were paid lower salaries than their Iranian counterparts and had neither health insurance nor a work contract making it easy to dismiss them on short notice. Due to a reduced demand for this kind of work in the past years (caused by the pandemic, economic stagnation, inflation and currency devaluation), many seasonal workers had left Iran, as they had no longer earned enough to send money home. Subsequently, the number of undocumented migrants leaving Iran in the period February to May 2021 was reportedly 94 000 fewer than the previous year. They had, however, begun to return with the Taliban's advance in 2021.⁶¹² *Amayesh* card holders faced economic pressure due to rising prices and reduced job opportunities.⁶¹³ An Afghan refugee in Iran stated that even an educated Afghan would only be able to earn about four million Iranian rials (EUR 95)⁶¹⁴ a month, if they were 'lucky'.⁶¹⁵ Lower participation rates in the renewal exercises for *Amayesh* cards indicated that many might face difficulties in affording the necessary fees. According to UNHCR, renewal fees constituted an average 8 % of a refugee's annual income, and women and girls faced a greater risk of being deprioritised when it came to choosing which household members would renew their *Amayesh* cards and therefore be allowed to apply for a work permit. Not renewing their cards, however, deprived individuals of services available only to card holders and increased their risk of labour exploitation as they had to rely on unstable daily labour. As UNHCR pointed out, this was particularly problematic for thousands of Afghan refugee children, many of whom were engaged in child labour to support their families in Iran.⁶¹⁶ USDOS reported in its 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report on Iran that 'Iranian and Afghan refugee and migrant children, orphans, and children who are homeless or use the streets as a

⁶⁰⁹ MEE, 'Nothing is certain': The precarious lives of Afghans in Iran, 18 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶¹⁰ Farzin, F. and Jadali, S., Freedom of movement of Afghan refugees in Iran, September 2013, [url](#), p. 85

⁶¹¹ TNH, For desperate Afghans, risky crossings into Iran are worth chancing, 17 May 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹² Aman, F., The Afghan refugee crisis: What does it mean for Iran?, MEI, 20 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶¹³ MEE, Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home, 12 March 2022, [url](#); UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Response Plan January – December 2022, 12 January 2022, [url](#), p. 18

⁶¹⁴ Exchange rate from European Commission, Exchange rate (InforEuro), n.d., [url](#), accessed on 30 September 2022

⁶¹⁵ MEE, Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home, 12 March 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹⁶ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Response Plan January – December 2022, 12 January 2022, [url](#), p. 18



source of livelihood in Iran are highly vulnerable to forced labour, and experts suggest child trafficking is increasing'.⁶¹⁷

4.4. Healthcare

According to UNHCR, primary health care was free for all irrespective of their documentation status.⁶¹⁸ Primary health care included vaccinations, prenatal care, maternal and child health, essential medicines and services such as family planning and was available at health posts established in refugee settlements and in urban areas with a large refugee population. In 2022, UNHCR was providing support (including the procurement of medicines) to 134 health posts. Moreover, in 26 of these health posts – most of them located in areas with a large refugee population – UNHCR was also paying for the personnel costs of essential health staff.⁶¹⁹ A study on pregnant Afghan women in Tehran and their access to prenatal care found that some undocumented women were reluctant to visit health centres, especially those run by the government, as they expressed the fear that they might be deported. This concern was particularly prominent in the context of giving birth, where the parents' identity documents were necessary for issuing a health record and birth certificate.⁶²⁰ While health centres and hospitals were obliged to issue delivery notes and birth certificates also to undocumented persons, in practice they might face problems obtaining such certificates without valid residence documents.⁶²¹

Since 2015, registered Afghan refugees⁶²² have been able to enrol in the national health insurance system through the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI) scheme. UPHI was supported by UNHCR upon agreement with the BAFIA and the Iranian Health Insurance Organisation (IHIO), and in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MoH).⁶²³ Expenses covered by the UPHI included hospital stays and para-clinical services (medicine, doctor's visits, radiology and testing) if provided by specific hospitals affiliated with the MoH or contracted with the IHIO, however, patients were required to pay a certain franchise fee depending on the service provided. Enrolment was family-based and subject to the payment of a monthly premium fee for each family member for at least 12 months and an annual administration fee.⁶²⁴ For the period February 2022 to February 2023, UNHCR announced that it would pay the entire insurance premium fee for about 120 000 of the most vulnerable⁶²⁵ refugees and their families.⁶²⁶ In general, UNHCR noted, neither undocumented migrants nor passport holders had access to UPHI, although there were some exceptions with regard to undocumented migrants in cases of extreme vulnerability.⁶²⁷ Passport holders with an Iranian

⁶¹⁷ USDOS, Country Report on Trafficking in Persons for 2021 – Iran, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹⁸ UNHCR, Help Iran: Announcement on Services Available for the Undocumented, 26 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶¹⁹ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet January – May 2022, 6 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁶²⁰ Dadras, O. et al., "It is good, but I can't afford it..." potential barriers to adequate prenatal care among Afghan women in Iran: a qualitative study in South Tehran, 6 May 2020, [url](#), p. 7

⁶²¹ UNHCR, Help Iran: Birth Registration, n.d., [url](#)

⁶²² That is, *Amayesh* card holders as well as those with a *Laissez-Passer* document. UNHCR Iran, Health Insurance for Refugees, n.d., [url](#)

⁶²³ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet January – May 2022, 6 July 2022, [url](#), p. 3; UNHCR, Help Iran: Health, n.d., [url](#)

⁶²⁴ UNHCR Iran, Health Insurance for Refugees, n.d., [url](#)

⁶²⁵ Including persons with certain diseases such as Haemophilia, Kidney Transplant, Multiple Sclerosis and others.

⁶²⁶ UNHCR Iran, Factsheet January – May 2022, 6 July 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁶²⁷ UNHCR, Help Iran: Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?, n.d., [url](#)



work visa, however, could apply for health insurance through the Social Security Insurance Organisation (SSO),⁶²⁸ a health insurance organisation that covers all those who are employed in the formal private sector as well as their dependents.⁶²⁹

According to UNHCR, refugees could get tested for Covid-19 free of charge at specific MoH-affiliated health centres. Moreover, foreign nationals, refugees and undocumented Afghans were reportedly included in the country's national deployment and vaccination plan.⁶³⁰ The Iranian newspaper Tehran Times, an English-language newspaper aiming 'to air the voice of the Islamic Revolution' reported in August 2021, that all Afghans over the age of 75 were eligible for free Covid-19 vaccination.⁶³¹

4.5. Housing, land and property rights

As of May 2022, 96 % of refugees in Iran were living in urban areas among Iranian communities, while 4 % of refugees lived in 20 refugee settlements in 12 provinces across Iran.⁶³² According to WFP, about 32 000 refugees were living in these settlements as of August 2022.⁶³³ The settlements are managed by BAFIA, the immigration office of the Iranian Ministry of Interior,⁶³⁴ and are known in Iran as 'guest cities' or 'guest towns' (in Farsi, *mehmanshahr*). Jauhiainen and Eyvazlu observed that this term referred on the one hand to the urban character of the settlements and on the other hand to the initial perception of Afghans refugees in Iran in the late 1970s as guests with an 'immediate and permanent right' to stay in Iran.⁶³⁵ In addition to these long-standing settlements, UNHCR reported on the development of a new refugee camp, Niatak, in Sistan and Baluchistan province, and of two transit centres - Mil 78 in South Khorasan and Dogharoon in Razavi Khorasan provinces, close to the border with Afghanistan.⁶³⁶ Moreover, UNHCR reported on government-run facilities along the Afghan border such as Al-Ghadir (Sistan and Baluchistan province), Sefid Sang, Fariman and Taybad (all Razavi Khorasan province) hosting new arrivals from Afghanistan.⁶³⁷ In contrast to older reports about restricted access to 'guest towns' (see above, section 4.1.) WFP noted in its annual report of 2021 that beneficiaries living in the 20 settlements faced no restrictions in entering and leaving these settlements.⁶³⁸ Movement regulations were apparently also in place in the reception/transition centre in Fariman, located close to the Afghan border in Razavi Khorasan province. UNHCR reported in June 2022 that newly arrived

⁶²⁸ UNHCR Iran, Health Insurance for Refugees, n.d., [url](#)

⁶²⁹ Bazyar, M. et al., What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of merging health insurance funds? A qualitative policy analysis from Iran, 31 August 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁶³⁰ UNHCR, COVID-19 response in the Islamic Republic of Iran December 2021, 14 April 2022, [url](#); UNHCR Iran, FAQ on Covid-19 Vaccination, n.d., [url](#)

⁶³¹ Tehran Times, UNHCR concerned by Afghan refugees fleeing to Iran, 10 August 2021, [url](#)

⁶³² UNHCR Iran, Factsheet January – May 2022, 6 July 2022, [url](#), p. 3. A map by UNHCR, indicating the locations of the 20 settlements as of December 2020, can be found here: UNHCR, Islamic Republic of Iran Refugee Settlements, 9 December 2020, [url](#)

⁶³³ WFP Iran, Country Brief August 2022, 21 September 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁶³⁴ UNHCR Iran, Refugees in Iran, n.d., [url](#)

⁶³⁵ Jauhiainen, J. and Eyvazlu, D., Entrepreneurialism through Self-Management in Afghan Guest Towns in Iran, 22 October 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁶³⁶ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan – 2021 Final Report, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁶³⁷ UNHCR, Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and Response in Iran 19 October 2021, 19 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 1-3

⁶³⁸ WFP, Iran (Islamic Republic of) Annual Country Report 2021, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 16



Afghans had been allowed to move to the nearby town of Mashhad and received Laissez-Passers (LPs) to leave the centre.⁶³⁹ In March 2022, the government had relocated some Afghans from Fariman to the Torbat-e-Jam refugee settlement. As space in the settlement was limited and facilities inadequate, UNHCR informed that it was working with its partners on renovating and improving the settlement's infrastructure (such as shelters or communal water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)⁶⁴⁰ facilities) to meet the needs of the growing number of inhabitants.⁶⁴¹

The refugee settlements or 'guest towns' generally were situated on the outskirts of cities in Iran's central and eastern regions. Refugees were living in small brick houses, and the settlements had facilities such as schools, health centres, sewing workshops,⁶⁴² shops, places of worship and for leisure. Moreover, they had basic urban infrastructure, including electricity infrastructure and a sewage system. Since a government decision in 2003 that guest towns should become economically self-sustaining, each settlement has been jointly managed by a government-appointed Iranian manager and a refugee council from the respective settlement's inhabitants.⁶⁴³

UNHCR observed in a report from March 2022 that Afghans newly arriving in Iran were predominantly settling in urban centres, often living in overcrowded spaces.⁶⁴⁴ UNHCR and WFP noted that some of them might receive support from family members or other members of the Afghan community in their place of residence. WFP, however, indicated that those who do not have any support networks are 'vulnerable' to food insecurity or protection threats.⁶⁴⁵ Afghans in Iran were reportedly struggling with high rents;⁶⁴⁶ TOLONews reported on Afghans claiming that local officials in the Iranian province of Bushehr allegedly urged residents not to rent homes to Afghans.⁶⁴⁷ Al Jazeera noted in a June 2022 article that undocumented Afghans were not able to engage in certain activities such as buying a house or apartment.⁶⁴⁸ Although Iranian law banned foreigners, including Afghans, to buy or sell land, some Afghans did acquire real estate using Iranian citizens as their cover.⁶⁴⁹ A change of law after 2019 granted this right to foreigners having a company of their own, however not to individuals. In practice, it was difficult for refugees to own a business, albeit not impossible.⁶⁵⁰

⁶³⁹ UNHCR, Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and Response in Iran 16 May – 15 June 2022, 5 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁴⁰ NRC, NRC's operations in Iran, August 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁴¹ UNHCR Iran, Afghanistan Situation Response in Iran – 31 August 2022, 29 September 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁴² MEE, 'Nothing is certain': The precarious lives of Afghans in Iran, 18 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁴³ Jauhiainen, J. and Eyvazlu, D., Entrepreneurialism through Self-Management in Afghan Guest Towns in Iran, 22 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 2, 5

⁶⁴⁴ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan – 2021 Final Report, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁶⁴⁵ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan – 2021 Final Report, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; WFP, Iran (Islamic Republic of) Annual Country Report 2021, 31 March 2022, [url](#), p. 17

⁶⁴⁶ Hasht-e Subh, Unkind Neighbor: Afghanistan's Refugees Facing Challenges in Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#); TOLONews, Afghan Refugees in Iran, Pakistan Call for UNHCR to Act, 31 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁷ TOLONews, Afghan Refugees Say Iran Officials Not Allowing Them to Work, 3 April 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁸ Al Jazeera, What does the future hold for Afghan refugees in Iran?, 12 June 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁹ Radio Farda, Iran Official Says Afghans Should Be Barred From Becoming Employers, 22 December 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁰ Jauhiainen, J. and Eyvazlu, D., Entrepreneurialism through Self-Management in Afghan Guest Towns in Iran, 22 October 2020, [url](#), p. 10



4.6. Financial and communications services

4.6.1. Financial services

In June 2021, UNHCR reported that the Gol announced a new policy to formalize access to banking services for Afghan refugees in the country. Prior to the new policy, ‘some refugees could access banking services but most could not’.⁶⁵¹ In 2022, sources reported that undocumented Afghans are unable to⁶⁵² or face difficulties⁶⁵³ in opening bank accounts.

According to an article by the newspaper Shargh,⁶⁵⁴ in June 2022, the Gol, cut off banking services to foreigners in Iran, particularly affecting Afghan immigrants.⁶⁵⁵ According to a spokesman of the Central Bank of Iran, foreign nationals would only be able to make transactions (including card transfers and online shopping payments) of up to 100 million rial (converted to USD 305 in the article) per day. Once data on the identity of legal foreign nationals has been obtained and verified, access would resume to normal.⁶⁵⁶ Iran’s largest lender, Bank Melli, ordered its branches to stop processing money transfers to and from accounts held by foreign nationals.⁶⁵⁷

Since measures were taken in July 2022 in connection with combating the sale of flour on the black market, bread could only be bought with a banking card. Afghans residing illegally or legally in the country, were unable to buy bread in bakeries and had to borrow a card from a friend, their employer or their landlord. The article also notes that many Afghans had reportedly been summoned by banks, which forced them to receive their cash balance and close their accounts; a claim, the Central Bank denied, however. According to other sources quoted in the article also the bank cards of some legally resident Afghans were blocked. The article also cites Peyman Haghighat-Talab of the immigrant support association Diaran. According to him, in recent years, immigrants had faced problems with bank accounts several times.⁶⁵⁸ As of September 2022, these bank cards had been blocked for over two months. Some second and third generation Afghan immigrants with companies and online businesses were also affected by these measures, disrupting their businesses. According to Peyman Haghighat-Talab, the measure led to a new phenomenon. Some Afghans started renting cards from Iranians for a monthly fee, risking that the official cardholder may steal money from the renter.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵¹ UNHCR, Iran policy change gives refugees access to banking services, 8 June 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁵² Al Jazeera, What does the future hold for Afghan refugees in Iran?, 12 June 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵³ AA, How Taliban takeover complicated Iran’s refugee crisis, 20 June 2022, [url](#); MEE, Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home, 12 March 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁴ The article was translated and published by Courrier International, a French newspaper which translates and publishes excerpts of articles from about 1500 international newspapers. Courrier International, Qui sommes-nous ? [About us], [url](#)

⁶⁵⁵ Courrier International, Enquête. En Iran, les Afghans privés de carte bancaire et de pain [Survey. Afghans denied bank cards and bread in Iran], 15 September 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁶ Pars Today, Iran’s central bank limits access of foreigners to banking services, 2 July 2022, [url](#); IRNA, CBI: Authorized foreign nationals provided with banking services in Iran, 2 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁷ Pars Today, Iran’s central bank limits access of foreigners to banking services, 2 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁸ Exchange rate from European Commission, Exchange rate (InforEuro), n.d., [url](#), accessed on 10 October 2022

⁶⁵⁹ Courrier International, Enquête. En Iran, les Afghans privés de carte bancaire et de pain [Survey. Afghans denied bank cards and bread in Iran], 15 September 2022, [url](#)



4.6.2. Communications services

In November 2018, Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology, Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi, said that Afghans with proper papers could use services offered by Iranian mobile operators. For registering a SIM in Iran, a passport or resident permit must be provided to the operators.⁶⁶⁰ More recent sources reported in 2022 that undocumented Afghans are unable⁶⁶¹ or face difficulties⁶⁶² in purchasing SIM cards for mobile phones.

According to a study⁶⁶³ on internet and social media use of Afghans in Iran, 83 % of the legally authorized Afghans had a mobile phone with internet access. They mostly lived in large cities with full mobile network coverage. Refugees living in camps had the lowest share with 54.5 %, also due to poor network coverage in some camps. 72 % of undocumented immigrants had a mobile phone with internet access. Of all respondents, 25 % had no mobile phone with internet access and 23.7 % of all respondents were not satisfied with the internet access.⁶⁶⁴ According to the study, many undocumented Afghans 'did not know the tricks [to overcome the regulations] to obtaining a proper SIM card, resulting in using the Internet less'.⁶⁶⁵

4.7. Legal aid and support services

UNHCR Iran, in collaboration with the BAFIA, provided legal assistance to refugees and asylum seekers in two ways: either through UNHCR-hired lawyers (UHL) or through Dispute Settlement Committees (DSC). UHLs provided free-of-charge legal assistance to all persons of concern for UNHCR, documented and undocumented persons equally, regardless of their nationality. DSCs, on the other hand, were only available to *Amayesh* card holders facing legal disputes with other Afghans or Iranian nationals. DSCs were operated by the BAFIA and were usually based in the BAFIA's provincial offices.⁶⁶⁶ UNHCR-hired lawyers participating in DSC meetings would support *Amayesh* card holders in resolving disputes through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.⁶⁶⁷ According to UNHCR, in the period January to June 2022, 16 DSCs and 17 UHLs were working across the country and had provided legal aid to 2 048 persons supported by UHLs and 568 persons supported through DSCs respectively.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁰ Financial Tribune, Afghans With Bona Fide Can Buy SIM Cards in Iran, 18 November 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁶¹ Al Jazeera, What does the future hold for Afghan refugees in Iran?, 12 June 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁶² AA, How Taliban takeover complicated Iran's refugee crisis, 20 June 2022, [url](#); MEE, Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home, 12 March 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁶³ The data used in the study is based on a survey of 2 003 Afghans living in Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, Kerman, smaller urban areas and villages in the provinces of Kerman and Razavi Khorasan, and four guest settlements in different parts of Iran. 60.5 % of the respondents had a refugee status, 22.3 % had another legal authorisation to stay in Iran and 17.2 % had no legal permission to stay in Iran. Data was collected in October 2017 and in the period June to September 2019. Jauhiainen, J. et al., Digital divides, the Internet and social media uses among Afghans in Iran, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁶⁴ Jauhiainen, J. et al., Digital divides, the Internet and social media uses among Afghans in Iran, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 5

⁶⁶⁵ Jauhiainen, J. et al., Digital divides, the Internet and social media uses among Afghans in Iran, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁶⁶ UNHCR, Help Iran: Legal Services (UNHCR-Hired Lawyers and Dispute Settlement Committees), n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁶⁷ UNHCR Iran, Legal Support, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁶⁸ UNHCR Iran, Protection Dashboard - Jan to Jun 2022, 23 August 2022, [url](#), p. 4



UNHCR reported on the detention and deportation of Afghans who had illegally entered Iran or had been apprehended without valid documents.⁶⁶⁹ AI noted in a report of August 2022 that under Iranian law, illegally entering the country was punishable by imprisonment or a fine. However, according to individuals interviewed for the report who had been detained, Iranian authorities had not provided detainees with any information on the reasons for detention, or on available legal remedies. Moreover, none of the interviewees had had access to a lawyer, nor did they ask for legal aid, either for lack of knowledge about their rights or out of fear. None had the possibility to challenge the detention before a judge, according to AI.⁶⁷⁰

Other support services offered by UNHCR Iran included counselling of ‘refugees, asylum-seekers and persons at risk of statelessness with protection concerns’ as well as psycho-social counselling, especially for highly vulnerable persons.⁶⁷¹ For the latter purpose, one part-time counsellor was hired per office (field office Tehran, field unit Isfahan, and sub-offices Kerman, Mashhad and Shiraz) and 872 persons had received psycho-social counselling in the first six months of 2022.⁶⁷² UNHCR also provided support in resettlement cases and with voluntary returns to Afghanistan,⁶⁷³ the latter, however, only to *Amayesh* card holders and mandate Afghan refugees registered with UNHCR.⁶⁷⁴ As of 31 August 2022, UNHCR had assisted in the voluntary return of 246 Afghans to their country of origin since the beginning of this year.⁶⁷⁵ Moreover, UNHCR collaborated with the Iranian government and local NGOs in several programmes aimed at improving the situation of Afghans in Iran, including technical and vocational training for refugees,⁶⁷⁶ as well as in the fields of health care (see above, section 4.4), and education (see above, section 4.2).⁶⁷⁷ In addition, UNHCR provided cash assistance to individuals and was engaged in awareness raising and information dissemination activities on issues such as resettlement, UNHCR services, the Iranian government’s headcount exercise, bank-related issues for new arrivals and others.⁶⁷⁸ The Regional Refugee Response Plan for 2022 included support programmes for Afghans already living in Iran or newly arriving, as well as for host communities. The programmes covered areas such as education, food security, WASH, protection, and others and were to be implemented by UNHCR in collaboration with 16 partner organisations, including other UN agencies, ICRI, INTERSOS, MSF, NRC and RI.⁶⁷⁹ Moreover, UNHCR Iran listed on its website several local partner organisations,⁶⁸⁰ such as the Society for Recovery Support (SRS) and the Rebirth Charity Organization (Rebirth), which provide support for substance abusers but also implement projects for refugees.⁶⁸¹ Other local partner NGOs included organisations active in

⁶⁶⁹ UNHCR Iran, Protection Dashboard - Jan to Jun 2022, 23 August 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁷⁰ AI, ‘They don’t treat us like humans’: Unlawful returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran, 31 August 2022, [url](#), pp. 31-32

⁶⁷¹ UNHCR, Help Iran: UNHCR Counselling, n.d., [url](#); UNHCR, Help Iran: Psycho-Social Support, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁷² UNHCR Iran, Protection Dashboard - Jan to Jun 2022, 23 August 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁷³ UNHCR, Help Iran: What are the main services for asylum-seekers and refugees in Iran?, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁷⁴ UNHCR, Help Iran: Voluntary Repatriation (UNHCR-Facilitated Return), n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁷⁵ UNHCR Iran, Afghanistan Situation Response in Iran – 31 August 2022, 29 September 2022, [url](#), p. 2; UNHCR, Iran Operational Data Portal, n.d., [url](#), accessed 18 October 2022

⁶⁷⁶ UNHCR, Help Iran: Work, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁷⁷ UNHCR, Help Iran: What are the main services for asylum-seekers and refugees in Iran?, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁷⁸ UNHCR Iran, Protection Dashboard - Jan to Jun 2022, 23 August 2022, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁶⁷⁹ UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Regional Response Plan January – December 2022, 12 January 2022, [url](#), p. 24

⁶⁸⁰ UNHCR Iran, About us: Partners and Donors, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁸¹ Rebirth, Home, n.d., [url](#)



support of women and children, such as the Pars Development Activists Institute (PDA)⁶⁸², the Iranian Life Quality Improvement Association (ILIA)⁶⁸³, the Kiyana Cultural and Social Group (KIYANA)⁶⁸⁴, as well as the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV)⁶⁸⁵. Some of these organisations were also mentioned in a report by the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) of March 2022, in addition to two other Iranian organisations working with refugees: the Association for Protection of Refugee Women and Children (HAMI)⁶⁸⁶ and the Omid Foundation.⁶⁸⁷ The latter, however, was reportedly deregistered in August 2019,⁶⁸⁸ and continued its activities online from abroad.⁶⁸⁹ The Iranian Diaran Association is working in the field of advocacy and research on immigration.⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸²PDA, Home, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁸³ILIA, Home, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁸⁴Kiyana, Home, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁸⁵ODVV, Home, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁸⁶HAMI, Home, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁸⁷Switzerland, SEM, Focus Pakistan / Iran / Türkei: Situation afghanischer Migrantinnen und Migranten [Situation of Afghan Migrants], 30 March 2022, [url](#), p. 23

⁶⁸⁸Akbarzadeh, S. et al., Registered NGOs and advocacy for women in Iran, 29 March 2021, [url](#), p. 1482

⁶⁸⁹OMID Foundation, Home, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁰Diaran, Home, n.d., [url](#)



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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The terms of reference were drafted by EUAA in consultation with the COI Specialist Network on Iran.

The content of the report should contain information on the following topics:

- Overview of key refugee inflows from Afghanistan to Iran
- Legal status of Afghan refugees
 - Demographics and locations of those with/without legal status
 - Legislation and policies
 - Types of legal status
 - Rights and obligations under each legal status, including documentation of legal status
 - Restrictions/barriers to obtaining legal status
 - Access to Iranian citizenship for Afghan refugees, including prevalence
- Situation and treatment of Afghan refugees, particularly since August 2021 Taliban take-over of Afghanistan
 - Societal attitudes and treatment of registered, unregistered, and undocumented Afghans, including extent of integration into Iranian society
 - Treatment by authorities
 - Recruitment of Afghan refugees to fight for Iran in foreign countries, including prevalence (e.g. Fatemiyoun movement)
- Access to other civil documentation
- Return to Afghanistan of registered and unregistered Afghan refugees
- Border crossings and human smuggling/trafficking of Afghan refugees, including prevalence and treatment
- Internal mobility and socio-economic situation of Afghan refugees in Iran
 - Freedom of movement
 - Education
 - Employment and livelihoods
 - Healthcare
 - Housing, land and property rights
 - Financial and communication services
 - Legal aid and support services
 - Cross-border ties and links to family/social network in Afghanistan

