

# Refugees – who they are and where they come from

**Who is a refugee?**

**The experience of refugee women**

**Cultural backgrounds:**

**Eritrea**

**Ethiopia**

**Somalia**

**Sudan**

**Iran**

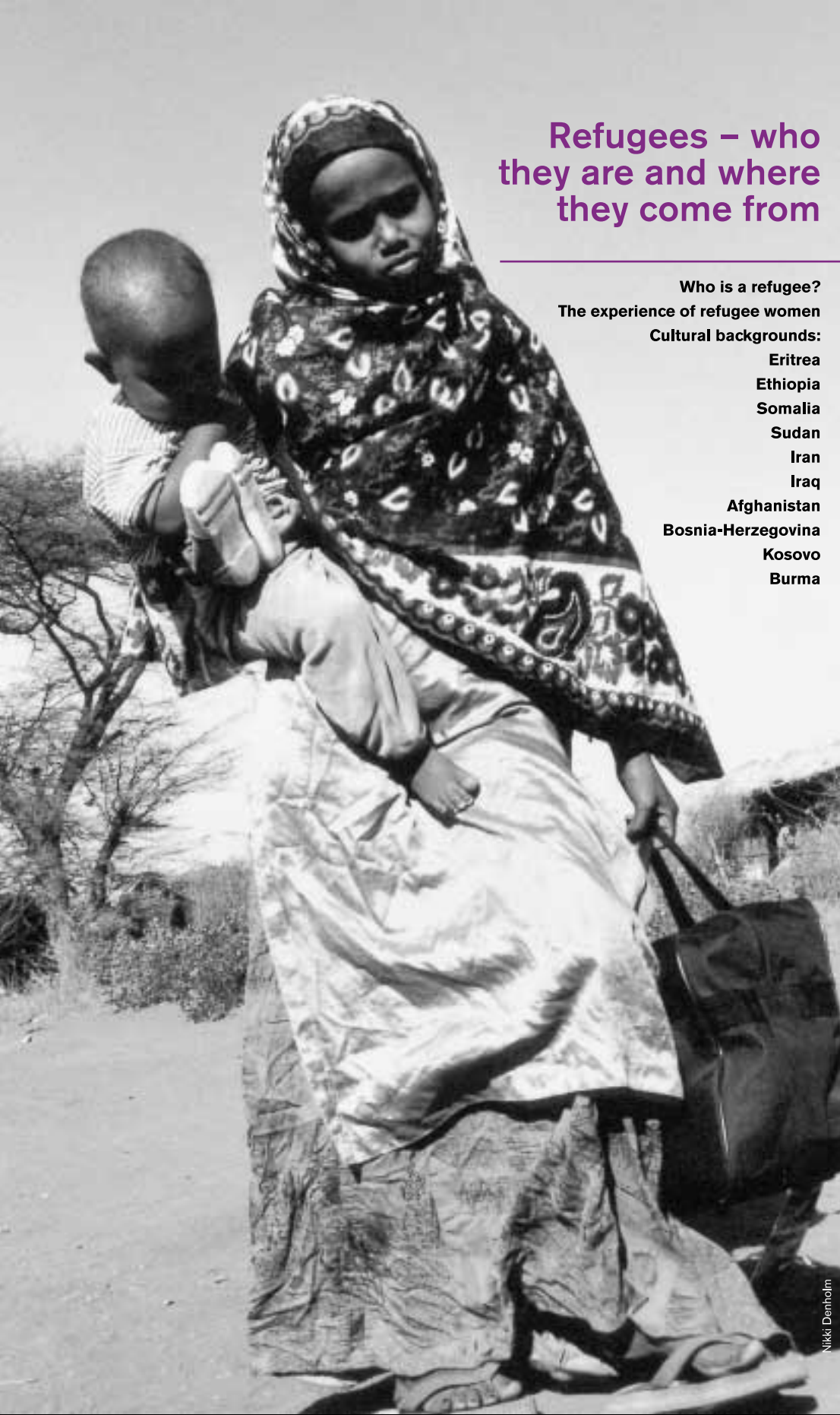
**Iraq**

**Afghanistan**

**Bosnia-Herzegovina**

**Kosovo**

**Burma**





# Refugees – who they are and where they come from

1

Refugees – who they are and where they come from

## WHO IS A REFUGEE?

A refugee is: any 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/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country.

*United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees<sup>1</sup>*

Refugees are the human casualties that stream from the world's trouble spots. They are driven from their homelands by major crises such as war, religious and political persecution, brutal regimes, ethnic cleansing, military uprisings and anarchy.

Very few refugees have emerged from their experiences without having endured or witnessed some form of physical or psychological trauma. The long-term physical<sup>2</sup> and psychological<sup>3</sup> sequelae resulting from this exposure are a common feature of the 'refugee experience'.

## What is the 'refugee experience'?

The refugee experience refers to the physical, psychological and social experiences of refugees as they flee conflict and seek safety.

Refugee experiences are diverse. Some refugees have endured years of warfare, such as that between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Others have suffered internal displacement or repression within their own countries for long periods, such as the Assyrians in Iraq. Still others have been subjected to siege conditions in their home towns and cities, as in the former Yugoslavia, or have lived through the terror of total anarchy, as in Somalia.

Forty percent of refugees are estimated to have experienced severe trauma, such as witnessing killings – often of their own family members.<sup>4</sup> Many have survived detention, physical violence, rape, and perilous journeys to countries of asylum, only to endure a hand-to-mouth existence in dangerous overcrowded camps or urban refugee environments.

There are over 40 million refugees and displaced people worldwide.<sup>5</sup> For the minute fraction of refugees (estimated to be less than 1 percent of the world's refugees<sup>6</sup>) who eventually resettle in a new country, the refugee experience continues as they struggle to adapt to a new environment and rebuild their shattered lives.



Nikki Denholm

## How do refugees enter New Zealand?

There are three ways in which refugees arrive in New Zealand.

### **1. *Under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mandated quota system ('quota refugees')***

The quota for UNHCR-mandated refugees to enter New Zealand is set annually by Cabinet. Currently the quota is set at 750 per year. Quota refugees may arrive under the following categories:

- Women at Risk
- Protection
- Medical/disability.

On arrival, quota refugees spend a six-week orientation period in Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre.

### **2. *As part of New Zealand Immigration Service (NZIS) humanitarian migrant intake or family reunification ('family reunification refugees')***

Those entering the country under this category are relatives of refugees already living here. They enter under the general immigration provisions that take into account humanitarian issues such as family reunification (Immigration Act 1987). The application costs and the air travel are generally met by their relatives, who are themselves often struggling with their own resettlement costs and challenges. In some years, the number of family reunification refugees is roughly equivalent to the size of the refugee quota.

### **3. *As spontaneous refugees ('asylum seekers')***

Asylum seekers usually seek refugee status on arrival at our borders, or when their temporary visa or permit expires. Claims for refugee status are confirmed or rejected by NZIS depending on whether their circumstances meet the criteria set out in the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Those who are successful are then eligible to apply for permanent residence and later, New Zealand citizenship.



## What is the difference between a migrant and a refugee?

The table below offers a general outline of the differences between migrants and refugees. However it is important to note that some migrants can experience similar resettlement issues to refugees.

Table 1

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Migrants	Refugees
<b>Migrants choose to leave their homeland and settle in a country of their choice. They arrange the most suitable method of travel and pack the possessions they wish to take. They can sell or dispose of possessions they don't wish to take.</b>	Refugees do not choose to leave their homeland. They flee in response to a crisis. They have little choice about where they go and by what means they will travel. They have no time to pack or to distribute possessions. Almost everything is left behind.
<b>Migrants have time to prepare emotionally for their departure and to farewell friends and family appropriately.</b>	Refugees, due to their hurried, often secret departure, are unprepared emotionally for leaving, and may not have time to farewell loved ones.
<b>Migrants take with them their travel documents, passports, and other documentation, including educational qualifications.</b>	Refugees often flee without any documentation whatsoever.
<b>Migrants usually emigrate with their families.</b>	Refugees must often leave family members behind.
<b>Migrants depart for their new country knowing that they can return to their homeland for visits, or return permanently if they cannot settle.</b>	Refugees, although they dream of returning home, know that this is unlikely to happen. <sup>7</sup>
<b>Migrants are usually well prepared and well motivated to settle in a new country. Many will have found out about schools, employment and local conditions before they left their homeland.</b>	Refugees arrive in their new country ill-prepared and often traumatised. They have little in the way of possessions and financial resources. They are often debilitated by a pervading sense of loss, grief, worry and guilt about the family left behind.
<b>Migrants, due to their better levels of health, education and economic independence, are less likely to encounter negative attitudes in their resettlement country.</b>	Refugees may experience stigma and prejudice in their resettlement country in relation to cultural differences, disease prevalence, low education levels and perceived burdening of the welfare system.

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## THE EXPERIENCE OF REFUGEE WOMEN

“While I stayed in the refugee camp for years, they gave me not enough food for my four children and me. Always it was the men who got the best of everything. If someone gave me anything, because the men were stronger, they would push me and fight me and take it from me, so I was afraid to take anything, even for my children. That is how it is for a woman who has no husband.”

*Refugee woman*<sup>8</sup>



Nikki Denholm

**T**wo-thirds of the world's refugees are women and girls.<sup>9</sup> Male members of the family are often away fighting battles, or they have fled earlier, have been killed, or have simply disappeared. Households headed by women are the norm in refugee situations.

On the other hand, the majority of asylum seekers who arrive in Western countries seeking refugee status are men. Women are much more likely to make perilous journeys on foot over borders into the nearest safe country, together with their children and other family members, and to seek refuge in a refugee camp.<sup>10</sup> They must often assume an abrupt change in roles and status that is culturally alien to themselves and their community. For example, they may have to take on the role of the head of the family, or they may have to adjust to the oldest son taking over this role.

Refugee women, at every stage of their flight, are vulnerable to all forms of abuse. Sexual harassment, rape and abduction are common violations. A woman who is unable to feed, shelter and clothe herself and her children is often forced into prostitution, or is subject to other abuse. Women are not only at risk from those they are fleeing, but they are also at risk from “helpers” such as camp guards, camp officials, other refugees and sometimes even their own families.<sup>11</sup> Their special need for protection may be recognised too late by international organisations, or may even go unrecognised.

“About two weeks after we arrived, the policemen guarding the camp held a party ... They had guns and knives and they were so strong. They forced the women into various rooms at the camp and they raped the women... I was so very frightened, I thought I was going to die that night. It was the most terrible shameful thing of my life. It happened in the place we went for safety and it was done by the people who were there to protect us.”

*Refugee woman*<sup>12</sup>

Estimates of the number of women raped during the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict range from 20,000 to 50,000.<sup>13</sup> Similarly there has been a high incidence of rape among Horn of Africa refugee women.

In refugee situations it is almost invariably women who suffer most from malnutrition and lack of access to health care, educational and skill-training assistance and income-generating activities. In the words of a social worker in a refugee camp:

*Third world refugee women are in every sense refugees at the end of the charity line where they wait endlessly for food, water, medicines, and whatever basic needs have to be met. The female refugee head of family is even worse off.<sup>14</sup>*

## CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

### GROUPS FROM THE HORN OF AFRICA



In the last decade, the largest proportion of New Zealand's refugee intake has come from the Horn of Africa countries such as Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and, to a lesser extent, Sudan.

### Eritrea

Eritrea, Africa's newest country, was established in 1993. With a population of 3.6 million the country has nine major tribes or clans, each with its own language. The population is roughly half Muslim, half Christian (see Table 2 page 11).

Italians arrived in the region in the last quarter of the 19th century and began establishing ports, railways, roads, factories and farms, their numbers increasing to thousands. In 1936, Mussolini invaded Ethiopia from Eritrea. When the Allies defeated the Italian army in 1941, Italy was forced to give up its three African possessions – Eritrea, Libya and southern Somalia. Eritrea was administered by the British until 1952, when the United Nations granted Eritrea self-government within a federal union of Ethiopia. After 10 years and a number of incidents, Eritrea sought to shake off the control exerted by Ethiopia. The war for independence from Ethiopia lasted 30 years.

From 1988, the Eritrean force began to gain the upper hand. Three years later the Eritreans won Asmara, the capital, and a provisional government for Eritrea was established under Isaias Afwerke. In 1993, the country won independence. Under the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, the country is now struggling to rebuild the economy and infrastructure.

During the conflict more than half a million Eritreans fled the country, mainly to the Sudan. Eritrean refugees began arriving in New Zealand in 1994.

## Ethiopia



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Ethiopia is a landlocked country bordered by Eritrea, Sudan, Kenya, Djibouti and Somalia. The country has a population of around 55 million, with more than 80 ethnic groups. The largest of these groups are the Oromo, followed by the Amhara and Tigrayan groups. Roughly 40 percent of the population is Christian, 40 percent Muslim and the rest follow traditional faiths (see Table 2 page 11). There are still conflicts between ethnic groups and factions within political parties.

Ethiopia is unique among African countries for having never been colonised, although it was occupied by the Italians for five years before and during part of World War 2. After this the Italians surrendered to Allied forces and Ethiopia resumed its independence. However, Eritrea remained under British administration until 1952 when the UN granted it self-government within a federal union of Ethiopia.

In 1962 Emperor Haile Selassie unilaterally annexed Eritrea as a province of Ethiopia. This led to an outbreak of guerilla warfare because the Eritreans regarded the annexation as colonisation by another African nation. The conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea resulted in Africa's longest war of the twentieth century.

In 1974, a coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam ousted the Emperor. From 1977 to 1991 wars and major famines ravaged the country, killing over half a million people. These catastrophes and the withdrawal of Soviet support forced Mengistu to flee and the government was taken over by a coalition of rebel groups led by Meles Zenawi. In May 1995 Ethiopia held its first ever parliamentary elections and Zenawi was confirmed as prime minister.

During the decades of warfare and famine over one million Ethiopians have fled to become refugees in neighbouring countries, or in a third country. Ethiopian refugees have been arriving in New Zealand since 1993.

## Somalia

The Somali are traditionally nomadic people who have occupied the Horn of Africa for over 1000 years. Somalis are divided into six major clan-families (see Table 2 page 11). Within these groups are many subclan-families. The clan-family system forms the basis of Somali society. Features within the clan system, such as shifting allegiances of the clan-families, have made it vulnerable to political manipulation and corruption.

During the colonial era the country was divided into British, French and Italian colonial territories. In 1960 these territories merged to become Somalia, an independent state. After a peaceful start, tensions between clans arose. In 1969, General Saieed Barre staged a coup and installed a military government. There followed clan persecutions, territorial conflicts with Ethiopia, famine and civil war. Throughout Barre's rule civilians suffered large-scale human rights abuses, including assaults, killings, torture and deliberate policies of genocide.

In 1991 General Barre was overthrown. Warring clans threw the country into a state of chaos and confusion. The power vacuum was filled in many areas by murderous warlords. More than 1.5 million people representing more than a quarter of Somalia's population fled to neighbouring countries. Most of New Zealand's intake of Somalis are drawn from refugee camps in Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan.

The first Somali refugees arrived in New Zealand in 1993. Somali people usually retain their clan identity and affinity in this country. It is important to take this into consideration when arranging interpreters or health education sessions here.



Nikki Demhoin

## Sudan

Sudan is the largest country in Africa. It shares borders with nine other countries and has a population of approximately 35 million. Although Sudan has more than 50 ethnic groups and 140 languages, the people fall into two main groups: the Arab or mixed Arab peoples in the north (mainly Muslims), and the African peoples in the south (mainly Nilotics of Christian or traditional religions). The enormous cultural, religious, economic and historical differences between these two groups lie at the heart of the civil war that has divided the country for decades.

From the late 19th century Sudan was jointly governed by Britain and Egypt until it won independence in 1956. Two years later the first of several military coups took place. These military regimes have consistently dominated the poorer south, and as a result the southern Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) sprang up, vowing to fight the government for complete autonomy for the south. The resulting civil war has reduced the south to a level barely above subsistence.<sup>15</sup>

The current ruler, General Omar Hassan al-Bashir, has repressed political opposition and escalated the war against the south. Foreign-led peace initiatives and temporary ceasefires to allow humanitarian aid to reach the war-torn south have had little impact on the strife.

The war has killed an estimated 1.3 million people. Hundreds of thousands of southerners have fled to bordering countries or to safer areas in Sudan. The country now has the largest internally displaced population in the world, estimated at 4 million people. According to the Australian Red Cross, 'Sudan will remain one of the world's chief refugee producing nations.'<sup>16</sup>

Refugees from Sudan have been arriving in New Zealand since 1994.<sup>17</sup>



## A comparison of the Horn of Africa refugees

Refugee intake from the Horn of Africa shows a huge diversity of religion, language and clan groupings, as indicated in Table 2, below.

Table 2

### SUMMARY OF RELIGIOUS, LINGUISTIC AND ETHNIC/CLAN GROUPS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Country	Religion	Ethnic Groups/ Clans	Languages
<b>Eritrea</b>	Coptic Christian and Islam, Catholic and Protestant minorities; some traditional religions	Includes Tigrinya, Tigre, Bilen, Afar, Saho, Kunama, Nara, Hidareb, Rashaida	Mainly Tigrinya or Tigray; also Arabic and local languages; some English and Italian also spoken
<b>Ethiopia</b>	Ethiopian Orthodox; Islam; some traditional African religions	Includes Amhara, Oromo, Tigre, Gurage, Niloti, Somali, Danakil	Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya, and local languages; some English and Italian also spoken
<b>Somalia</b>	Predominantly Islam; some Christians	Includes the Dir, Issaq, Hawiye, Digil, Rahawayn, Darood	Somali and Arabic; some English and Italian also spoken
<b>Sudan</b>	Predominantly Islam; minority Christian; some traditional religions	<i>North:</i> mainly Arabs, including Nubian, Jamla, Beja and other groups. <i>South:</i> Nilotic Africans, including Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk and others	Arabic, including creole Arabic in the south, and many local languages; also some English

Source: Adapted from R Elissalde (ed). *The World Guide 2001/2002*. Instituto del Tercer Mundo, Uruguay, 2001. <http://www.item.org.uy/>

## The experience of conflict, flight and becoming a refugee

People from the Horn of Africa may have experienced:

- aerial bombardment and shelling
- torture, including torture of children
- arrest and killings of family members
- eviction and property destruction
- imprisonment or detention, often for prolonged periods
- separation from family members
- systematic and public rape.

Many refugees have experienced long and dangerous journeys to their countries of asylum. On arrival most were put into camps where conditions ranged from substandard to appalling. Some refugees have languished in camps for more than 10 years. Many Horn of Africa children currently in New Zealand were born in the refugee camps and have no other life experience.

### Prior access to health care

The coverage of health care in the Horn of Africa countries is poor compared to New Zealand standards (see Table 3). While most of the major cities have hospitals with essential facilities (anaesthesia, theatres, pathology laboratories, x-ray machines) and programmes such as family planning and immunisation, the rural areas are generally poorly serviced, with people having to travel very long distances, often on foot, to access care.

Health care is usually accessed through a community-based primary health care clinic. Much of the care routinely provided by general practitioners (GPs) in New Zealand is provided by health workers such as nurses or birthing attendants in the Horn of Africa countries. Traditional healers are used extensively, particularly in rural areas. Many Horn of Africa refugees in New Zealand will be unfamiliar with the concept of a family doctor and a formalised appointment system. These aspects will need to be explained carefully to them.



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Table 3

### KEY HEALTH INDICATORS – HORN OF AFRICA

Country	Life expectancy at birth <sup>a</sup>	Under 5 mortality rate <sup>b</sup>	Maternal mortality rate, pregnancy-related <sup>c</sup>	Total fertility rate <sup>d</sup>
Eritrea	50.8	112	1400	5.6
Ethiopia	43.3	173	1400	6.2
Somalia	47	211	1600	7.2
Sudan	55	115	660	4.5
New Zealand <sup>e</sup>	77.8	8.5	5.2	2

- a Years a newborn is expected to live based on prevailing patterns of mortality. Data refers to 1998 figures. United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2000*, Oxford University Press, 2000. <http://www.undp.org/hdro/>
- b Children under 5 years per 1000 live births. Data refers to 1998 figures. United Nations Development Program (UNDP) *Human Development Report 2000*, Oxford University Press, 2000. <http://www.undp.org/hdro/>
- c Per 100,000 live births; data refers to 1990 figures. World Health Organization, *The World Health Report 1999: Making A Difference*, Geneva: World Health Organization, 1999.
- d Average number of live children born to a woman during her lifetime. Data refers to 1999 figures. World Health Organization, *The World Health Report 2000 Health Systems: Improving Performance*, Geneva: World Health Organization, 2000.
- e Data for New Zealand presented as a basis for comparison. New Zealand data sources: a and d Statistics New Zealand (1997-99); b and c New Zealand Health Information Service (1997).



### **Significant resettlement issues in New Zealand**

- Many refugees from the Horn of Africa are single women who face the burden of caring for a large family without the support of the traditional extended family.
- Some families may face adjustment issues associated with the changing role of women in the family, from home-maker to breadwinner.
- Many refugees send money back to family members, compromising their own capacity to meet the financial demands of resettlement.
- Some may face difficulties in adjusting to their change in social status in New Zealand, particularly if they formerly held positions of power and prestige. Others may find that suddenly gaining rights and status (as in women who formerly held no status) is just as difficult.
- There is a significant number of young adults who arrive without adult support, or whose relationships with parents or guardians have broken down since arriving in New Zealand.
- Children, particularly those who have spent a prolonged period in a refugee camp, may have limited school experience and may have learning difficulties and problems adjusting to school life in New Zealand.
- Despite living in close proximity to other people from the same region, many Horn of Africa people may feel socially isolated, or even experience hostility, because they belong to a different clan system or family grouping from those around them.



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## GROUPS FROM IRAN, IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN



Since 1994, refugees from Iran and Iraq and to a lesser extent Afghanistan have formed a large proportion of New Zealand's refugee intake.

### Iran

Constitutional monarchy was established in Iran around the beginning of the 20th century. In practice, the constitutional component was nominal, with the country being ruled largely by Shahs who maintained a strict, authoritarian system. In the rule of the last Shah (1925-79) Iran, an oil-rich nation, experienced rapid economic growth and urbanisation. While this period was characterised by economic inequality and political repression, there was a gradual liberalisation of Iranian society. Women were no longer required by law to wear the veil, were granted the vote in the 1960s and were gradually incorporated into public life.

In 1979, Iran underwent an Islamic revolution marked by the return of the Islamic leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini, from Paris where he had previously been in exile. An Islamic government was popularly elected in 1981 and Iran returned to a more traditional, religious lifestyle. Between 1980 and 1988 Iran was at war with Iraq over border territories.

Since the Islamic revolution, Iranian politics have been characterised by struggles between moderate and radical forces. This has resulted in a climate of marked political repression, including the banning of political parties and the systematic persecution of some ethnic and religious minorities, most notable the Kurds (who were also persecuted under the Shah's rule) and those of the minority Bahai faith.

Documented human rights abuses have included:

- summary execution
- amputation of limbs
- imprisonment and torture
- public flogging of women who break the Islamic dress code.

Many women report imprisonment, rape and sexually degrading treatment.

## Iraq

Following a coup d'etat in 1968, Iraq has been ruled by the Baath party. Since the 1970s the party has crushed any alternative political organisation, with extrajudicial executions, detentions, torture and large-scale disappearances being documented by human rights organisations. Assyrian Christians and Kurds have been consistently repressed. Kurdish and Shiite Muslims who opposed the regime have been subjected to particularly harsh oppression.



In 1990 Iraq invaded oil-rich Kuwait, in response to which the UN launched a military campaign – the Gulf War. In the same year, the UN also imposed a military, financial and trading boycott on Iraq, which continues to this day. While the war resulted in the liberation of Kuwait, Saddam Hussein remained in power in Iraq.

The following year, there was an uprising against Saddam Hussein by Kurds and Shiite Muslims in the south of Iraq. The uprising was brutally quelled, and over 150,000 people were arrested. Two million people were forced to flee.

## Afghanistan

Afghanistan was a monarchy until 1973, when the reigning king was overthrown by a military coup and Muhammad Daud became president of the new republic. Daud's government came under increasing pressure from traditionalist rebels who objected to the rapid social change he sought. By 1979 the rebels controlled much of Afghanistan, Daud was killed and the government's position deteriorated. The Soviets invaded late that year, plunging the country into full-scale war for the next 10 years. The rebel groups fighting the Soviets were sustained by weapons and money from the US, Saudi Arabia, Iran and China.

During the Soviet occupation half the population was displaced internally, forced to flee to neighbouring countries, wounded or killed.<sup>18</sup> One-third of the population was estimated to have fled the country, with Pakistan and Iran sheltering a combined peak of 6 million refugees.<sup>19</sup> In 1989, after massive losses and little progress, the USSR was forced to withdraw from Afghanistan. For the next

few years a power struggle waged between the new government and different factions within the country.

In 1996, one of these factions, the fundamentalist Islamic Taliban movement, took the capital, Kabul. The Taliban now controls most of Afghanistan, with opposing factions holding the northern regions. In addition to the continuing civil strife and the harsh policies of Sharia Law, the country suffers from enormous poverty, a crumbling infrastructure and widespread landmines.<sup>20</sup>

In 2001, events such as famine, drought, continued repression and the conflict with the United States resulted in thousands of Afghans fleeing to neighbouring countries.

Refugees from Afghanistan have been arriving in New Zealand over the last two decades. In September 2001, over 130 Afghan asylum seekers rescued from a sinking boat arrived in this country.

### ***A comparison of refugees from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan***

People forced to flee Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan come from a number of ethnic and religious groups and have different political sympathies (see Table 4 below).



Table 4

#### **SUMMARY OF RELIGIOUS, LINGUISTIC AND ETHNIC GROUPS – IRAN, IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Religious and ethnic groups</b>	<b>Languages</b>
<b>Iran</b>	Mainly Islamic (with Shias predominating); other Muslim groups; Bahais, Catholics, Jews, Zoroastrians; also some Kurdish people	Farsi (Persian); ethnic minority languages
<b>Iraq</b>	Mainly Islamic with Shias in south and Sunnis in north; also Christian Assyrians, Kurds and other minorities	Arabic, Kurdish and Assyrian
<b>Afghanistan</b>	Mainly Sunni Muslims, with Shiite minority; also some Hindus, Sikhs and Jews; ethnic groups include Pashtun, Tajik, Hazaras, Uzbek and others	Pashtu, Dari, Turkic and other minority languages

Source: Adapted from R Elissalde (ed). *The World Guide 2001/2002*. Instituto del Tercer Mundo, Uruguay, 2001.  
<http://www.item.org.uy/>

## Prior access to health care

Table 5 on page 18 sets out key health indicators for Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan.

### Iran

While health care and public health measures improved dramatically during Iran's period of economic growth, many of the gains made were subsequently lost as a consequence of the long conflict with Iraq. Access to health care in Iran is poor relative to New Zealand standards. There is one medical practitioner for every 3140 inhabitants compared with one medical practitioner to every 444 inhabitants in New Zealand.<sup>21</sup>

Access to health care is particularly limited in rural areas, as practitioners are concentrated in the larger cities. Folk medicine and traditions are still practised, especially in rural areas, although these systems co-exist with Western medicine. Overall, government provision of health care is poor, with most people reliant on private practitioners. However, Iran has a system of free immunisation services.

Unlike the situation in New Zealand, access to medical specialists in Iran is initiated by patients themselves. Thus, the New Zealand system, where the GP refers patients to a specialist, may need to be carefully explained.

### Iraq

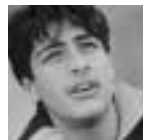
Prior to the Gulf war in the early 1990s, Iraq had a health system comparable to that of most industrialised countries, with widely accessible and free health care. It rated among the best in the region. Key health indicators (for example, infant mortality, life expectancy) were similar to those in most industrialised societies.

Since the Gulf War in the early 1990s, and the imposition of sanctions, access to good health care has deteriorated. Iraq's health system has been seriously compromised, with many hospitals destroyed or run down as a result of the blockage of supplies or damage to infrastructure, particularly water and electricity. Infant mortality rates have escalated and malnutrition is common. In 1991 Iraq's comprehensive immunisation programme ceased.

### Afghanistan

After the Soviets departed in 1989, life in Afghanistan became desperate. In the mid 1990s there was on average only one medical practitioner to every 7000 people,<sup>22</sup> compared with every 444 in New Zealand.<sup>23</sup> In some areas there was only one functioning hospital for every 500,000 people.

Medical supplies have been in short supply because of frequent hijacking of relief convoys. Some provinces have begun experiencing famine, and diseases of malnutrition are being reported. From the mid-1990s, trachoma, dysentery and skin



infections were widespread. Tuberculosis reached epidemic proportions with surveys showing 80 percent of families with at least one member sick. Afghanistan has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world. Large numbers of people sustain war injuries, especially lost limbs, as a result of the conflicts.<sup>24</sup>

Table 5

**KEY HEALTH INDICATORS – IRAN, IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN**

Country	Life expectancy at birth, years <sup>a</sup>	Under 5 mortality rate <sup>b</sup>	Maternal mortality rate <sup>c</sup>	Total fertility rate <sup>d</sup>
Iran	69.2	33	120	2.7
Iraq	62.4	125	310	5.1
Afghanistan	45.5	257	1700	6.7
New Zealand <sup>e</sup>	77.8	8.5	5.2	2

- a Years a newborn is expected to live based on prevailing patterns of mortality. Data refers to 1998 figures. United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2000*, Oxford University Press, 2000. <http://www.undp.org/hdro/>
- b Children under 5 years per 1000 live births; data refers to 1998 figures. United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2000*, Oxford University Press, 2000. <http://www.undp.org/hdro/>
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**REFUGEES FROM THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA**

**Bosnia – Herzegovina**

In 1991, the six republics of Yugoslavia declared their independence, with communism being replaced by ethnically based politics. This caused enormous conflicts between ethnic and religious groups, particularly in the republics of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. The forced removal of people from opposing groups (ethnic cleansing) and their mass detention, rape and slaughter has been likened to the genocide of Nazi Germany.

More than 2.5 million Bosnians are currently refugees. In 1992 the first Bosnian quota refugees arrived in New Zealand. Many of them have lived through situations of siege and genocide, and are at increased risk for mental health conditions such as post traumatic stress (PTS) symptoms, depression and other psychological problems, including alcoholism.<sup>25</sup>



## Kosovo

Kosovo, the poorest region in the former Yugoslavia, is in the south of what is now the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia). Both Albanians and Serbs claim Kosovo as their historical heritage. Currently, under the United Nations Interim Administration Mission, the people of Kosovo have significant autonomy.<sup>26</sup>

In 1998, a Serbian-led ethnic cleansing programme of horrific proportions forced hundreds of thousands of Kosovar Albanians to flee to neighbouring countries. The first refugees from Kosovo arrived in New Zealand in 1999. In total, 405 have arrived under the quota system, although a number have since returned to Kosovo, while others have migrated to Australia and other countries. Mental health risks for Kosovar Albanians are similar to those for Bosnian refugees (see above).

## REFUGEES FROM BURMA

**B**urma is the largest country in mainland South East Asia. The major ethnic group is the Burman, with a population of around 29 million, followed by the Karen, and then at least 20 other ethnic groups. Since a military coup in 1962, a repressive regime has resisted a return to democracy, resulting in years of armed opposition to the government and a dismal record of human rights violations. In 1988 a student uprising ended in a massacre, with thousands of mainly Karen people fleeing to the border with Thailand.

In 1990, a national election resulted in a democratic victory but the military regime refused to cede power. Since then fighting has intensified, as have human rights violations and the flow of refugees to Thai border camps. It is estimated that at least 200,000 Burmese refugees and asylum seekers have found refuge in neighbouring countries such as Thailand, India and Bangladesh.<sup>27</sup>

In recent years there has been a significant rise in the number of Burmese asylum seekers and quota refugees arriving in New Zealand. Between July 2000 and April 2001, 300 Burmese refugees arrived under the quota category.



***For information on other countries from which New Zealand draws its refugees, visit UNHCR's website: [www.unhcr.ch/refworld/welcom.htm](http://www.unhcr.ch/refworld/welcom.htm)***