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12 December 2023

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Introduction

The following note describes the different types of identity documents that Afghan nationals residing in Iran may have. In doing so, the note will touch upon the different bases for residence which Afghan nationals may hold in Iran, whether legal or illegal.

Around 22,000 Afghan nationals reside in Iran as students. This includes around 17,000 Afghan pupils in primary or secondary school and another 5,000 under religious training in Qom or Mashhad.¹ This note will not describe the documents they hold or the type of residence permit they have obtained.

The note is based on a meeting with representatives from the Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Iran, in October 2018 as well as open sources.

Afghans in Iran

There is a long history of Afghan migration to Iran. Since 1979, an important reason for this migration has been the security situation in Afghanistan.² The Afghan population in Iran is ethnically diverse, but the majority of them are Shia Muslim and speak Dari, which is closely related to Persian. This means that adapting to the religion and language in Iran is less complicated for this group of Afghans.³

According to Landinfo, the number of Afghans residing in Iran is between three and four million with approximately half residing in Iran illegally.⁴ Since Afghans continuously cross the border into Iran while others are being deported, this number is constantly changing. Representatives from the Afghan Embassy in Tehran estimate a daily exchange of around 1,500-2,000 Afghans across the Iranian-Afghan border.⁵

¹ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

² Lifos, 10 April 2018, pp. 5-6.

³ Landinfo, 16 April 2018, pp. 9-10.

⁴ Landinfo, 16 April 2018, p. 4.

⁵ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

Afghans with legal stay in Iran are either in possession of an Amayesh card or an Afghan passport with valid Iranian visa.⁶

Amayesh cards

The Amayesh card is issued to Afghans, who have been registered as refugees by the Ministry of Interior's Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant's Affairs (BAFIA) and can maintain this status through every round of re-registration.⁷

According to Lifos, the Amayesh system is closed. This means that Iranian authorities have only registered new Afghans into the system in a few exceptional cases since the first Amayesh registration round in 2001-2003. Re-registration rounds have since taken place regularly, in which failure to re-register results in an irrevocable loss of refugee status in Iran.⁸ A new colour card is issued in connection with each new round of registration.⁹

The Amayesh card enables the holder to access basic services and facilitates the issuance of work permits.¹⁰ The card does not permit the holder to travel, and Amayesh registered Afghan refugees risk losing their Amayesh card, if they go back to Afghanistan.¹¹ The Afghan Embassy in Tehran estimates that roughly 900,000 Afghan nationals hold Amayesh cards.¹²

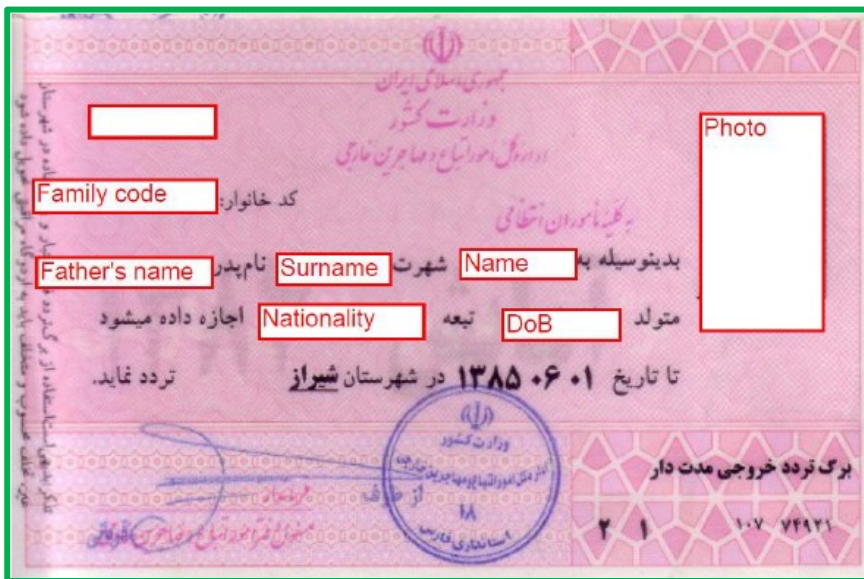


Image 1: Example of an Amayesh card from second registration round. Expiration Date: 23/08/2006 (Lifos, April 2018, p. 46).

⁶ Landinfo, 16 April 2018, p. 7.

⁷ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

⁸ Lifos, 10 April 2018, p. 10.

⁹ Lifos, 10 April 2018, appendix 2.

¹⁰ UNHCR, 2013.

¹¹ Landinfo, 16 April 2018, pp. 15-16.

¹² Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

Afghan passports

Approximately 650,000 Afghan nationals residing in Iran hold an Afghan passport.¹³

All Afghan nationals who hold an Afghan passport should likewise hold the Afghan certificate of identity (Tazkira), as it is the primary breeder document in connection with the passport application.¹⁴ In case a citizen does not hold the Tazkira, it may be possible for consular staff at the Afghan Embassy in Tehran or the General Consulate in Mashhad to confirm the birth and identity of the said individual through authorities in Afghanistan. The citizen may then use this confirmation instead of the Tazkira to obtain the passport.¹⁵



Image 2: Afghan P-series passport (NIDC reference material).

Of the approximately 650,000 Afghan nationals residing in Iran with an Afghan passport, it is estimated that about 450,000 hold handwritten family passports, and about 200,000 hold ordinary Afghan passports that were issued to them in exchange for their Amayesh card (see sections below).¹⁶

Handwritten family passports

According to the Afghan Embassy in Tehran, approximately 450,000 Afghan nationals in Iran hold a handwritten family passport. The term “family passport” refers to a special handwritten passport that has been issued to an entire family instead of each individual. All family members thus use the same passport for travel, and are generally expected to travel together.¹⁷

¹³ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

¹⁴ Landinfo, 23 April 2020, p. 21.

¹⁵ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

¹⁶ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

¹⁷ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

The Afghans that hold family passports have migrated illegally and without identity documents from Afghanistan to Iran around 2010-2011. Their residence in Iran was later legalised through a special agreement between Afghan and Iranian authorities, which also permitted issuance of Iranian residence permits to them.¹⁸

If a spouse wishes to travel alone using the family passport, the person in question will need an approval from the other spouse. Children below the age of 18 are not permitted to travel alone using a family passport.

According to representatives from the Afghan Embassy in Tehran, the handwritten family passports were meant to have been replaced by new electronic and individual passports in 2017. However, since all Afghan nationals were required to exchange their non-electronic passports for the electronic model during the same time period, there was a significant increase in workload at both the Afghan Embassy in Tehran and the Afghan General Consulate in Mashhad. Because the Afghan authorities did not have the resources to accommodate the increased workload, they instead decided to postpone the issuance of electronic passports to holders of family passports.¹⁹ The family passports were thus renewed for an extra year. They also made an agreement with Iranian authorities that allowed holders of family passports to travel between Iran and Afghanistan during this time period. According to Landinfo, handwritten family passports were no longer issued after 1 November 2017 and after 24 November 2017, they were no longer valid as travel documents.²⁰

Holders of family passports must have their Iranian residence permits renewed on an annual basis.²¹

Afghan passport in replacement of Amayesh card

According to the Afghan Embassy in Tehran, approximately 200,000 Afghan nationals have exchanged their Amayesh cards (including their status as refugees in Iran) for an Afghan passport along with an Iranian residence permit with a validity period of 6-12 months.²²

The application to substitute the Amayesh card with an Afghan passport (and Iranian residence permit) is handled at an Afghan representation in Iran. Once the passport has been issued, the Afghan national must hand in the Amayesh card to the Police and Immigration Authorities in Iran.

Afghan nationals in Iran are not allowed to hold an Afghan passport and an Amayesh card at the same time.²³

¹⁸ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

¹⁹ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

²⁰ Landinfo, 23 April 2020, p. 19.

²¹ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

²² Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

²³ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

Undocumented refugees

According to the Afghan Embassy in Tehran, approximately 1,5 million Afghan nationals residing in Iran are undocumented, hence having neither an Amayesh card nor an Afghan passport.²⁴ This group resides illegally in Iran and have no possibility of obtaining documents from the Iranian authorities.²⁵

School papers

Children of undocumented Afghan refugees in Iran have been allowed to attend Iranian public school. In connection with their education, the children's families will receive papers that prove the enrolment in school and the grades they have received.²⁶

Families that reside in Iran illegally will not be deported if they are registered in connection with a school enrolment.²⁷

²⁴ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

²⁵ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

²⁶ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

²⁷ Afghan Embassy in Tehran, Tehran, October 2018.

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