
Iran

**Total area:**

1,648,195 km²

Population:

79,926,270 (2017)

Literacy:

72%

Official languages:

Persian

GDP (PPP) per capita:

\$19,050 (2017 est.)

Life expectancy:

73 years

Religions:

98% Muslim, 2% other religions

Prayer points

Imprisoned for not denying Christian faith

A Christian is starting a one year prison sentence in the infamous Evin Prison in Iran for refusing to renounce Christ. Pray for the many imprisoned in Iran, for their safety & well-being. (AsiaLink - December 2019)

Detained for religion or belief

Political opposition members, human rights activists and journalists continue to be arrested on spurious grounds. At least 746 people are detained on account of their religion or belief. Pray for divine protection and provision for everyone who is in prison because of their beliefs or because they spoke out against oppression. (Christian Solidarity Worldwide - April 2019)

Forgiven not condemned

A young married woman recently revealed to our Arabic partner that she had betrayed her husband and wanted to repent. Jesus didn't condemn the woman caught in adultery, but rescued and saved her. After praying, she gave her life to Christ. Pray for her and others like her. (Reach Beyond - February 2019)

Harsh Sentences in Iran

In Iran, Judge Ahmadzadeh is notorious for giving harsh sentences to Christian converts. At present there are over half a dozen Christians facing at least ten years in prison. Pray for God to work powerfully in the hearts of judges in Iran, moving them to act in justice and fairness instead of punishing people for their faith. Also use Deuteronomy 8:31 to pray for Christians in Iran: *"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."* May they be able to share their faith so that many more would come

to Christ. (Christian Solidarity Worldwide - January 2018)

No Match for God

Islamic leaders in Iran are seriously concerned about the spread of Christianity in the country. It is only by the grace of God that young Iranians are placing their faith in Jesus, especially considering the rigorous Islamic indoctrination of youth in families and schools. The Iranian government is actively seeking to reduce the growth of Christianity: increased numbers of Islamic teachers are being sent to turn youth away from the Christian faith while house churches are shut down. As active as the Iranian government is in its efforts, praise the Lord for His promise to not let the gates of hell ever overcome His church. Pray for the youth in this land to resist the pressures facing them, for safety as they seek to live faithfully and for a relaxation in the government's efforts against them. (AsiaLink - November 2017)

Garden of Friendship

Elam's TV show Garden of Friendship teaches young Iranians about Jesus and the Bible. Very little is available to reach and disciple Iranian children, so this show fills a serious void. Golnoush is a nursery school teacher in Iran who is using Garden of Friendship to teach her class about Jesus. When she wrote asking for scriptures we managed to safely get children's Bibles to her early this year. Please pray for all the children in Golnoush's class, for Garden of Friendship to reach more children and their parents across Iran with Jesus, and for protection for the show's producers. (Elam Ministries - July 2017)

Pray, Support, Advocate

Many Christians, particularly those of us in the West, take our religious freedoms for granted - like being able to own a Bible (or several!), freely attend a house group or church service, talk openly about our faith without fear, and listen to Christian music. How many of us would still try to meet with other Christians if we might get beaten up, lose our jobs, or even get killed for doing so? Christians face persecution in many countries in the Middle East and North Africa, ranging from state-sanctioned killings and violence against Christians, to destruction of church buildings, ostracisation by friends and family members, and discrimination in education and employment. We must always remember the amazing, terrifying and traumatic sacrifices others make for their faith, and pray for them, support them and advocate for them in any way we can. (Middle East Media) (Middle East Media - March 2017)

An Open-armed Church

More than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2015, and the inflow of people has continued in 2016. The mass movement of people away from their homelands is a tragic symptom of chaos and brokenness in the world. Churches across Europe are opening their doors and their hearts to the incoming refugees. Iranians and Afghans are particularly open to the gospel, and many are coming to Christ. Amid the chaos, God is at work and his word is shining brightly. Please pray for the many ministries seeking to show Jesus, serve, and love refugees in Europe. Pray also for those remaining in Iran and Afghanistan, that the love of Jesus would be revealed to them. (Elam Ministries - September 2016)

Praise for a Life Saved.

As a student in Tehran, Fatimeh had married a professor, an educated man. He would love her and treat her with respect and kindness, but when she gave birth to their first child he sent her back to her parents. In her heartbreak, loneliness, and depression, she walked through the rain to a bridge where she intended to take her own life. A car approached and an old man stepped out of it saying, 'My daughter, what are you doing standing here in the rain? It is not right that you make any serious decisions now. Ask God for help. God loves you. God will never leave you.' He gave her a New Testament, and later Fatimeh gave her life to Jesus Christ. Praise God that He sees the desperate, He sends help, and the New Testament is reaching Iran. (Elam Ministries - July 2016)

Persian New Year

During the recent Persian New Year (Norouz) outreach in a country near Iran, an Iranian family was given New Testaments by a team of street evangelists. The family excitedly declared that they had been searching for the Scriptures inside Iran for a long time without success. Following a deep conversation, the whole family gave their lives to Christ right there on the street. They have returned home to Iran, taking the gospel with them. Pray for new believers to be disciplined and connected to a house church in Iran. (Elam Ministries - May 2016)

Safe outlets

It's not everyday that you hear a strong declaration of faith in Christ from someone raised in a Muslim majority country. But Hosni contacted the media team via WhatsApp with this urgent request for spiritual support: "I believe that Jesus is God... I need to know more about Jesus and the Bible." Pray that social media will continue to be a safe outlet for Muslims to seek Jesus. (Arab World Ministry of Pioneers - May 2016)

Healing by smartphone

A newly launched smartphone app is helping young Iranians avoid the morality police on Tehran's streets. Iran's feared 'Gasht-e Ershad' (morality police) patrol Tehran to identify men and women who violate Iran's moral codes. Now, the 'Gershad' app is using crowd-sourcing to map the locations of each squadron, so that ordinary Iranians can avoid crossing paths with them. Pray for Iranians frustrated by the control of the police, for healing for victims of the morality police, and for many to find freedom in Christ in an oppressive atmosphere. (Elam Ministries - March 2016)

House church in Iran

A house church was born just the other day in Iran. The church's new pastor was put in touch with an old neighbour called Amir, who was excited to talk to a Christian. "We had an incredible conversation when he called me. Amir had become disillusioned with his religion and began searching for truth. He heard the gospel from a TV program, and became a Christian. He was so thirsty to learn more about God, and he told me about seven other new believers he knows. He explained they have no one to teach them. We agreed that Amir and his friends will gather in his home weekly, and I will call them to teach and pastor them." Pray for rapid growth in maturity and faith, sustained growth in numbers, and protection for this house church. (Elam Ministries - January 2016)

Iranian tourists

During the summer months 35,000 New Testaments were distributed to Iranian tourists in one city alone. Hassan was travelling outside Iran, when somebody gave him a Persian New Testament and he took it gladly. In his own city, which is very religious, he had had no idea how to get hold of a New Testament. Now he has one, and he is reading it back in Iran. At the end of the New Testament is a prayer of repentance for those who want to ask Jesus Christ into their lives. Many pray that prayer, and then tell their families in Iran about the Saviour. Pray for huge ongoing impact from these evangelism efforts. Pray for more Iranian Christians to bravely distribute Persian New Testaments and for them to be widely read. (Elam Ministries - January 2016)

Imprisoned pastor

Around 90 Christians are reported to be detained in Iran for their faith, most of them from a Muslim background. The majority face harsh conditions in prison, and some have been interrogated and tortured. Reports have emerged that intelligence officers repeatedly used a taser gun on one prisoner, pastor Saeed Abedini, during interrogation and that he is in need of medical treatment. It is believed that Saeed, who is currently serving an eight-year sentence for his involvement in Iran's house church movement, continues to suffer abuse at the hands of other inmates too. Interrogators have told him that he could face new charges, alleging that he has connections with groups opposed to the Government - claims Saeed denies. (Release International - November 2015)

Christ through poetry

SAT-7 recently launched the PARS poetry series, which features an Iranian Christian rapper as it targets tough topics. Persian poets are among Iran's most celebrated figures. It is said that every Iranian home has a copy of the poetry of Hafez and in conversation there, you can expect to hear lines of memorised poetry slip off the tongues of people of all ages. But, alongside the classics, Iranian young people have also embraced an immensely popular Iranian form of rap poetry which avoids swearing and violence and, instead, tackles widespread social issues like drug addiction and unemployment. Pray that listeners will be challenged and inspired by these powerful words, and that many will embrace Christ in response to these new perspectives. (SAT-7 - November 2015)

Welcome to the family

Every Sunday Iranians are coming to faith. In Western churches there would be a private prayer of repentance. Not so in the Iranian churches. At the end of the service the whole church is told that there is a family that wants to repent. They are called to the front. They all repeat the 'Sinners Prayer' after the pastor. The whole church gives a loud 'Amen' and the family are each given a New Testament. Everyone says, "Welcome to the family". Later, arrangements are made for the new believers to begin Bible studies. Praise God for the openness of Iranian Muslims to the Gospel. This is absolutely a time of harvest. Pray for all Iranians who have given their hearts to Jesus this week, for pastors and older believers who teach them, and for more to give their lives to Christ next week. (Elam Ministries - September 2015)

Temporary marriages

Marriage is in a mess in Iran. Divorce ends one in three marriages in Tehran. Under-30s make up 55% of the population. But most cannot afford marriage, and brief flings have become prevalent: 'temporary marriages' can last for as little as an hour. Over 300 'Western-style' dating websites have sprung up of late to facilitate young people meeting. Christians have a role to play in this matrimonial mess. Pray for Christian couples in Iran as they seek to model healthy, committed, and self-sacrificial marriage to their friends and neighbours. Let's pray for pastors as they guide and counsel couples in their churches. If marriage is given to mankind by God primarily as a picture of Christ's covenant love for his church, let's pray that as Christians seek to live out godly marriages, many more Iranians would be drawn to Christ. (Elam Ministries - March 2015)

Young people

Iran is full of young people. Nearly 54% of the 79 million population is under thirty; about 23% is under fifteen. Sick of religious hypocrisy and corruption, these millions switch off when their bearded leaders talk about their revolution. Their minds are not on the past but on the future. They have two major frustrations. First, they want more social and intellectual freedom. They are tired of being told what they should wear, watch or read. Secondly, they want meaningful jobs, as nearly one million enter the labour market every year. For the church, this is an opportunity. Millions of young Iranians have time to browse the internet and watch satellite TV where they can hear about Jesus. This curiosity has led many to look for a New Testament. House churches are often full of young people, and many church leaders and planters are under 25. (Elam Ministries - January 2015)

New Iranian Bible

The recently launched New Millennium Version of the Bible has been eagerly anticipated by the Iranian church ever since Elam began the translation work in 1995. Prior to the publication of the new translation, Persian Christians have been reading the Old Testament in the old standard version that is over 100 years old and uses obscure, archaic words and phrases, which render the text difficult to comprehend. Praise the Lord the Iranian believers now have an easily comprehensible, accurate and beautiful translation of the full Bible. We believe it will strengthen the rapidly growing Iranian church for generations to come. Pray for the distribution of this translation. (Elam Ministries - November 2014)

Forgiving her son's killer

After M's son was killed in a fight, she wanted nothing more than revenge for his death. Anger quickly turned into depression. Then one day M came across SAT-7, a Christian satellite TV station, and started watching a programme about Jesus forgiving his murderers. She identified with Jesus and his pain, but couldn't understand his peace. She prayed as she watched, asking for that kind of peace and the ability to forgive her son's killer. A few days later, while getting ready for her son's memorial, she suddenly felt that she couldn't go before she visited his murderer. When she saw the man who had killed her son, she gave him a big hug, saying, "I have forgiven you. Jesus told me to do so." Then she said, "I want you to be my son." Everyone around was amazed. After this, she kept telling people to watch SAT-7. (Church Mission Society - September 2014)

Corruption as a way of life?

Iran doesn't do well on the Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International - in 2013 it ranked 144th out of 174 countries listed. However, Iranians don't need this chart to tell them their country has a corruption problem as scandals have been headline news. With the state and Islamic charitable foundations making up about 80% of the economy, the opportunities for insiders to line their pockets are endless. Most Iranians conclude that corruption is a way of life and see it as one reason why their naturally rich country delivers such poor living standards to its citizens. The extent of corruption makes Jesus' teaching against greed and for trusting God for daily needs even more attractive. Pray for corruption to be rooted out in Iran and for churches and Christians to be salt and light in this area of life, setting an example of honesty and generosity. (Elam Ministries - July 2014)

Fearing for their jobs

Those who become Christians in Iran immediately fear for their jobs because 80% of the economy is directly run by the Islamic government. Apostates are definitely not welcome. Believers must tread wisely to keep their job, and many do, but live with the pressure that any day they may be fired because of their faith. Though Iran's ethnic minority Christians, the Assyrians and Armenians, do not face the same level of intimidation, they too have found employment and business very challenging. The best jobs are always reserved for Muslims. Pray for protection and wisdom for Christians in the workplace and in business and for the impact of 'marketplace' evangelism. (Elam Ministries - May 2014)

Censorship of the press

In November an Iranian newspaper was banned for publishing an article that questioned a religious tenet. The regularity with which newspapers are censored, and journalists, editors and bloggers are imprisoned in Iran, reveals that the government greatly fears the prospect of a free speaking civil society. President Rouhani pledged to work for more social freedom during his election campaign and since he took office his administration has released a few reformist journalists from prison. Though there is a long road to walk before freedom of expression becomes a possibility in Iran, with God anything is possible. (Elam Ministries - January 2014)

Talks in Geneva

Talks in Geneva during October have produced hope that a nuclear agreement between Iran and world powers can be reached. But in order for this hope to be realized, trust must continue to build between both sides, the lack of which has undermined all previous negotiations. Prior to the talks, Iran had insisted that it would not allow its current stocks of enriched uranium to be shipped out of the country as part of any deal- a demand that world powers had previously made. Christians should intercede earnestly that the good progress made in Geneva will be constructively built upon. (Elam Ministries - November 2013)

Cautious optimism

The election of Hassan Rouhani as president is a reason for cautious optimism for Iran's Christians. Voters and most of the establishment agree the policy of no compromise with the West over Iran's

nuclear program has failed and the Shia cleric was recognised as the best candidate to negotiate with the West to get the economic sanctions lifted. The fact that there must be a deal with the West in order for the economy to recover brings some hope for Iran's suffering Christians as headlines about the persecution of the Christian minority could jeopardise this strategy. Pray for Hassan Rouhani and for an easing of the persecution of Christians in Iran. (Elam Ministries - July 2013)

Theological studies

Iranians living inside and outside of Iran have a new opportunity to take part in theological studies through the recently launched Pars Theological Centre. In January, seventy students commenced online studies with the Centre. As well as online learning, the Theological Centre will also be running intensive teaching conferences for students and separately for house church leaders. Pray for Christians participating in these training courses to grow in spiritual maturity. (SAT-7 - March 2013)

Cyber police

Launched in January 2011, Iran's Cyber Police are having an impact, and not just among ordinary internet criminals involved in hacking, scams or identity theft. When the Cyber Police (FTA) was launched the chief of police made it clear this unit would have a wider agenda - namely taking on 'anti-revolutionary' or 'dissident' groups. The Human Rights Group claims that Iran arrested more journalists and bloggers than any other country in 2011. Christians have also been targeted and in November the home of Christian blogger Ali Reza Ebrahimi was raided by the police. Pray for wisdom and protection for Iranian Christians who use the Internet to share their faith. (Elam Ministries - January 2013)

Business trips

Danial (not his real name) is a UK-based Iranian whom God is using to reach fellow Iranians. What originally began as business trips to Iran have now become opportunities for him to talk to people about Christ. Danial says, "It's as if the Holy Spirit is sending me. With everyone I speak to, God says, 'Speak to this person - this is my son, this is my daughter.' And they are very open to Jesus." One man rang Danial a few days after their meeting. He said "I have news for you. From the first day I believed in Jesus, everybody was shouting at me at work. They didn't know I had come to Jesus, but I prayed and after a few days they said, 'You are changed. What's happened? Your face is so shiny!'" (SAT-7 - January 2013)

Air pollution

According to the World Health Organisation, four of the ten cities in the world with the worst air pollution are in Iran. While not in the worst ten, Tehran is notorious as one of the smoggiest capitals in the world. Petrol is poorly refined and the Alborz Mountains prevent the fumes from dispersing. With massive dust storms further darkening these already polluted skies, authorities in Tehran have recently declared that the air pollution has reached an 'emergency' level. For Iran's asthma sufferers, and for old people, the air pollution situation can be fatal. One source suggests that over 20 people die every day in Tehran because of the smog. Pray that Christians will be creative in thinking of ways to help their neighbours and ease the pain for those who are especially vulnerable. (Elam Ministries - July 2012)

Military service

Every able-bodied Iranian man over 19 must do military service for at least 18 months, with about 500,000 serving at any one time. The state sees military service as an opportunity to cement into young men the values of the Islamic revolution. As well as prayer five times a day there are compulsory lectures on revolutionary Islam. Needless to say, this is a very challenging time for any Muslim who has become a Christian. Although since the war with Iraq ended in 1988 military service has not been arduous, it's worth remembering that if an international conflict breaks out over Iran's nuclear programme, it is these young men who will pay the price. Pray for protection for them and that their experiences will make them open to Jesus Christ. (Elam Ministries - January 2012)

Iranian women

Iranian women, renowned for their strength of character, are active in nearly every area of Iranian life. However, while strict dress regulations irritate some women, their legal status is offensive. For example, a woman's testimony in court is worth half that of a man's and there is a significant disparity between the legal rights of the two parties in a marriage. This injustice, coupled with a low view of the value of women, often leads to intense abuse within society. This partly explains the special interest women have for Jesus Christ, who shows them such radical respect. Around 60 percent of new believers in Iran are women. Pray for the legal position of women to be improved and for the dignity that Christianity gives women to be seen in the nation. (Elam Ministries - November 2011)

Iranians abroad

The Islamic revolution has driven 4 million Iranians abroad where, more than any other group of immigrants from the Middle East, they have been turning to Christ. In Europe there are fellowships in every major country, and in the US there are churches in at least 22 states. There are also thousands of Iranians who have joined the national churches of their host countries. These Christians are very significant for Iran. They are in constant contact with their loved ones back home, and often they get an opportunity to visit the country and share their new faith. There are reports of whole families who have become Christians through their witness. Pray for Christian Iranians worldwide as they contact their families and friends in Iran and pray for more national churches to reach out to the Iranians in the midst. (Elam Ministries - September 2011)

Mistreatment of refugees

Mohsen Al, a 22 year old former student at the University of Arak, was recently denied citizenship to Iran, his home country and place of birth. Born to an Iranian mother and exiled father from Iraq, Mohsen was denied a birth certificate by Iranian officials and has been told he must report 'back' to Iraq, although he's never lived anywhere other than Iran. As a result, his marriage is now null and void and he has no opportunity for appeal. In his desperate attempt to find a solution he came across Luke 6:29 and found salvation through this lesson of love. Mohsen now blogs on Christian persecution and the rising problem and mistreatment of refugees in the Middle East. He asks for prayer for fellow Christians who are mistreated and persecuted for their faith in Christ. He also asks for prayer to support misplaced refugees who are denied a right to the only life they've ever known. (AsiaLink - July 2011)

Hunger for the scriptures

Millions of people in Iran want to read the Christian scriptures, but printing and importing the Bible is strictly illegal. Christians have sent in hundreds of thousands of scriptures, but in a country of 66 million, demand dwarfs supply. The brave distributors always want more. They say that 95 percent of people receive the New Testament with joy. The goal is to print and distribute one million New Testaments in Iran by the end of 2013. Pray for wisdom and protection for those distributing scriptures and that God would speak powerfully, through His word, into the hearts of Iranian people. (Elam Ministries - July 2011)

Mullahs

About 200,000 mullahs work in over 50,000 mosques and Islamic seminaries in Iran. They have a lot of influence but are under pressure because of people's intense frustration with the religious regime. Some mullahs are no doubt motivated by political power, but many are ordinary men who want to please God and serve their communities. Like religious men in Paul's day, they 'are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge' (Romans 10:2). Already some mullahs have turned to Christ and some church planters in Iran today became Christians while studying in Islamic seminaries. Pray for mullahs and students in Islamic seminaries to meet and be impacted by the lives and testimonies of Christians. (Elam Ministries - March 2011)

Epidemic of depression

The stress and pressures of life in Iran have caused an epidemic of depression. Some say that it affects up to 20% of the population and others say over 70% of young people, especially girls, are affected. There is no shortage of possible reasons - from unemployment to long working hours, from family stress to intrusive religious policies - but there is a desperate shortage of answers. Pray for Christians to be equipped to minister to the depressed and that the joy found in Christ will draw many to faith in Jesus. (Elam Ministries - January 2011)

The strength of the family

In the midst of all Iran's storms, the strength of the family has remained. However, there are worrying trends tearing at the fabric of families. Divorce is on the increase and is now about 13%, although there are many more unhappy marriages. Because of Islamic divorce law, children usually end up in the father's custody so many mothers choose to stay in difficult marriages in order to raise their children. Many families live under severe financial strain with fathers often having to work in two or three jobs to make ends meet. As a result, many seek a better life abroad and so families are torn apart. Pray for a strong family life in Iran and for many entire households to be saved. (Elam Ministries - September 2010)

Drug addiction

Drug addiction is an open wound across Iran. Some blame unemployment but the real reason is that heroin is cheap and plentiful. Government officials are fighting a hard war against the traffickers with some success - figures show that nearly 70 percent of the heroin confiscated worldwide is seized in Iran. Whatever the number of addicts - the Government says one million, others say four million - the pain is etched on the face of the user, their shame and sickness shared by the family. All around the world, Christians have proved that they run the best rehabilitation centres. Iran is no exception. Many individuals have been delivered and have testified openly to the power of Christ. Their witness wins many. (Elam Ministries - May 2010)

Young people

About 15 million out of the 66 million people in Iran are under 15. Two thirds of the population are under 30. Most of these millions switch off when bearded religious leaders talk about their revolution. Their minds are not on the past but on the future and they have two major frustrations. First, they want more social and intellectual freedom - they are tired of being told what they should wear, watch or read. Secondly, they want meaningful jobs. Nearly one million enter the labour market every year. The government uses oil money to create jobs, but not enough. However, many unemployed young Iranians have now heard about Jesus through satellite TV and the Internet. House churches are often full of young people and many church leaders and planters are under 25. Pray for more young people to come to faith in Christ and find God's purpose for their lives. Pray too that young Christians would be a powerful witness in Iran. (Elam Ministries - March 2010)

Christian websites

Iran has an estimated 23 million Internet users who spend a lot of time surfing the net. Every week thousands access Christian websites to read and learn about the faith. It is quite common to hear converts refer to the Internet when they give their testimonies. For many isolated believer the Internet is their only means of finding Bible material, especially because Christian literature is so scarce. They can print scriptures and articles they would otherwise never get. Christian websites provide materials to help with house church meetings and, for radio and TV ministries, the Internet is vital for follow up. (Elam Ministries - January 2010)