

# The Origin of the Different Waves of Iranian Migration in France

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From the knowledge exile of the 19th century, the profile changed towards the political refugee in 1908. French was then recognized as the official language in administration. Iranian migration later took on another dimension after the 1953 Coup, a politicization that reached a peak with the arrival in Paris of Khomeini on August 2, 1978. In spite of this migratory tradition, about 4,000 persons before the revolution, the majority being from the political and financial elite, these migratory flows amplified in the middle of the 1980s, in such a way that at the end of December 2014, there were 31,000 Iranians in France. This new phase which included four waves, from a sociological point of view, can be called the diasporisation of Iranian migration. The socio-economic profile goes from the urban elite: lawyers, officials, journalists, teachers, doctors, nurses, magistrates, military officials, company directors, political exiles, etc., to artisans such as shopkeepers, garage owners, building contractors... and finally from the skilled labourer, on through to unskilled workers in building, restauration or removals.

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Among the few studies on the subject, rare are those that go back to the 19th century<sup>1</sup>. Very often, the arrival of Iranians in France is studied as from the 1920s, when, under the regime of Rezâ Châh Pahlevi, many were sent abroad within the framework of pioneering legislation on the matter<sup>2</sup>. However it is well in the 19th century that we have to situate the arrival of the first Iranians in France, who were, like at the beginning of the 20th century, students. What can we say about the previous centuries?

## Historical Retrospective on Franco-Iranian Relations

Historically, it was in the 17th and 18th centuries that we could trace back Franco-Iranian relations. We were then under the Bourbons in France and the Safavides in Persia. The exchange of ideas between Christian clerics, Persian Armenians and agents from the East India Company lead to a political treaty signed in 1708 by Pierre-Victor Michel in Ispahan and in 1715 by Mohammad Réza Beg in Versailles<sup>3</sup>. It is in this context that we must imagine the *Persian Letters*, sent by Uzbek and Rica and presented by Montesquieu; at this period, Persians appeared as strange colourful beings (see the reproduction below). Nearly three centuries after

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<sup>1</sup> Armand Karimi (2009), in *L'Iran et la France malgré les apparences*, Paris: Éd. Europeperse, pp. 109-118.

<sup>2</sup> Maryam Habibi (2004), *L'interface France-Iran, 1907-1938: une diplomatie voilée*, Paris, L'Harmattan, pp. 263-283.

<sup>3</sup> Florence Hellot-Bellier (2008), *France-Iran: Quatre cents ans de dialogue*, Paris: Association for advancing Iranian studies, pp. 26-40.

Montesquieu, the question “How can one be Persian?” could still be pertinent.



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From these events we can ask ourselves in what way the Iranian community forged in France and how it divided or politicized during its genesis. Why did Iranians decide to emigrate towards France? At what period did they come and what were their motivations? Can the cultural factor have favoured their choice? How can we explain this attraction for France although this country never colonized Iran<sup>5</sup>? At what point did the myth “France, Land of Asylum” influence the Iranian Intelligentsia? Did they choose it because of its relative geographical proximity compared to Canada and the United States?

Following 18th century relations, in 1805 (see illustration), Napoleon 1, haunted by the project of an expedition towards India and, on the Iranian side, Fath Ali Châh who was seeking an alliance against the Russians, came to an agreement: it resulted in the Treaty of Finkenstein, near Tilsitt, signed in May 1807 and would lead to the exchange of ambassadors: Askar Afchâr in Paris and General Gardanne in Teheran.

So, the origin of the arrival of Iranians in France goes back to the particular situation at the beginning of the 19th century when Persia turned to France. This was due to two defeats inflicted by the Russians in 1813 and 1828 and its revulsion towards the British Empire<sup>6</sup>. Already in 1805, Napoleon I, haunted by the project of an expedition towards India and, on the Iranian side, Fath Ali Shah who had been looking for an alliance against the Russians, had been drawing up an agreement; it resulted in the Finkenstein Peace Treaty signed in May 1807 near Tilsitt and it brought about a change in Ambassadors: Askar Khân Afchâr in Paris and the General Gardanne in Tehran. But the war between Iran and Russia, which had begun in 1804, ended in a Russian victory and an obligation for Persians to sign the humiliating Treaty of Golestân although they had relied on France as an ally; after the defeat of Napoleon in Russia and the winter retreat of 1812, diplomatic

<sup>4</sup> André Lagarde and Laurent Michard (1954), *xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle: les grands auteurs français*, Paris, p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> Migrants from countries colonised by France make up an important part of the migratory flow in France. Cf. Île de France. History and memoirs of immigrations since 1789, Natacha Lillo and Marie-Claude Blanc-chaleard (April 2009), *Revue, Hommes et migrations*, Volume II, No. 1278, pp. 18-31.

<sup>6</sup> Nader Vahabi (2012), Genèse de la diaspora iranienne en France, une analyse socio-historique et démographique, *Revue Migrations-Société*, No. 139, pp. 27-35.

relations were suspended<sup>7</sup>. It was in this social, historical, political and regional context of the 19th century that Iranian patriotic sentiment was born and that Persian politicians and intellectuals saw their interests converging towards France<sup>8</sup>. With regard to intellectuals, they were mainly influenced by the revolutions of 1789 and 1848 and by writers some of whose works had been translated into Persian during the second half of the 19th century (Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, Honoré de Balzac, etc.)<sup>9</sup>.

This tendency was re-enforced by the political choice of the Persian government to send Iranian students to France so that on their return they could reform the administration system. This cultural turmoil ended with French becoming adopted in 1902 as the official and diplomatic language for those wanting to work in administration<sup>10</sup>.

This student migratory flow increased substantially in 1908<sup>11</sup>, following the repression and the bombarding of the parliament by Muhammad Ali Shah and it transformed itself into a quest for political asylum<sup>12</sup>. This tendency was reinforced by the coup<sup>13</sup> against Muhammad Mossadegh's government in 1953<sup>14</sup>, by Khomeini's exile to Iraq in 1962 and his arrival in France in 1978 with a view to preparing the revolution<sup>15</sup>; these are the important moments for the Iranian diaspora in France before the revolution of 1979.

Despite this tradition of an Iranian migratory flow since the 19th century, the number of Iranians in France has remained limited and only 5,944 have been recorded at the onset of the 1979 revolution. But in 1982, three years after the revolution, there were 12,876, that is to say the number had tripled compared to 1978. Six years later, in 1985, the number had quadrupled, up to 22,484 persons<sup>16</sup>.

### Why This Inflow? What Does This Uninterrupted Increase Mean?

Based on these figures which question the existence, identity, even the unity of an Iranian diaspora<sup>17</sup>, on the one hand, we can ask ourselves in what way this Iranian diaspora has emerged and increased quantitatively in France since the birth of the Islamic Republic, and, on the other, which factors have contributed to the process of the diasporisation of Iranian migration? What are the main reasons for the outpour of Iranians in the

<sup>7</sup> Iran's failure was the result of an external factor, namely Napoleon's defeat and an internal one: The lack of political skills of King Fath Ali Shah who didn't understand Persia's geopolitical situation and spent his time in the harem; the mighty efforts of Prince Abbâs Mirzâ who was leading a difficult war and failed to save the situation. Cf. Mohammad Reza Zarrin Koub (2011), *Rouzgârân, Tarikhé Iran, Az Aghâz tâ seghouté saltanaté pahalavi*, in Persian, (Les temps jadis, *L'histoire de l'Iran, Du commencement à la chute de la dynastie Pahlavi*), Téhéran, Edition Sokhan, 1390, pp. 795-797.

<sup>8</sup> To understand 19th century Iran, cf. Florence Hellot-Bellier, *France-Iran: quatre cents ans de dialogue* (2008), Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, pp. 26-40. Also, Yan Richard (2006), *L'Iran, Naissance d'une république islamique*, Paris, Editions de la Martinière, pp. 38-45.

<sup>9</sup> Homa Nategh (1994), *Kârnâme yé farhanguyé farangui dar Iran, 1837-1921*, in Persian, *Le bilan culturel de la France en Iran*, Paris: Xâvaran, pp. 7-40.

<sup>10</sup> Homa Nategh (1994), *Kârnâme yé farhangui yé farangui dar Iran, 1837-1921* in Persian. *Les Français en Perse, Les écoles religieuses et séculières françaises en Iran*, op. cit, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Janet Afary (1996), *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911*, Published by Columbia University Press, U.S.A, pp. 10-30.

<sup>12</sup> Yan Richard, *L'Iran, Naissance d'une république islamique*, op. cit, p. 119.

<sup>13</sup> Fakhreddin Azimi (2008), *The quest for democracy in Iran: A century of struggle against authoritarian rule*, Londres, Harvard University Press, pp. 40-60.

<sup>14</sup> Ervand Abrahamian (1982), *Iran, between two revolutions*, Princeton University Press, pp. 261-287.

<sup>15</sup> Farhad Khosrokhavar (1993), *Utopie sacrifiée*, Paris, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences politiques, pp. 43-88.

<sup>16</sup> The source for these two figures comes from the Ministry of the Interior following a telephone interview carried out on March 6th 2000 with a person in charge in the in charge the statistics Service.

<sup>17</sup> The term "diaspora" has recently been used by researchers in relation to Iranian migratory flows since the birth of the Islamic Republic. Applying its definition will be the object of another paper. Here we are using it according to Robert Cohen's meaning: "A strong awareness of an ethnic group which is maintained over a long period and based on its impression of feeling distinct" with a common history and concept of a common "destiny" Cohen, Robert (2006), *Diaspora: "changing meaning and limits of the concept"*, in Berthomiere, William; Chivallon, Christine (under the direction of) *Diasporas in the contemporary world: A close look*, Paris: published by Karthala, pp. 40-45.

1980s and why has this trend decreased in the 1990s? How are Iranians spread out all over France?

From a macro-analysis approach<sup>18</sup> where the key actor is not the individual but where the international socio-political context, the State and economic systems make up the crucial elements, the Iranian diaspora would be the consequence of the transformation of four factors of the Iranian society in contemporary Iran<sup>19</sup>: a transformation related to socio-economics, linked to the land reform between 1962 and 1966; a transformation linked to the Iranian revolution of 1979 and its fall into repression; a transformation linked to the war between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988) and finally demography, the growth of the Iranian population from 33,708,744 persons in 1976 to 55,837,163 persons in 1991<sup>20</sup>.

These factors could make up, on a macro-analysis level, the structural elements of Iranian migration since the Second World War. They enable a better understanding of Iranian migration in France in the context of a quantitative analysis. This analysis that the rest of this article presents, requires first of all some methodological comments and observations with regards to Iranians in France.

### Intellectual Poverty

The first remark focuses on intellectual poverty and indigence. During the research we began in 1998, we interviewed Iranians in Paris and enquired if they knew the number of Iranians in France. We collected from these people, a wide range of figures which were often very different from what we were able to obtain from competent authorities. We received answers such as 40,000, 62,000<sup>21</sup>, 160,000 and even sometimes 200,000 Iranians in France; most of the people interviewed gave the figures at random and could not indicate what they were basing their estimations on. These gaps between estimations and scientific data, are a reminder that even in the most concrete domains, the reliability of figures is subject to caution. For many Iranians, the general trend is “common sense” and information by word of mouth, which reflects the lack of interest in research concerning this population in France<sup>22</sup>. The most convincing hypothesis to explain this gap relies on the fact that the circle of migrants in Paris is highly politicized and hostile to the current regime.

Reinforced by the lack of a general study on the displaced Iranian population, these migrants tend to overestimate the number of Iranians in France, thinking that it underlines the repressive force of the Iranian regime. Thus an over politicized and not innocent subject.

### A Neglected Iranian Migratory Field

The second remark focuses on a neglected Iranian migratory field. There are numerous reasons which have prevented researchers, whether Iranian or not, from carrying out exhaustive work on Iranian migrants. Amongst these reasons we must mention the rapid evolution of circumstances following the revolution of February 1979, the intensity of the migratory flow (around 180,000 people leave Iran each year)<sup>23</sup> as well as

<sup>18</sup> To understand macro and micro factors in a better way, see D. S. MASSEY and all (1993), “Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal”, in *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 433-434.

<sup>19</sup> For a deeper understanding of these four transformations cf. Nader Vahabi (2011), *la Migration Iranienne en Belgique, Une diaspora par défaut*, Harmattan, pp. 18-24.

<sup>20</sup> Source: Statistics on “the Iranian population, after consulting a website on general information concerning Iran.” 15.02.2010. <http://salameh.sei.org.i.p.3.4>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.farinet.com/pwo/diaspora.html>, consulted 15.01.2012.

<sup>22</sup> To understand the difficulties for the research concerning the Iranian diaspora cf. Nader Vahabi (2008), an enquiry with exiled Iranians: A maieutic exercise faced with those reluctant to speak in enquiries, Paris, *Revue Migrations Société* Vol. 20, No. 120, pp. 13-35.

<sup>23</sup> For a deeper study on this subject see Nader Vahabi (2012), *Atlas de la diaspora iranienne*, Paris, Karthala, pp. 31-48.

the absence of a great longstanding experience on stays abroad. In addition, for Iranian researchers, revolutionary euphoria, conditions for intellectual work, (indigence of data, the absence of motivation to study an ethnic minority) and the illusion of a return to the home country in the near future have not encouraged work on Iranian migration. And more especially since, these studies don't have any interest for the host country which has no problem with this migration and is afraid of complications in its relations with the regime in place<sup>24</sup>. As a result, our problematic, following a sociological enquiry with fifty migrants, in semi-directed interviews, between 2000, and 2010, is a little different from problematics concerning other diasporas in France and there are three points to be made about it.

First of all, it is not about a labour migration but a non-work migration. The first migrants, since the 19th century, were knowledge exiles and the second category, as from the 20th century, made up of political refugees. Next, second characteristic, Iranian migrants do not constitute a homogeneous group. The Iranian diaspora is constructed around very varied entangled facts: a legal or illegal migratory trajectory and path, discrepancy between generations, gender bias, ethnic origin, migration for study, a political project and especially political and social diversity. Finally, the general trend with settled migrants is more in favour of commercial and artisanal activities and less for structural and institutional jobs because of difficulties in transposing social and cultural capital in the host country.

So the central hypothesis of this article is that the Iranian francophone diaspora, born historically in the 19th century, would nurture more on cultural, professional and political affinities than the needs of a simple work migration and this would be the very fabric of the motivation of Iranian migration since the Iranian revolution of 1979. However, in the years 2000 it falls in line with the characteristics of a transnational migration—breaking away from its classic profile as an economic, financial, and political elite—presenting a very complex, heterogeneous social aspect which by its movements defies the sovereignty of States, just like a cyclone through a plain, landing in France or elsewhere.

We are going to verify this hypothesis through a demographic study of the different arrival waves to France during these three decades, and for each wave we are quoting two interviews within the framework of this article. To date, we have carried out 75 interviews on the Iranian diaspora in France.

### **Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile**

Before carrying out a demographic analysis to better discern the migratory reality in France since the birth of the Islamic Republic, it is important to give precisions on our sources. Two sources have provided statistics on the Iranian population in metropolitan France: OFPRA (the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons) and INSEE (the National Statistics Office). Each source has its own particularities and work methods. We are going to analyse them successively.

#### **OFPRA (National Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons)**

For nearly 40% of the Iranian population in France recorded on December, 31, 2010, 7,605 persons, to obtain residency had to apply for asylum with OFPRA<sup>25</sup>. Demands for asylum are systematically examined with regard to International Law which has not, as far as we know, evolved since the Second World War.

<sup>24</sup> Nader Vahabi (2008), *Sociologie d'une mémoire déchirée, le cas des exiles iraniens*, Harmattan, p. 21.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Report 2009 OFPRA, p. 58, and 2010, OFPRA, p. 74, consulted 15.01.2012. [http://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/documents/RA\\_2010\\_Ofpra.pdf](http://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/documents/RA_2010_Ofpra.pdf).

According to the Geneva Convention (1951) and the New York Protocol (1967), a refugee is:

A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, referring to paragraph 4 of the preamble of the 1946 Constitution, each person persecuted for his action in favour of freedom (conventional asylum) can also apply for political asylum, as well as political actors, trade unionists, and actors from the civil society, because of their commitment towards establishing a democratic regime (fundamental rights and freedom)<sup>27</sup>.

The Iranian migratory dynamic in France entered a very important phase after the Left came to power in 1981, as you can see in the following table.

Table 1

*Iranian Political Refugees in France*<sup>28</sup>

Year	Number of applications	Number of files studied	Number of cards admitted	Rate of cards admitted	Number of applications rejected
1981	296	217	153	70.5%	64
1982	884	688	548	79.7%	140
1983	1,062	1,163	1,036	89.1%	127
1984	1,547	1,356	1,185	87.4%	171
1985	1,014	1,359	969	71.3%	390
1986	892	1,166	653	56%	513
1987	564	746	517	69.3%	229
1988	324	478	400	83.7%	78
1989	384	294	268	91.2%	26
1990	362	491	332	67.6%	159
1991	305	359	199	55.4%	160
1992	184	304	152	50%	152
1993	165	192	109	56.8%	83
1994	156	124	87	70.2%	37
1995	134	222	94	42.3%	128
1996	146	156	84	53.8%	72
1997	134	151	90	59.6%	61
1998	153	144	78	54.2%	66
1999	189	152	58	38.2%	94
2000	329	282	77	27.3%	205
2001	187	235	61	26%	174
2002	118	246	32	13.10%	214
2003	145	145	24	16.6%	121
2004	105	159	41	25.8%	118
2005	96	85	18	21.6%	67
2006	109	129	32	24.8%	97

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.unhcr.fr/pages/4aae621e11f.html>, consulted 20.06.2013.

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/index.html?xml\\_id=75&dtd\\_id=11](http://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/index.html?xml_id=75&dtd_id=11), consulted 25.04.2010.

<sup>28</sup> Source: Exchange of mails with Mrs Vallenaud, in charge of statistics for PFPRA, 26.10.2009. Also, cf. [http://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/documents/RA\\_2010\\_Ofpra.pdf](http://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/documents/RA_2010_Ofpra.pdf), consulted 16.01.2012.

(table 1 continued)

Year	Number of applications	Number of files studied	Number of cards admitted	Rate of cards admitted	Number of applications rejected
2007	132	120	31	25.8%	89
2008	117	127	40	31.5%	87
2009	184	123	53	43.1%	70
2010	328	263	184	70%	79
2011 <sup>29</sup>	74	68	54	79.4%	14
2012 <sup>30</sup>	111	62	38	61.2%	24
2013 <sup>31</sup>	65	92	55	59.5%	37
Total	10,995	11,898	7,752	Average 65%	4,146

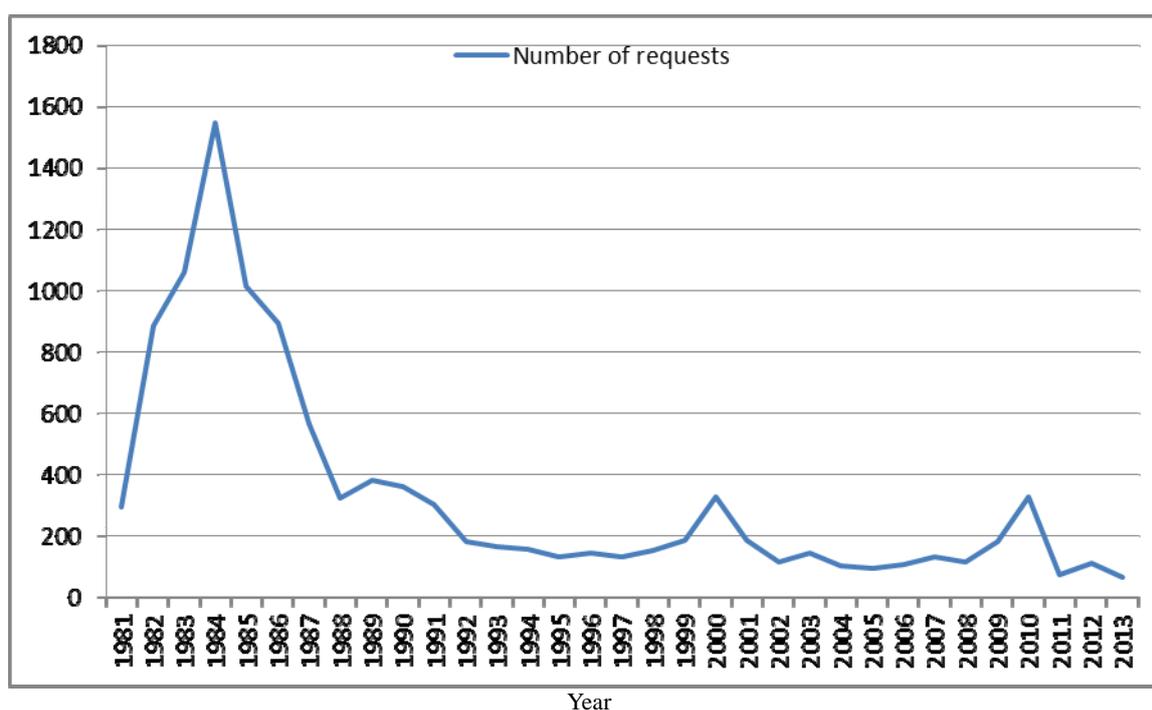


Figure 1. Requests for political asylum from 1981 to 2013.

What does this table and figure show us? We can draw up several elements from it.

### The Four Great Migratory Waves

The first wave, 1978 to 1988, began in 1978, several months before the revolution and was mainly of royalist tendency, at this time individuals couldn't ask for political asylum; it was only in 1981 that France accepted to give political refugee status to Iranians. During the entire period of the Pahlavi dynasty, Iranians could stay without problems, even although some of them were involved in politics. The Embassy of the Shah's regime renewed passports with a certain spirit of tolerance and facility so that Iranians did not have to ask for political refugee status<sup>32</sup>. After the revolution of 1979, the French government under Giscard d'Estaing, did not

<sup>29</sup> OFPRA report 2011, p. 78, <http://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/documents/OfpraRA2011.pdf>, consulted 30.11.2014.

<sup>30</sup> OFPRA report 2012, p. 94, <http://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/documents/OfpraRA2012.pdf>, consulted 30.11.2014.

<sup>31</sup> OFPRA report 2013, p. 96, [http://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/documents/OFPRA\\_BD\\_28-04-2014.pdf](http://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/documents/OFPRA_BD_28-04-2014.pdf), consulted 30.11.2014.

<sup>32</sup> This way of politics has been confirmed in our interviews with exiles and opponents of the Shah's regime: during our interviews with Abolhasan Banisadr, the first President of the Republic, exiled again in Paris in 1981 and Djalal Idjâdi, former exile in Paris at the time of the Shah.

grant political refugee status to the Shah's officials who had fled Iran so as not to enter into conflict with the Islamic republic<sup>33</sup>. But in 1981, for the first time in France, l'OFPRA recognized political refugee status for Iranians, the peak of the first wave being (cf. Figure 1) in 1984 with 1,547 applications for asylum. It was a period with a strong growth in the Iranian population in France linked to the revolution and its phase of repression. From 1985 to 1988, we can see a fall in the number of applications (clearly illustrated in the figure) and an increase in political refugee status, 969 persons obtained the status in 1985 compared to 400 in 1988. Iranians who arrived in France during the great wave of refugees in the 1980's represent a range of very heterogenous political tendencies which include the traditional right, the royalist tendency opposed to the revolution, some generals from the former regime, technocrats having undergone purges just after the revolution (accused of collaborating with the imperial regime), University professors and teachers, the majority of leaders from political organizations, independent personalities from the civil society, revolutionary actors having participated actively in the revolution, as well as the radical left who had the surprise of seeing the Islamic government turn against all these tendencies in order to eliminate them from the social body.

The origin of departure was mainly for political reasons but also linked to the war between Iran and Iraq. As far as the socio-economic profile is concerned the majority of witnesses confirm that the population of migrants was essentially from an urban middle-class, more or less cultivated, generally qualified and well aware of the western way of life, although this didn't always prevent them from having a drop in status in the host country<sup>34</sup>.

**Interview With Abdol Karim Lahhidji<sup>35</sup>, Born in 1940, Exiled in Paris April 9, 1982, President of the League for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran (LDDHI) and President of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)**

After the revolution, freedom of the press was progressively abolished. During 18 months, the headquarters of the newspapers were attacked, notably at the beginning of the war between Iran and Iraq. In 1980, the Iranian headquarters of the Human Rights Association was seized. Each day, the vice tightened on us; as from 1981, I was constantly nervy because I felt that the revolutionary guards (Pâsdârân) could attack me, either at my home, or at my office. In the second half of the month of Khordâd 1360 (around June 5, 1981), I made the decision to no longer go home; one day the Pâsdârân attacked my house and confiscated all the documents connected with my activities on Human Rights. As from Hafté Tir (June 28, 1981), following an attack on the Headquarters of the Islamic Republic Party, I went into complete hiding and I was only able to leave my refuge March 19, 1982, when I left Tehran to take the route of exile.

**Interview With MK<sup>36</sup>, Born 1962, Exiled Since 1982, in Paris, Member of the RPR, Married, Two Children Municipal Civil Servant**

As a woman, in Iran I was not free to decide. I felt that I was "small" because others decided instead of me. Let me give you an example regarding my divorce and "forced marriage" which went wrong. In fact, against

<sup>33</sup> This way of politics has been confirmed in our interviews with two Ministers of the Shah's regime Abdolmajid Madjidi, 10.03.2010 in Paris, former Minister of the budget and finance and Houshang Nahavandi, former rector of Tehran University and Minister of Higher Education in Brussels. 22.03.2010. During the interview, Houshang Nahavandi explained to us that the French authorities had given the order not to demonstrate on French territory.

<sup>34</sup> To classify Iranian refugees in France, cf. Nassehi-Behnam Vida (2000), *Diaspora iranienne en France: Changement et continuité*, *Cahiers d'étude sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien*, No. 30.

<sup>35</sup> Interview in Paris January 21, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Interview in Paris September 8, 2002.

my parents' wishes, I got civilly married in 1979 although I was under age. Just after the revolution, my father filed a complaint against my husband and denounced the marriage as illegitimate because he as a father had not agreed with this union. One night about two o'clock in the morning, the regime's agents came to my house with my father. They showed me the procurer's verdict cancelling my marriage. I was arrested on the spot and told I could no longer live with my husband. I had a baby of forty days old. That night I was obliged to abandon my husband and follow my father to his home 800 kilometres away. After two days at my father's place given I was an adult, my ex-husband and I decided to remarry civilly. I thought that this time my father would not be able to do anything; ten days later I handed the act concerning our new marriage to my father and fled. During the next step we were informed that my father was trying to pass a stoning verdict against my husband. He knew the "Islamic Laws" perfectly well and tried to influence Khomeini's son to obtain this verdict. Consequently we decided to leave Iran. This decision was made in complete secrecy and no one else knew about it because I feared my father might take action with the competent authorities to have my name put on the red list.

### The Second Wave

The second wave, from 1988 to 1998, is characterised by a rise, second peak on the graph, 305 persons in 1991, then a drop and a stagnation of the number of asylum seekers, to reach 134 persons in 1997, the lowest figure since the beginning of the 1980s. France was no longer a land of asylum: the level of demand and the cards granted dropped, then stagnated until 1998, and Iranians then oriented themselves elsewhere.

The 1990s decade was of great social significance, immediately following the opening up to reform of the regime instigated by Presidents Rafsandjani and Khatami. Fewer political refugees were recorded but we note that a large number of migrants left their country in the hope of accessing economic or social promotion. Indeed, with the end of the war against Iraq, in 1988, and the death of Khomeini in 1989, reasons for migrating diversified, becoming social, intellectual and cultural; moreover, it was easier to obtain a passport. The interviews reveal aspirations for another way of life; often, a first professional visit to Europe resulted in the preparation of definite migration some years later. The interviewees declared that they did not hesitate, given their difficulty integrating in Iran, to try their luck by migrating. This was a turn for Iranian migration since, contrary to its mainly illegal nature during the period 1980-1990, it was now something banal. To leave Iran officially was no longer taboo: migration institutionalised itself through training and the development of networks and it transformed into diaspora which became gradually independent from structural or individual factors which were the original cause<sup>37</sup>.

While networks extended and the costs and risks of migrating fell, the afflux of the Iranian diaspora became less selective in socio-economic terms and more representative of the global Iranian population.

In this wave, the socio-economic profile of the middle-class began to fade and little by little the poor appeared: trafficking of migrants became a real industry for the first time in the history of contemporary Iran.

#### **Interview With MM<sup>38</sup>, Born in September 1947 in Iran, Married to an Iranian, Two Children, Exiled in Paris in 1990, Advisor on Atomic Energy**

I was a civil servant in an organisation for atomic energy. After the revolution, we had problems as to the continuity of this organisation because it was said it was an organisation from the Shah's regime and they were

<sup>37</sup> To understand better the change of a structural factor to a culture of migration, cf. MASSEY et al., *op. cit.*, p. 444.

<sup>38</sup> Interview in Paris November 7, 2012.

thinking of transforming it into a depot for wheat! While waiting for clarification of the regime's politics, I wrote a book on the problems of atomic energy. During my work, I understood that I was a liberal and not someone ideological. The regime's politics towards people like me was to tolerate, but the direction did not give important responsibilities to liberals. We were used only to give advice. I noted that as a civil servant in the public sector, I had no future in Iran. In addition, in social relations, sometimes, in the street, a young man, *basidiji*, controlled my identity card and papers. My wife was also bothered for this sort of control. Let me tell you a story with an anecdote. In 1988, one day my director told me I was on the black list of individuals who were not allowed to leave Iran. After some finding out, I understood that I had been a shareholder under the Shah's regime. Given that the company had been nationalised after the revolution, members of the committee had become undesirable. After my protests, my name was taken off the black list. The origin of my departure was more social than political. This atmosphere raised a feeling of revulsion in me towards the regime. As a result, we decided to leave Iran definitely in 1990.

**Interview With MM<sup>39</sup>, Born in 1940 in Rasht in the North of Iran, Three Children, Emigrated to Toulouse in 1990**

I did my studies until second year in High School and I no longer continued. I got married very young but I divorced at the age of 23 years while having three sons. My parents had decided on my marriage. With my three children I went to Tehran and settled there definitely. My eldest son came to France before the revolution in 1976 to continue his studies. My two other sons joined him after. I did not want my sons to remain in Iran during the war because they would have had to go to the front. Ten years later, I also emigrated, after the end of the war between Iran and Iraq. As a hairdresser, I worked 16 hours per day because my children needed the money. My apartment was also my place of work; five people were working with me. My departure from Iran was linked to a problem of affection for my children. Every year, I used to come regularly to France and leave again but in 1990 I decided to stay definitely. This was my second migration: the first was in the interior of Iran at the age of 23 and this time it was towards the exterior. I was already separated from my husband and I was alone. Some months after staying, I created the same job here. At the beginning, it was difficult because I didn't master the French language, but little by little I was able to learn the hairstyles of French women and it worked well. At the time of my departure, I brought my mother with me because she was living with me in Iran, I loved my mother and my children. She looked after the children and I worked. In 1998 my mother died after 7 years living in France. I bought a tomb and after my death, I said to my children that I must rest beside her! The soil belongs to God and there is no difference between France and Iran. I am not a modern woman but if you are good to others, in life after death it will be the same.

### **The Third Wave**

The third wave, from 1999 to 2008, first experienced an increase in demand in 2000 (it is the third peak on the graph) which is explained by the rise in applications as from July 1999; past this alert, applications decreased and experienced first a drop (a relative drop if we compare it to the one in the years of the first and second waves) to reach the lowest figure since the 1980s, namely 96 in 2005 before then presenting a slight rise: 117 in 2008. The wave which surfaced following the riot at the University of Tehran in July 1999, marked the end of the period of reform of Khatami who wanted, to a certain extent, embody the new horizon of Iran's

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<sup>39</sup> Interview in Toulouse, June 20, 2013.

social classes<sup>40</sup>. The causes for migrating were multiple with, especially, a rise in the number of economic migrants who still maintained their political backgrounds. A new element is that emigrants no longer originated exclusively from Tehran's middle-class, but were often from the north, centre, and south of Iran, with a very diverse geographical spread as regards departures.

In this wave, Iranians had a tendency to choose Belgium<sup>41</sup> rather than France because it had become the anti-chamber to enter the easily accessible England where migrants, upon arrival, could access employment and promotion. This corresponded to a large extent with economic and social emigration undertaken by young single men, travelling alone and whose final goal was often Great Britain, another European country or North America. Another characteristic of this wave is the dynamic nature of the migratory process: According to the circumstances, migrants could increase their ambitions, modify their initial projects or postpone them to later.

**Interview With Nahid<sup>42</sup>, Born in 1973, Exiled in Paris in 2008, Divorced, Jobseeker**

I have an exceptional background because my parents have been settled in France for a long time. I came to see them during the holidays for 17 years. But after my participation in a social action, I had problems in Iran, and I therefore decided to stay here. In fact, because of the situation for women in Iran, I made this decision because women have no rights, no inheritance, no divorce. We were made wear the headscarf in public space. For two years, I have started participating in the campaign "a million signatures" for women in Iran, I have met people who participated, I have tried to help them, and it would be difficult for me to stay there. Many of these women who have done this sort of action are now arrested in Iran and many are condemned to death. The shortest time spent in prison was 21/22 days. I received a letter saying I was going to have problems if I continued. I have a child. For my child, I said to myself that I had to do something.

**Interview With Hamid<sup>43</sup>, Born in 1971 in Iran, Divorced, Two Daughters Born in Iran, Emigrated to Paris in 2005, Server in a Sandwich Bar**

In Iran, I was an accountant but I cannot do this job in France because at present I do not master the French language. At the moment, I am working as an employee in a sandwich bar in the *Les Halles* area. My boss masters French perfectly. He has been here since the 1980s. He knows France well. However he has abandoned his further studies in political science and now manages this restaurant. This has demotivated me. As far as the origin of my departure is concerned, I had a violent conflict with my wife; the problem was that the family conflict then transformed into a "political" conflict. My father-in-law was in the office that supervised for the Supreme Leader of the Iranian revolution, he held a lot of influence. As soon as he understood that my wife and I were in conflict, I was under threat: I understood that I risked being arrested and imprisoned. At first, I had no problems with the Iranian government but since my family problem transformed into a political one, I was obliged to leave Iran. I had a very difficult period because I left my two daughters in Iran.

<sup>40</sup> To understand the structural obstacles and Khatami's failure, cf. Mohammad Reza Djalili (2001), *Iran: l'illusion réformiste*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, pp. 20-50.

<sup>41</sup> In 2000, there were 3,183 Iranian political asylum seekers in this small country. This exceptional scale put Belgium on the same level as other European countries as it welcomed a very large number of Iranians (Germany, England, and Sweden). The European and Iranian context therefore presented particular circumstances for the displacement of migrants: In fact, independent in 1992, Bosnia stopped asking for visas from Iranians as from 1998, which made Iranian illegal emigration easier via Bosnia, Greece, Italy, France and Belgium.

To understand the stakes in this increase of Iranians in Belgium cf. Nader Vahabi (2011), *La migration iranienne en Belgique*, Paris, L'Harmattan, p. 75.

<sup>42</sup> Interview in Paris May 26, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Interview in Paris, May 22, 2009.

### The Fourth Wave

The fourth wave, from 2009 until the present day, once again showed an increase in the number of requests in 2009 and a rise to 328 in 2010 (fourth peak on Figure 1). This new increase was largely linked to the protest movement of June 2009 which was severely reprimanded by the regime who attacked progressive forces from the civil society<sup>44</sup>. The economic and social profile of this wave was made up of social and political actors participating in this movement. If we follow the logic of the previous waves, requesting asylum should have returned to a stable state. This is what we can note for the figures of 2011 (74), 2012 (111) and 2013 (65). These three years show an important drop in the applications for asylum from refugees in France, not seen since 1981.

Data provided by OFPRA since 1981 have therefore given indications on Iranian migratory flows. It has not however enabled us to evaluate the total number of Iranians in France, which is why we contacted INSEE.

#### **Interview With AS<sup>45</sup>, Born in 1960 in Iran, Two Children, One Daughter and One Son, Journalist, Advisor for Moussavi's Presidential Campaign, Exiled in France Since April 2010**

During the presidential campaign of 2009, I was responsible for the publication and propaganda for the General Headquarters of Moussavi. The night of the announcement of the result, the General Headquarters was attacked and 40 people were arrested. A person amongst the people arrested gave me up. As a result, to protect myself, I left Tehran and went to the North of Iran where my son was continuing his studies. I led a clandestine life and this lasted about six months. My daughter was a graphic artist and during the campaign, she worked with me. The *basidiji* of Tehran University had threatened to arrest and rape her. I had a Schengen visa but I could not officially leave. I took a smuggler; I left Iran by the North-West border towards Azerbaijan in the town Nakhjavan on January 23, 2010. Next, a smuggler accompanied me to the Turkish border by motor-bike. We crossed the border on foot and arrived in the first town Van after walking for 7 hours. After a 10 hour bus ride, I arrived in Istanbul, January 24, 2010. I paid the smuggler 1,500 dollars. My destination was Canada but I didn't have enough money, so I took a ticket for Sweden since I had the Schengen visa. At the control post, they asked me how I had left Iran and why I did not have an exit stamp from Iran or an entrance stamp to Turkey. I was obliged to ask for political exile in this country, but given my Schengen visa had been delivered by France, I came to France and settled definitely here in April 2010.

#### **Interview With K. R.<sup>46</sup>, Born in 1973 in the North of Iran, in Rasht, Exiled in Paris in December 2009, Cartoonist**

I was a cartoonist and as an artist I would have liked to have designed freely but I couldn't do that. After the Green Movement of 2009, I couldn't do cartoons related to social political or philosophical themes. I had already been to France for professional and artistic reasons in 2004 and 2006, but this time the political situation obliged me to make the choice to leave Iran definitely. I was admitted by OFPRA as a political refugee in December 2010. After staying I got orders for cartoons from some newspapers such as the International Courier but I still do not have a stable job.

### The French National Institute of Statistical and Economic Studies (INSEE)

Data that INSEE communicated to us concerning the five censuses of the Iranian population in France as

<sup>44</sup> Nader Vahabi (2009), Iran: A civil revolution? Foundation for political innovation, <http://www.fondapol.org/etude/1603/>.

<sup>45</sup> Interview in Paris, April 17, 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Interview in Paris with K. R. August 7, 2014.

from 1980 have provided figures which complete those on naturalised Iranians and minors.

INSEE produces general censuses of the French population in France with a frequency and content that has evolved over time: before 1948, Iranians were classed in the category “others” and have only appeared very clearly in censuses for the period 1948 to 2006. Before presenting an analysis of INSEE figures, some semantic specifications need to be clarified.

Table 2

Number of Iranians According to INSEE

Year	Iranian foreigners	French Iranians	Immigrant Iranians	H	F	TA <sup>47</sup>	TN <sup>48</sup>
1948	1,541	104	1,645	934	711	-	-
1962	1,640	700	2,340	1,340	1,000	42 %	573%
1975	3,300	685	3,985	2,175	1,810	70 %	-2%
1982	10,520	1,356	12,876	6,832	5,044	323 %	98%
1990	15,209	3,769	18,978	10,313	8,665	47 %	178%
1999	10,525	9,041	19,566	10,529	9,037	3 %	139%
2006 <sup>49</sup>	8,244	12,314	20,558	11,205	9,353	5 %	36%
2008 <sup>50</sup>	7,980	12,947	20,927	11,015	9,912	1.71 %	5%

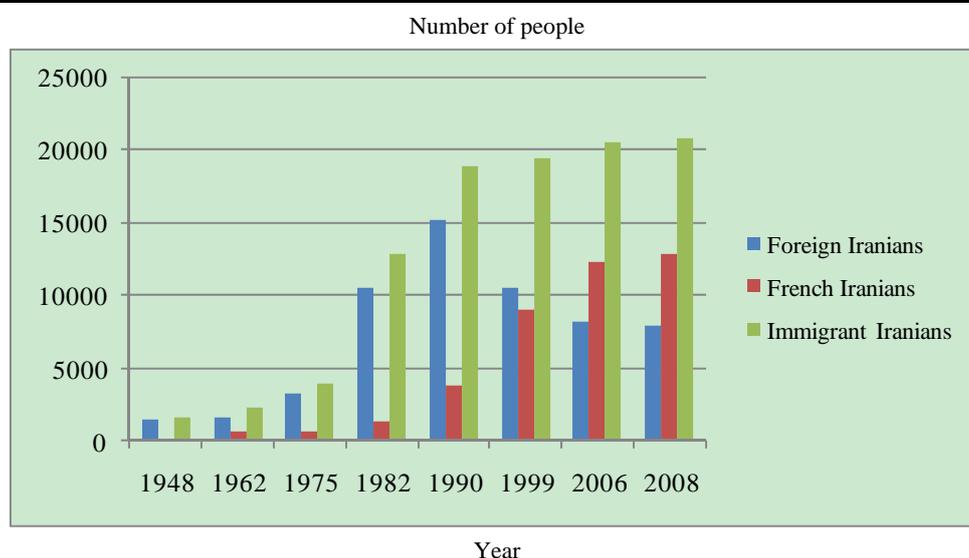


Figure 2. Iranian immigrant population.

### Foreigner and Immigrant, What Difference?

According to the definition of INSEE, a foreigner is a person who does not have French nationality. The term “foreigner” comes under legislative framework and can therefore be lost through naturalization. The foreigner then becomes French “through acquisition”, distinguishing him from being French “through birth”. The immigrant is an individual who has migrated from his country of birth where he had the nationality, towards another country where he has not yet the nationality. The qualifying adjective “immigrant” refers to a

<sup>47</sup> TA= Increase rate.

<sup>48</sup> TN= Naturalization rate.

<sup>49</sup> For the male/female distribution given by the 2006 census the «secret» clause is for the age group 0 to 14 years. INSEE has indicated that there were 9,748 males (in employment and out of employment) and 8,353 females (in employment and out of employment) which give the figure 18,101. If we take into account the age group 0-14 years, the figures 11,205 males and 9,353 females in our estimation therefore seem to be reliable.

<sup>50</sup> Figures were received from INSEE 07.02.2012.

migratory flow, not to the legislative framework: even if a foreigner becomes French, he remains an immigrant. The immigrant population is therefore composed of foreigners and French through acquisition.

These basic definitions, which greatly influence public opinion, raise problems for researchers who want to clearly define Iranian residents in France because this definition of “Iranians in France” is purely administrative. It does not take into account personal experience and relations with the country of origin: an individual born in Iran, naturalised as being French, can maintain with *Iranianess* important identity and affective relations; he should really be classed in a specific category “Franco-Iranian”. Similarly, what happens for children of Iranians born in France, will they automatically become French? These children come from the Iranian diaspora but they are not emigrants from Iran. In addition, some of them regularly return to Iran and have a cultural affinity with their parent’s country. At this stage of our research we do not have a precise answer for these ambiguities which exist within INSEE’s categorizations.

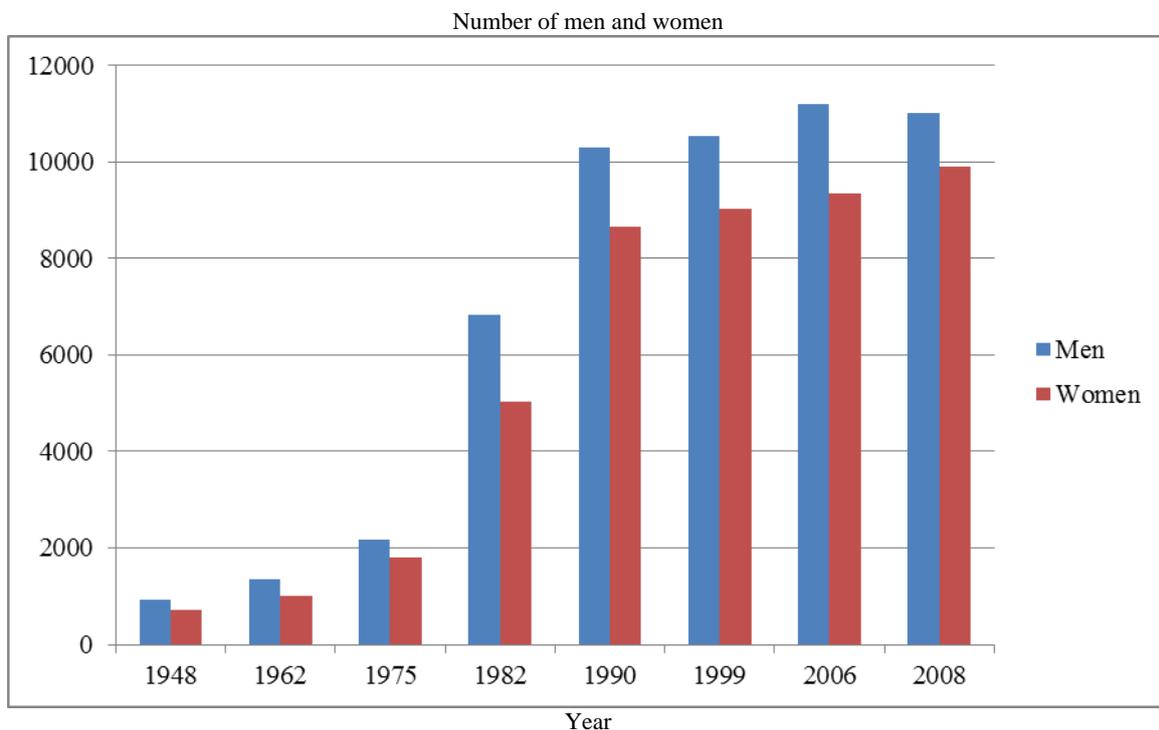


Figure 3. Comparative figure: men and women.

Iranian immigration, using INSEE’s definition, is relatively weak compared to that of other communities. According to the 1999 census, only 19,566 Iranians were recorded whereas there were 571,874 Portuguese, 574,208 Algerians, 522,504 Moroccans, and 174,160 Turks. In 1999, out of 4,306,094 immigrants in France, Iranians, 19,566 persons, only represented about 0.005% of the total number; this explains the invisible characteristic of this population at first glance.

Table 1 shows that an increase in Iranian immigration in France began to slow down as from 1990; this means that France at this time was no longer a popular destination for Iranians compared to its German neighbour and Northern Europe<sup>51</sup>. In addition, some of the newly arrived, after staying two to five years

<sup>51</sup> In 2009, 160,000 Iranians were recorded in Germany. For Iranians in Germany, cf. Nader Vahabi, *Atlas de la diaspora iranienne*, op.cit, pp. 129-140.

emigrated again to other countries. In other words, basing ourselves on INSEE statistics, which indicate for 2006, 20,556 immigrant Iranians, we note that more time passes, more the number of naturalized Iranians increases, and at the same time, more the number of foreign Iranians decreases, which appears clearly in Table 2.

In addition, as regards distribution by age group, INSEE data on the Iranian population, recapitulated in Table 3, show that the population had become in the years 1990 to 2006, more and more “sluggish” according to an expression used by demographers, that is to say that the percentage of the population over 55 increased and that, as a result, the active population decreased.

Table 3

*The Iranian Population Over 55 Years*<sup>52</sup>

Year	Iranian immigrant population	Over 55 years	Rate %
1990	18,978	2,560	13%
1995	19,566	2,773	14%
2006	20,558	5,089	25%
2008	20,927	5,850	28%

Table 4

*The Iranian Population by Age Group in 2008*

Year	0-14 years	15-24 years	25-34 years	35-54 years	Over 55 years	Total
2008	1,079	1,478	2,981	9,540	5,850	20,927

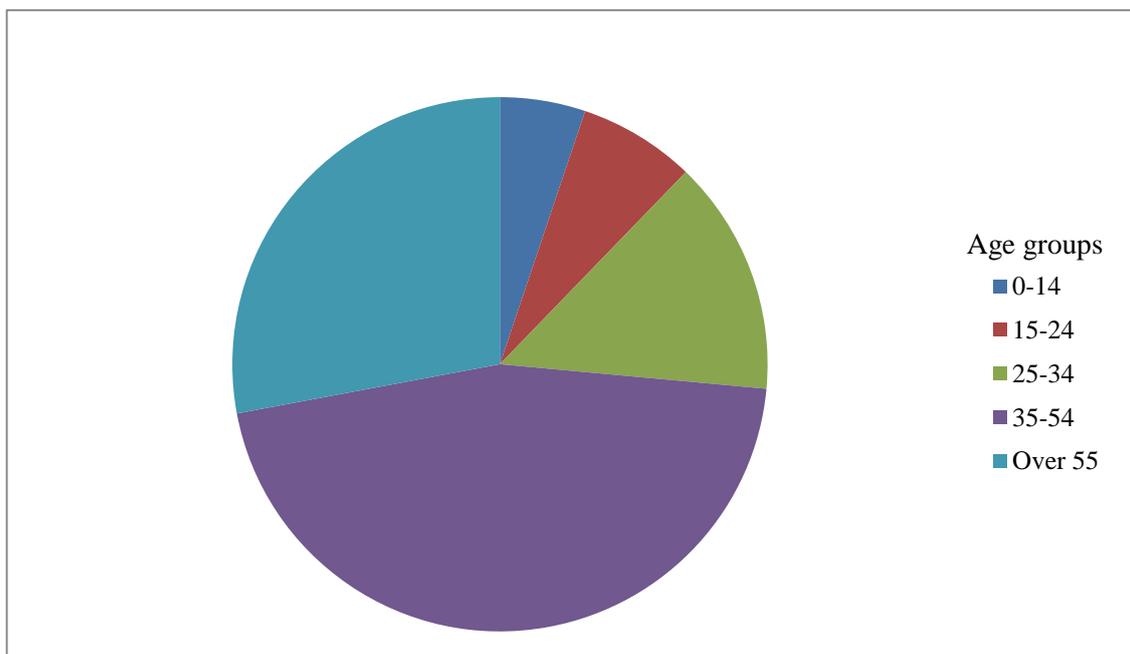


Figure 4. Iranian population by age group.

<sup>52</sup> Source: INSEE 1990, 1999, and 2006. Document received by mail February 14, 2010, forwarded by a representative from INSEE Mme Nathalie Frère. It is interesting to specify that the criteria for “age group” according to INSEE can evolve, which explains why there is 55 years in 1990 and over 60 years in 1999. For the age group 0-14 years, no information was given for the censuses in 1990 and 1999; for the census of 2006, the age group 0-14 appears in the rubric “secret” which gives the nomenclature 0-14, 25-34, 35-54, over 55 years.

To sum up, the figures from INSEE<sup>53</sup> and the data from Figure 1 and Tables 1-4, also confirmed by our field study, have shown that the year 1990 was a real turning point for the Iranian migratory dynamic in France. As from this date, the number of “foreign” Iranians stagnated until 2009 and was more or less in corroboration with the number of new arrivals, which we can note by examining the Iranian migratory flows between 2004 and 2008 according to the Minister of Immigration and National Identity (Table 2). However, we had no more massive arrivals of Iranians like in the period 1980 and as Tables 3, 4 and Figure 4 indicate, the population became more and more “sluggish” (5, 850 over 55 years, which is 28% of the Iranian population in France).

### **The Total Number of Iranians in France**

By adding the number of foreign Iranians (8,244) to those naturalised (12,314), we come to the figure 20,558 which represents the number of Iranians living legally in France in 2006 whatever their birth place or nationality<sup>54</sup>. Similarly, in 2008, 20,927 Iranians were recorded, 12,947 French and 7,980 foreign, a rise of 1.71% in the population compared to 2006. By estimating an increase of 500 migrants per year from 2008, (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014), we obtain a total number of 23,927 legal migrants present in France in 2014.

But this official figure does not correspond to the reality because statistics should include individuals who live illegally and whose files have not been admitted. For example, we have seen above that between 1981 and 2010, 4,071 political asylum requests were rejected by OFPRA. Where do these rejected go? Our field research has shown that only between 10% and 15% of those rejected find a solution in the next five years (a late regularisation) and between 5% and 10% envisage an early return to Iran. What happens then to the others, 75% of those rejected? This question is at the heart of our problematic concerning the statistic study on the Iranian population but, at this stage of our research we have no hypothesis on the future of these individuals.

However following our field work investigation in the three bordering countries France, Germany and Belgium<sup>55</sup>, we can estimate that in France 30% to 50% of rejected Iranians hide from the administration system because they lack prospects to find a solution to their problem of regular residency. This non-official category therefore makes the number of Iranians that can be recorded more complicated and less reliable. In addition, some Iranian students and those who come on tourist visas do not return to Iran. Based on the different interviews that we have carried out, and in light of information given by certain associations in France, we can evaluate this floating population as being between 5,000 and 8,000 persons; which added to the 23,927 persons from official statistics, gives a bracket ranging from 28,927 to 31,927 Iranians. Therefore we are rounding up this figure to 31,000 for the Iranian population for the end of year 2014<sup>56</sup>.

### **The Geographical Distribution**

How do Iranians choose their city of residency in France? Has the choice of a given place been imposed on them or is it the result of a personal choice? Can the parameter “social status of individuals” be taken into account in the study of their distribution? The following tables provide elements of answer to these questions.

<sup>53</sup> The INSEE figure does not include the Iranians who live illegally.

<sup>54</sup> Table 5.

<sup>55</sup> Our enquiry in Belgium confirmed the same tendency. Nader VAHABI (2001), *La migration iranienne en Belgique, Une diaspora par défaut*, Paris, L’Harmattan, pp. 111-112.

<sup>56</sup> For a deeper study, cf. Nader Vahabi, *Atlas de la diaspora iranienne*, op. cit. pp. 170-171.

According to INSEE, in 1999, the 19,566 Iranian immigrants were distributed over 97 departments, 1,795 in towns with more than 5,000 inhabitants and 1,214 of them living in communes of less than 5,000 inhabitants. According to the figures in Table 5, the majority (12,181, 62%) was settled in Ile-de-France and 35% of the 12,181 were in Paris (4,269).

Table 5

*Distribution of Iranians in Ile de France*

N of the department	Name of the department	French by acquisition	Foreigner	Immigrant population
75	Paris	1,811	2,458	4,269
77	Seine-et-Marne	149	100	249
78	Yvelines	282	368	650
91	Essonne	288	292	580
92	Haut-de-Seine	1,272	1,652	2,924
93	Seine-Saint- Denis	416	485	901
94	Val-de-Marne	873	1,055	1,928
95	Val-D'Oise	266	414	680
Total number	Total number for 8 departments	5,357	6,824	12,181

In order to understand the logic of the geographical distribution, Table 5 has emphasised the grouping together of a part of Iranian immigrants in big urban centres which have more than 100 Iranians. We are questioning the logic of this distribution. How can we justify it?

The statistical analyses and cartography underline a strong division Ile de France/Province: the majority of Iranians, 70%, live in Ile de France; this is partly explained by the strong politicization of this diaspora because it finds structures which enable it to keep up with Iranian politics more easily in the Paris region than in province. In addition to historical, cultural affinity and asylum factors, it is necessary to specify that the choice of France can be explained by “the theory of networks”: in the zones of origin and destination, migrants’ networks are composed of interpersonal ties which link migrants, former migrants and new migrants in terms of affinity, friendship, political persuasion and bonds established between members who originate from the same religious and ethnic community. These networks increase the probability of the migratory movement because they decrease the costs and risks of the displacement and reassure as to the feasibility of the migratory project for an Iranian who is on the edge of making a decision. The links between the networks constitute a form of social capital which the newly arrived can draw on to choose the town where they first settle, initiate their first application for residence, make their first housing application, look for a roof over their heads or have access to a casual job in France. The enquiry shows that most of the time these knowledge networks rebound towards employment stability. This distribution is part of the problematic of “Living together” which believes that a foreign population integrates better in the host country if it benefits from a reasonable geographical distribution, without excessive concentration, and is favourable to the acculturation of the ethnic minority in the new territory. This problematic will be the subject for a future paper.

### Conclusion

The birth of a francophone elite, eager for literature and French culture, was at the origin of a migration the trace of which can be found in Montesquieu’s “Persian letters,” 1722 and which evolved slowly following very distinct phases. From the knowledge exile of the 19th century, we moved towards that of the political

refugee in 1908. Moreover, French was recognized as the official language in administration. Iranian migration then took on another dimension after the 1953 Coup, a politicization that reached a peak with the arrival in Paris of Khomeini on August 2, 1978.

In spite of this migratory tradition, at the moment of the downfall of the Pahlavi dynasty, the continuous migratory flow was still not quantitatively important: 4,000 persons before the revolution. But these flows amplified in the middle of the 1980s, linked to the downturn of the revolution into terror and the massive arrivals of refugees so that the number of Iranians emigrating to France in 1985, six years after the revolution, reached 22,484, and had quadrupled compared to 1979. In other words, the 1980s constituted a pivotal period, during which we moved from a migration of the elite to one which touched nearly all groups of the Iranian society. This new phase which included four waves that coincided with political events in Iran can be called the diasporisation of Iranian migration. If the majority of Iranian migrants in the 1980s came from the reasonably well-off class and were born in big urban agglomerations, those in the 1990s (following the end of the war between Iran and Iraq and the death of Khomeini) and the years 2000 (following the riot at the University of Teheran in July 1999 and the failure of the reformist movement) had very diversified sociocultural profiles even coming from rural backgrounds. The socio-economic profile goes from the urban elite: lawyers, officials, journalists, teachers, doctors, nurses, magistrates, military officials, company directors, etc., to artisans, such as shopkeepers, garage owners, building contractors... and finally from the skilled labourer, on through to unskilled workers in building, restauration or removals.

This migratory flow, and its distribution which follows “the theory of networks” established in the form of political affinities, professional reasons, friendships and family ties, has led to a demographic study of the Iranian population in metropolitan France; we then identified a discrepancy between the common sense, which gave phenomenal figures about immigrants, transmitted from word of mouth, and scientific estimations that we obtained in the three sources of our study, OFPRA (French Office for the Protection of Homeless and Stateless persons), INSEE (French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies), and the Ministry of the Interior. By comparing the figures of these three sources since 1980, we are estimating that there are 31,000 Iranians in France at the end of 2014.

Overall, Iranians in France constitute a population presenting considerable diversity, to the extent that we can say that in France there is not an “Iranian community” but groups of Iranians who are culturally and politically widely diversified. This peculiarity concerning Iranians in France is less one of a seemingly new “community” than the expression of a system of values where the individual outweighs the group<sup>57</sup>. By distinguishing themselves from the “communitarianism” of certain immigrants in France, Iranians produce integration schemes which are not very well known, different from those of an “assimilate approach” dominantly propagated by President Sarkozy in 2007.

Iranian immigration, distributed well geographically, does not raise any major problems and we might ask whether this form of “ethnicity of Iranian modernism” could not act as a model for the management of other groups of immigrants; this here is an interesting path of research for the future.

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<sup>57</sup> In our enquiry on the memory of Iranians in France, we have observed a heterogeneous memory, scattered, torn apart and not homogeneous, which proves that there is not a community in the traditional sense of the term. (Cf. N. Vahabi 2008), *Sociologie d'une mémoire déchirée, le cas des exilés iraniens*, L'Harmattan, pp. 225-230.

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