

**UPDATE ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN
SOUTH WEST ASIA, NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST**

1. This document consists of two parts. Part I gives a Regional Overview. Part II contains Country Reviews. Regional Special Programmes are reported on in document EC/46/SC/CRP.23, the *Update on Voluntary Repatriation Movements*".

I. REGIONAL OVERVIEW

2. The South West Asia, North Africa and Middle East region has been relatively stable in terms of new refugee movements compared to previous years. There have been no major emergencies although some developments could have provoked humanitarian crises.

A. South-West Asia

3. The continuing clashes between government forces and various contending factions in and around Kabul continue to impede Afghan refugees from returning to certain parts of the country. Return and rehabilitation are taking place mainly in areas unaffected by the fighting. The year 1995 saw the voluntary return of some 348,000 refugees to Afghanistan from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, of whom 169,000 returned under UNHCR assistance and 179,000 returned spontaneously. In 1996, however, a larger repatriation movement is expected in view of a recently concluded agreement for repatriation from the Islamic Republic of Iran via Turkmenistan.

B. Central Asian Republics

4. A major positive development has been UNHCR's ability to meet most of its objectives in Tajikistan and to begin phasing down UNHCR's presence in that country by handing over various responsibilities to other agencies. This is a successful example of UNHCR fulfilling a range of objectives: providing emergency assistance to returnees and displaced persons; creating conditions for the return of refugees in safety; starting the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction of areas affected by the conflicts; and playing the role of catalyst for the change-over from an emergency phase to the development phase where other agencies (Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and UNDP) have a mandate and the requisite expertise. Equally significant is the role of in-country protection undertaken by UNHCR through protection monitoring and through assistance to law enforcement agencies.

5. In other countries in Central Asia, UNHCR is involved in a an innovative task of prevention through confidence-/capacity-/institution-building. Areas of such work are: assistance to Governments in adopting legislation in areas relevant to UNHCR's mandate; the training of various government agencies, including police and judiciary; and bringing awareness of the problems of population displacement and the need for containment and institution building to different segments in the society. These new countries are now struggling to find solutions to potentially massive displacements of populations and their inherent economic and social implications, including the exacerbation of underlying tensions. In view of this, UNHCR's engagement in preventive activities is of vital importance in this region.

C. North Africa

6. In Algeria, the overall security situation continues to justify the implementation of phase IV of the United Nations security plan. This situation continued to impose restrictions on staff movements and to interfere with the Office's ability to effectively protect refugees and asylum seekers.

7. In the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, following to the decision of the authorities to deport all illegal foreigners from the country and to change its generous open door policy regarding nationals from Arab and neighbouring countries, de facto refugees have found themselves in a critical situation. When approached by UNHCR, the Libyan authorities have requested the repatriation of those refugees willing to go back to their countries of origin. Thus, in spite of logistical difficulties associated with travel sanctions, the repatriation of Somalis, Ethiopians and Eritreans has started from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. In addition, around 1,000 Palestinians were requested by Libyan authorities to leave the country. (see below)

8. Since the repatriation of Malian refugees from Algeria and Mauritania commenced at the end of 1995, around 14,500 Malians have repatriated spontaneously (approximately 8,000 from Algeria and 6,500 from Mauritania).

9. With regard to the Western Saharans in Algeria, Security Council resolution 1042/1996 extended the mandate of MINURSO through 31 May 1996 to allow the identification process to resume and thus enable the identification and the registration of potential voters for the referendum to be completed. UNHCR remains ready to resume its preparatory work whenever the United Nations Secretary-General considers this appropriate.

D. Middle East

10. During 1995, 16,000 Turkish refugees of Kurdish origin were sheltered in two camps in Northern Iraq. Because of continuing concerns for their security and safety, the Turkish refugee population was accommodated (in the last quarter of 1995) in one single camp, Atroush B. The security concerns have also affected UNHCR staff and non-governmental organizations working in the region.

11. Palestinians expelled from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and trapped in the border area between Egypt and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (at the Salloum border crossing point) were assisted by UNHCR from Egypt. UNHCR has been liaising closely with all parties concerned to determine an appropriate course of action. During January and February 1996, a joint UNHCR-UNRWA mission proceeded to Salloum to ascertain the refugees' condition. From the mission's findings, it appears that the situation has deteriorated. At the time of writing, 179 persons were still living under precarious conditions in the border region. They are paying for their own food and water. Negotiations are underway with all concerned parties to explore alternative solutions.

II. COUNTRY REVIEWS

1. Afghanistan

(a) Beneficiaries

12. At 1 January 1996, Afghanistan continued to host a refugee population of some 19,600 Tajik refugees, of whom 7,600 were located in Sakhi Camp outside Mazar-i-Sharif in Balkh province, with the remaining 10,000 living in scattered settlements in the northern provinces of Kunduz and Takhar. The figures reflect a small decrease in the beneficiary population during the past year due to the ongoing voluntary repatriation to Tajikistan.

(b) Recent developments and objectives

13. Activities in Afghanistan under General Programmes continue to focus primarily on the provision of assistance to Tajik refugees and their repatriation to Tajikistan. The initial expectation that voluntary repatriation to Tajikistan would follow the trend of 1994 did not materialize. During the course of 1995, UNHCR assisted the repatriation of a total of 1,325 Tajik refugees from northern Afghanistan, representing a considerable reduction as compared to the total of some 19,000 repatriated the previous year.

14. Given the prevailing attitudes of the remaining Tajik refugees and the general trend of much-reduced repatriation movement observed during 1995, it is now believed that the majority will opt not to repatriate. For these refugees, local integration represents the optimal durable solution. For these reasons, the UNHCR programme for the benefit of the Tajik refugees in Afghanistan has been reoriented from care and maintenance to local settlement, commencing in 1996. During the current year, criteria will be established for the identification of those likely to remain. Activities under this new type of assistance are aimed at preparing for a permanent, sustainable and productive life in Afghanistan. Like the programme for Afghan reintegration, the implementation of quick impact projects (QIPs) constitutes the principal means of facilitating the foreseen local integration for these refugees.

15. The above notwithstanding, voluntary repatriation of Tajik refugees wishing to avail themselves of this option will continue to be facilitated during the course of 1996 and 1997. The month of January 1996 already saw a total of 71 Tajiks repatriating from Mazar-i-Sharif. A plan has been agreed upon between UNHCR and the Afghan, Uzbek and Tajik authorities to facilitate a visit of Tajik refugee volunteers to Tajikistan to observe the situation and to return with the information for the remaining refugees in Sakhi Camp.

16. The UNHCR programmes for repatriation and for assistance to the communities to which Afghan refugees are returning are described in document EC/46/SC/CRP.23 , the Update on Voluntary Repatriation Programmes.

(c) Budget

17. The 1996 assistance programme for Tajik refugees has been reoriented from care and maintenance to local settlement. The level of funding for the operational components has, however, been kept at the same level as initially approved, despite a slight increase in the beneficiary population owing to the small number of repatriants in 1995. The repatriation component for Tajik refugees is covered by an allocation from the Voluntary Repatriation Fund. Starting in 1996, care and maintenance for the benefit of individual refugees has been funded directly under a regional project administered by Headquarters, given the negligible size of the beneficiary caseload.

18. The mid-term review of QIPs and reintegration activities represents one of the most important activities undertaken so far in 1996. The current exercise is being carried out jointly by the Office of the Chief of Mission together with concerned supporting units of Headquarters. The review focuses on the regional approach and increased activities, which were implemented in response to an Executive Committee conclusion of 1994 (A/AC.96/839), and is expected to recommend corrective measures and appropriate modifications as may be needed for 1996. The findings and recommendations will also be incorporated in the 1997 country programme submission which is due later this year.

(d) Post situation

19. The existing level of staffing in the field will be maintained through 1997.

(e) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children and environment)

20. The largest number of QIPs (over 100) are implemented within the education sector, benefiting children of both returnees and displaced persons. However, implementation of the assistance programme in certain areas has recently encountered serious difficulties due to the imposition of religious restrictions by a certain Afghan authority, severely limiting women's activities, (i.e. employment for women and formal education for girls). UNHCR, in coordination with other United Nations agencies, has been pursuing a dialogue with the concerned authority to find appropriate ways to address this restriction. Consideration has also been given to increasing assistance activities under different sectors for the benefit of female beneficiaries.

21. In this connection, an initial contact has been formally established between UNHCR and the Grameen Bank/Grameen Trust to jointly explore possibilities to initiate, on an experimental basis, a replication of the Grameen Bank type of micro-credit programme in Afghanistan. It is foreseen that a joint Grameen/UNHCR project identification mission to the country may be undertaken during the month of April 1996. On the basis of the approach usually adopted in the Grameen model for extension of credit facilities, a majority of the targeted beneficiaries are expected to be women.

(f) Oversight reports

22. No reports were initiated during the reporting period.

2. Algeria

(a) Beneficiaries

23. At 1 January 1996, Algeria hosted a refugee population of some 219,000 persons, comprised of an estimated 165,000 Western Saharan refugees in Tindouf, south-west Algeria, 28,000 refugees from Mali and 22,000 from Niger in the southern part of the country. Also included are some 4,000 Palestinians and 80 persons of various other nationalities residing in urban areas, mainly in Algiers. Of this total, some 120,000 refugees are being assisted, including 80,000 Western Saharans considered to be vulnerable cases. The Palestinian refugees are generally integrated into Algerian economic and social life. Others, mainly students whose first country of asylum was not Algeria, are also assisted by UNHCR, mainly with scholarships to supplement those granted by the Algerian Government.

(b) Recent developments and objectives

24. The food situation in the Western Saharan camps was of major concern to UNHCR in late 1995. Periodic food insufficiencies were caused by delays in food deliveries. A cash donation from a European Government, however, permitted the local and international purchase of some 800 metric tons of various food commodities.

25. In an attempt to increase UNHCR's monitoring capacity of the Western Saharan programme, UNHCR obtained, in March 1995, the approval of the Algerian Government for the establishment of a UNHCR presence in Tindouf.

26. Spontaneous repatriation of refugees from Mali and Niger, which continued throughout 1995, brought the number of repatriants during the year to some 8,000 Malian and 295 Nigerian refugees. This encouraged UNHCR to establish a pilot project for organized voluntary repatriation to various locations in northern Mali. By the end of February 1996, the pilot repatriation operations for groups of 200 to 300 persons, which started in October 1995, had resulted in the successful repatriation of some 1,500 Malian refugees. Repatriants were provided with three-months food rations and essential non-food items. They were also escorted by UNHCR in order

to ensure their protection during the repatriation process.

27. Urban refugees continue to benefit from the protection and assistance provided by UNHCR in cooperation with the Algerian Government. Nevertheless, because the majority of the urban refugees are students whose first country of asylum was not Algeria, UNHCR's involvement is limited to protection against *refoulement* and assistance with scholarships to supplement those granted by the Algerian Government. Exceptions are made, however, for vulnerable cases who are considered in need of financial assistance.

28. UNHCR protection and assistance activities, including care and maintenance, in favour of Western Saharan, Malian and Nigerian refugees in Algeria will continue until voluntary repatriation, the appropriate durable solution, becomes possible.

29. The process of repatriation of Malian refugees, however, will depend to a large extent on the improvement of conditions in their country of origin, including the rehabilitation of their intended areas of return. In this respect, it is expected that UNHCR will launch, in the first half of 1996, an appeal for funds for the repatriation and reinsertion of Malian returnees from Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger. With regard to refugees from Niger, a Tripartite Agreement for their voluntary repatriation was signed on 6 March 1996 between UNHCR and the Governments of Algeria and Niger. It is anticipated that, should the situation in Mali and Niger continue to improve, the voluntary repatriation operation for both Malian and Nigerian refugees should be completed by the end of 1997.

30. For the urban refugees, UNHCR protection and educational assistance continues until they return to their country of origin or first asylum upon the completion of their studies. Meanwhile, resettlement, as a durable solution and as a measure to ensure continued protection, will be sought for some individual urban refugees.

(c) Budget

31. In January 1996, an initial allocation was made from the Voluntary Repatriation Fund to commence the repatriation of some 10,000 Malian refugees, pending the launch of an appeal for the repatriation of some 110,000 Malian refugees in various countries neighbouring Mali. In view of the expected repatriation, the 1997 General Programmes budget has been decreased accordingly.

(d) Post situation

32. The posts of one National Officer, one Secretary and one Driver were created, effective 1 January 1996, to permit the establishment of a UNHCR presence in Tindouf, which aims, as mentioned above, at increasing the Office's monitoring capacity. Furthermore, a post of Administrative Assistant was created as of 1 January 1996 to strengthen the local staff working in separate premises in Algiers.

(e) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children and environment)

33. The main care and maintenance activities with regard to the Western Saharan refugees are focused on vulnerable groups composed of women and children. The refugee women enjoy a strong position and participate in almost all the social and community activities of the camps. Through the provision of adequate supplies and materials, UNHCR encourages income generating activities such as knitting, sewing and gardening. Refugee women are also responsible for making their own tents, utilizing canvas cloth purchased by UNHCR. In the sectors of education and health, an important number of them are teachers, nurses and doctors. With the assistance of the NGO, Enfants Réfugiés du Monde, the refugee women will continue to be trained in infant health care and the development of day care centres. UNHCR is also giving a special attention to health care and education for refugee children, mainly through the provision of medical supplies, equipment and educational material.

(f) Oversight reports

34. External auditors are scheduled to undertake an audit of the UNHCR Programme during 1996.

3. Central Asian Republics

(a) Beneficiaries

(i) Kazakhstan

35. Kazakhstan hosts an estimated 8,000 refugees/asylum-seekers, of whom 3,000 are from Afghanistan and 5,000 from Chechnya (Russian Federation). According to Government estimates, some 8,000 Tajiks of Kazak origin have returned to their ancestral land in Kazakhstan in the past few years. Although the status of these Kazak-Tajiks has not been clearly defined, the Government assists them with their integration in the economic and social life of the country.

(ii) Kyrgyzstan

36. Some 13,000 Tajiks, mostly of Kyrgyz ethnic origin, were registered with the Government, as were some 800 Afghans and 70 Chechens, while a further 20,000 unregistered Tajiks are estimated to be residing in Kyrgyzstan. As is the case in Kazakhstan, the status of the Tajiks is not clearly defined but some began receiving assistance from whom for their integration in the country.

(iii) Tajikistan

37. A large number of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons have benefited from the UNHCR protection and assistance programme in Tajikistan. Some 500 Afghans were recognized as refugees and received UNHCR assistance in the Dushanbe area. Of the estimated more than 500,000 Tajik internally displaced persons who were forced to leave their homes, mostly in the Khatlon region, during the 1992 civil war or ethnic conflict, approximately 95 per cent had returned to their places of origin by the end of December 1995. Some 14,000 internally displaced persons remain in the Gorno Badakhshan region. Some 43,000 Tajiks who fled to northern Afghanistan have also repatriated with UNHCR assistance, while 19,600 Tajik refugees still remain in the Kunduz and Mazar-i-Sharif areas of Afghanistan.

(iv) Turkmenistan

38. The Government of Turkmenistan estimates the number of Afghan refugees/asylum-seekers in the country at about 3,000 and is in the process of naturalizing 537 of them in Chardjew. Some 25,000 Tajiks are also estimated to be residing in the country, and their status is being reviewed by the Government.

(v) Uzbekistan

39. A total of 2,627 asylum-seekers were registered with the UNHCR office in Tashkent, of whom 2,558 originated from Afghanistan. There are an estimated 30,000 Tajiks residing in Uzbekistan.

(b) Recent developments and objectives

40. The primary objective for 1996 and 1997 in all the Central Asian Republics is to assist operational partners, through the proactive approach of capacity and institution-building, in the formulation and development of national legislation to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to protect the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers and to manage population movements in the region in an effective and appropriate manner. Plans include the establishment of a

regional centre for migration management, commissioning of research work on inter-ethnic relations, material support to institutions of higher education, judicial assistance and a series of refugee and human rights law training seminars. UNHCR programmes in Central Asia will take into account the Programme of Action which is expected to be adopted at the Regional Conference to address the problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, other forms of Voluntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States scheduled for 30-31 May 1996. Developments and objectives by country are described in the paragraphs below.

(i) Kazakstan

41. In October 1995, UNHCR started its assistance for the resettlement of 1,500 Afghan refugees of Kazak ethnic origin in Turkestan, through the construction of a water pipeline and a primary school building which was completed in late December. Building materials for 60 homes have also been provided. The second phase of the resettlement project will be implemented in the spring of 1996 with the construction of an internal water supply system, purchase of agricultural tools and school materials/equipment, and a reforestation programme.

42. Discussions on material assistance to some 2,000 urban refugees through the Kazak Red Crescent and Red Cross Society are under way.

(ii) Kyrgyzstan

43. The Kyrgyz Republic is in the process of acceding to the 1951 Convention. The ratification passed the first chamber of the Parliament in October 1995, the second chamber in March 1996, and is now awaiting signature by the President of Kyrgyzstan. UNHCR has provided support and advice, as requested, to various government bodies involved in the accession process.

44. Since October 1995, UNHCR has been assisting in the resettlement of 800 Tajiks of ethnic Kyrgyz origin in Batkent, Osh region. Construction of the water supply system (potable water and an irrigation canal) at their village was completed in December. Construction of a primary school building, which is also to be used as clinic and community centre, is to start in the spring of 1996.

(iii) Tajikistan

45. With the return of the majority of Tajik internally displaced persons and refugees to their respective places of origin, UNHCR has completed the main objectives of its three-year operation in Tajikistan and phased down in the last quarter of 1995. Some of the UNHCR equipment and facilities were redeployed to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) which has successfully taken over from UNHCR the human rights monitoring activities in the areas of their return. During 1995, a total of 1,325 Tajik refugees repatriated from Afghanistan and, in January 1996, 71 returned to Tajikistan. Some 18,000 houses for Tajik returnees have been reconstructed in the Khatlon region with shelter materials provided by UNHCR. Delivery of the last phase of construction materials for an additional 500 houses was under way in February 1996. Other UNHCR material assistance programmes (quick impact projects and small enterprise development programmes) have been handed over to UNDP.

46. Since October 1995, a UNHCR judicial consultant has conducted a series of in-country seminars for judges from the city and district courts covering topics such as constitutional and criminal law, independence of judiciary, court administrative methods, relations of judges and prosecutors, etc. He has also made a number of recommendations on administrative and material assistance to the judiciary system in Tajikistan.

(iv) Turkmenistan

47. Preparatory work is under way for repatriation, during the course of 1996, of up to 30,000 Afghan refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran through Turkmenistan which is expected to start in mid-April. Repatriation convoys, covering a distance of some 970 kilometres (740 kilometres inside Turkmenistan), will pass through resting points in Sarakhs, Mary, Chardjew and Kirki on the Turkmen territory.

(v) Uzbekistan

48. UNHCR is providing assistance on a case-by-case basis to vulnerable refugees/asylum-seekers, particularly women and children. School registration fees are provided for some Afghans as a temporary measure until a durable solution can be found.

(c) Budget

49. With the opening, in September 1995, of three Liaison Offices in Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, the initial 1996 budget covering four countries (i.e. these three plus Uzbekistan) has been increased. The initial allocation was maintained for 1996 activities in Tajikistan, with a planned reduction in 1997.

(d) Post situation

50. Reflecting the phase-down of the UNHCR operation in Tajikistan, the number of international posts was reduced from seven in 1995 to four in 1996, and will be further reduced to two in 1997. Similar reductions are envisaged for the other Republics.

(e) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children, environment)

51. While refugee women and children have received UNHCR protection and assistance in the family and community context, they have also benefited in Central Asia from specific activities carried out by UNHCR. A particular category of refugees who received special attention is a group of Afghan unaccompanied minors/orphans in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (some 80 in total) who had been sent to the Soviet Union during the Najibullah regime in Afghanistan. UNHCR scholarships have regularized their stay in the countries and thus secured their protection.

52. During 1995, UNHCR's assistance programme in Tajikistan included, *inter alia*, a number of quick impact projects such as household goods production (e.g. coats, mattresses, socks, yarn, school bags, shirts, carpets), oil seed pressing, shoe-making, rabbit farming, and livestock breeding (goats and sheep). These small-scale projects were intended to create social and economic situations conducive to voluntary repatriation and to facilitate integration of the returnees. The direct beneficiaries of these projects (1,185 persons) were almost exclusively returnee women.

53. In 1996, a UNHCR environmental coordination group plans to study problems related to environmentally-induced population displacement in Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in order to define UNHCR's position on this issue.

(f) Oversight reports

54. A UNHCR inspection mission is planned in 1996 to review the results of the UNHCR operation in Tajikistan and of the preventive deployment to other Central Asian Republics.

4. Cyprus

(a) Beneficiaries

55. As of January 1996, the internally displaced population assisted by UNHCR numbered some 265,000 persons. UNHCR protection and assistance was also provided to some 60 urban refugees and persons of concern to the Office.

(b) Recent developments and objectives

56. To further increase the awareness of the Cypriot authorities of the refugee problem, and in an attempt to promote the establishment of national procedures for the determination of refugee status in Cyprus, a refugee law training seminar for government officials was organized in early 1995.

57. At UNHCR's request, a consulting agency carried out an assessment of the UNHCR assistance programme in favour of the displaced persons in Cyprus. Its report, presented in January 1996, recommends that more emphasis be put on objectives promoting the bi-communality of the programme. UNHCR will implement this recommendation by ensuring bi-communal cooperation, planning and use of project resources, and access by all beneficiaries to the project services and infrastructure. UNHCR will also encourage new partners to submit proposals for bi-communal activities, and will assess proposals for major infrastructure projects in light of developmental needs.

58. In addition to the above, the Office will continue its activities in the field of refugee protection, *inter alia*, through a series of refugee law training seminars for government officials and non-governmental organizations in Cyprus. UNHCR will also assist the Government in the formulation of new refugee legislation for adoption.

(c) Budget

59. There are no major variations between the initial and the revised 1996 budgets; a slight reduction was achieved through a gain in exchange rate.

(d) Post situation

60. There were no post creations or discontinuations during the reporting period.

(e) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children and environment)

61. During 1995, UNHCR funded small handicraft projects with the aim of achieving self-sufficiency for some 2,500 displaced women. An amount of \$ 100,000 was allocated for these activities. UNHCR also sponsored the participation of women in the bi-communal teams to attend international conferences and seminars on various medical subjects.

(f) Oversight reports

62. External auditors are scheduled to undertake an audit of the UNHCR programme during 1996.

5. Egypt

(a) Beneficiaries

63. At 1 January 1996, there were approximately 7,700 refugees in Egypt, the majority of whom were Somalis and Sudanese, with an additional group of some 186 stateless persons. Approximately 70 per cent of the refugee population are estimated to be women and children.

(b) Recent developments and objectives

64. An agreement was reached with the competent Egyptian authorities regarding the

registration of Sudanese nationals formally recognized by UNHCR as having a valid claim for international protection and assistance, whereupon UNHCR started issuing registration cards. Seven consultants were recruited to conduct eligibility determination for a backlog of 3,000 persons. Additional referrals for status determination are received from the Egyptian authorities on a regular basis.

(c) Budget

65. The initial 1996 budget has been increased, mostly to cover the costs of hiring consultants to complete the process of status determination for Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers, to fund a new project for vocational training, and to reinforce staffing levels at the Regional Office in Cairo. The proposed increase for 1997 is due to an expected increase in the number of Sudanese beneficiaries.

(d) Post situation

66. Six new posts in 1996, - Refugee Women Coordinator, External Relations Assistant, Secretary, Telecommunications Operator, Driver, and Receptionist - were created to upgrade the operational capacity of the UNHCR Regional Office for the Middle East in Cairo.

(e) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children, environment)

67. Refugee women are benefiting from specific assistance such as family planning training and handicraft activities. A reproductive health study was conducted on Somali refugee women and finalized in January 1996. The results will help in reorienting the family planning courses during the year. Moreover, a socio-economic survey will be undertaken amongst the refugee population to identify appropriate income-generating activities benefiting, on a priority basis, all refugee women, especially female heads of families. The appointment of the Refugee Women Coordinator will further address the needs of refugee women and children.

(f) Oversight reports

68. External auditors are scheduled to undertake an audit of the UNHCR programme during 1996.

6. *Islamic Republic of Iran*

(a) Beneficiaries

69. At 1 January 1996, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran reported the presence of an estimated 1,420,000 Afghan and 595,000 Iraqi refugees. Of this group, some 18,000 Afghans and 63,000 Iraqis were accommodated in refugee camps administered by the Government. According to UNHCR statistics on Afghan returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran, more than 52 per cent of the population is under the age of 15, and approximately 20 per cent are women. For the Iraqi refugees, based on camp refugee statistics, children under 18 make up approximately 40 per cent of the refugee population, and 20 per cent are women. In addition to these two main groups of refugees, the Government also reports the presence of some 48,000 persons of other nationalities, such as Tajiks, Bosnians, Azeris, Eritreans and Somalis, who are all considered refugees by the Government.

(b) Recent developments and objectives

70. Despite the reported overall improvement in the economic situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and apart from refugees accommodated in the camps who benefit from in-camp services, the general refugee population, and in particular the Afghans who are scattered among the urban population throughout the country, continued to face increasing difficulties as a consequence of the withdrawal of health and education subsidies, price increases of basic

commodities and limited job opportunities.

71. In order to address this situation, UNHCR has initiated a number of specific interim measures within the ongoing programme to minimize any adverse impact on the welfare of the refugees and their potential for self-reliance. Under the health sector, UNHCR has expanded its activities by establishing medical referral units in ten major urban centres to directly assist those refugees in need of, and who cannot afford, specialized medical care. The new referral system has proved to be functioning satisfactorily and, in 1995, a total of 5,150 refugees benefited from this programme. Education is another sector requiring introduction of new assistance measures to lessen the impact of the withdrawal of education subsidies by the Government. In 1996, additional support is directly provided to the concerned education departments to ensure that primary education continues to be extended to refugee children whose families are not able to afford the tuition costs. Given the additional financial implications involved, these newly introduced measures within the health and education sectors will remain subject to close monitoring and ongoing review to ascertain that the new approach will not evolve into an open-ended assistance programme.

72. Although voluntary repatriation continues to remain the most viable durable solution for the refugee populations in the Islamic Republic of Iran, it has now been increasingly recognized that other durable solutions options may also have to be considered if the problems are to be satisfactorily and realistically resolved. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has accordingly indicated its preparedness to initiate consultations with UNHCR with a view to seeking a comprehensive approach to the remaining refugees in the country. The overall future direction of the UNHCR programme of assistance in the Islamic Republic of Iran will be guided, therefore, by policy decisions on how different durable solution options may be pursued and made available to the respective groups of refugees.

73. At the seventh Tripartite Repatriation Commission meeting held in December 1995, the Government of Turkmenistan agreed to facilitate the transiting of Afghan repatriants from the Islamic Republic of Iran to northern Afghanistan. Until now, repatriation to northern Afghanistan could only be carried out through Herat in western Afghanistan. However, due to the unsatisfactory security situation in the region, the operation could not be launched on a large scale. It is envisaged that the first convoy using the new Turkmenistan transit route will commence in mid-April 1996.

74. Following the start of talks between the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq in August 1995, UNHCR will endeavour to adopt a more pro-active role in pursuing the possibility of repatriation of the Iraqi refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran and of the Iranian refugees in the Al-Tash camp in Iraq.

(c) Budget

75. The initial 1996 Annual Programme allocation has been revised upward due, essentially, to three factors. Firstly, the remaining beneficiary population is larger than initially foreseen owing to the rate of repatriation in 1995 being well below the projected level. Secondly, new assistance measures introduced under the health and education sectors require substantial additional budgetary support to enable the Office to adequately address any potential adverse impact of the Government's new policies on subsidies upon the welfare of the refugees and their livelihoods. Thirdly, the revised allocation takes into account the prevailing rate of programme implementation which has shown a steady improvement over the past year.

76. A planning figure of 10,000 Iraqi refugees has been adopted for the repatriation operation in 1996. UNHCR and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue to promote voluntary repatriation to Iraq, depending on the prevailing security and stability in the northern part of the country.

77. Comments on the budget for the Afghan repatriation operation from the Islamic Republic of Iran are included, the Update on Voluntary Repatriation Movements (EC/46/SC/CRP.23)

(d) Post situation

78. A total of nine repatriation field posts were discontinued at the end of 1995. On the other hand, the Iraqi refugee situation in the western part of the country has required UNHCR to strengthen the core functions during 1996 with a view to taking a more pro-active role in promoting durable solutions for the group.

(e) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children, environment)

79. Existing assistance activities for the benefit of women under the UNHCR programme in the Islamic Republic of Iran include income-generating assistance, family planning and reproductive health training, literacy training courses and community-based activities in camps. For children, special emphasis is placed on primary education, child health care, nutritional surveys, and immunization, as well as sports facilities.

80. The \$ 6 million UNHCR/IFAD South Khorasan Rangeland Rehabilitation Project, implemented by the Forest Rangeland Organization within the Ministry of Jihad, was completed during 1995. The project successfully rehabilitated a total of 140,000 hectares of land deforested by the prolonged presence of the Afghan refugees and their livestock. The Government reportedly plans to launch an appeal through a bilateral channel for additional assistance to continue with the rehabilitation of another 50,000 hectares in the surrounding areas.

(f) Oversight reports

81. External auditors are scheduled to undertake an audit of the UNHCR programme in the Islamic Republic of Iran in April/May 1996.

7. Iraq

(a) Beneficiaries

82. At 1 January 1996, there were 60,694 assisted refugees in Iraq. Of these, 26,088 were of Iranian Kurdish origin, while 18,000 were of Iranian Arab and 50 of Persian origin. An additional 16,000 Turkish nationals of Kurdish origin were housed in the Atroush Camp in northern Iraq. The UNHCR Field Office in Baghdad also provided assistance to 556 refugees of other origins. Another 62,565 individuals, the majority (62,100) of whom are Palestinians, make up the non-assisted caseload.

(b) Recent developments and objectives

83. The ongoing embargo and continuing inflation weigh heavily upon the refugees and pose a major challenge to UNHCR in the implementation of its programmes.

84. UNHCR will provide assistance on a needs basis to some 38,500 refugees of Iranian origin, most of whom are accommodated in the Al-Tash refugee camp in the Misan and Wasit Governorates. This assistance consists of supplementary food, social welfare services, community development activities, vocational training courses and infrastructural support. As in the past, basic food needs will be met by WFP. The remaining refugee population will benefit from care and maintenance assistance, including a subsistence allowance to cover their educational needs, until such time as a durable solution is identified.

85. UNHCR is also providing assistance to some 16,000 Turkish Kurdish refugees in the

Atroush camp in Northern Iraq in the form of food, health, educational and shelter assistance. For security reasons, the residents of Atroush A camp were relocated and integrated into Atroush B camp in late 1995. However, security concerns continue at the Atroush Camp. In addition to the care and maintenance programme, UNHCR will also provide livestock/shelter assistance in Northern Iraq to 15,000 Iraqi nationals who are expected to return, mostly from the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as from Turkey and the Syrian Arab Republic. Some 7,322 persons (940 families) of Kurdish origin returned to northern Iraq in 1995.

86. Resettlement missions from Norway and Finland have recently travelled under UNHCR auspices to Iraq to interview refugees from the Al-Tash camp, which hosts 22,500 Iranian refugees of Kurdish origin. Other countries have also expressed their interest in sending similar missions to Iraq. UNHCR provides assistance to persons leaving for resettlement from Iraq via Jordan.

87. There has been no reported progress on the exchange of refugees between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq. However, in anticipation of the results of the negotiations between the two Governments on the voluntary repatriation of their nationals, which reportedly culminated in the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding in 1995, UNHCR will continue to liaise with them with a view to ensuring the organized movement of those persons who elect to repatriate.

(c) Budget

88. An increase in the 1996 budget was required to prepare for the planned repatriation of Iraqi nationals of Kurdish origin in the area of Suleymaniyah Governorate.

(d) Post situation

89. Subject to a forthcoming policy decision on an enhanced UNHCR presence in Iraq, seven posts were created.

(e) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children, environment)

90. By the end of 1995, UNHCR Baghdad listed 21 persons (3 cases) in the category of women-at-risk who are pending resettlement. UNHCR has provided assistance for the purchase of a knitting machine and for the training of four refugee women in its use. The women have started production of woollen sweaters for children and other vulnerable groups. Women and children will also receive lessons in music, drawing and painting. Milk will be supplied to pregnant and lactating women and to school children under the supervision of medical staff.

91. In Al-Tash camp, school supplies were provided to the children in December 1995. Funds have been made available for building additional classes for the primary school and maintaining playgrounds for children and the purchase of sports equipment. For children in Atroush camp, provisions have been made for construction of classrooms.

(f) Oversight reports

92. An internal audit was carried out in 1995, the results of which are still under review.

8. Mauritania

(a) Beneficiaries

93. As of 1 January 1996, UNHCR protection and assistance activities were provided to a Malian refugee population of 35,000 persons accommodated in camps in Bassikounou and M'Berra, located in the extreme south-east of Mauritania.

(b) Recent developments and objectives

94. Although voluntary repatriation for the majority of the Malian refugee population remains subject to the rehabilitation of their areas of origin, 1995 saw a remarkable spontaneous movement from the refugee camps in Mauritania towards Mali; some 8,400 refugees are believed to have repatriated spontaneously between June 1995 and February 1996. Meanwhile, UNHCR developed a pilot project for organized voluntary repatriation and started implementation in November 1995; 2,247 refugees benefited from this project between November 1995 and February 1996. Repatriants were provided with food rations and escorted by UNHCR staff to ensure their protection during the repatriation process. The success of this pilot operation has encouraged many refugees to opt for voluntary repatriation despite the delays in the rehabilitation of their intended areas of return. As of the end of February 1996, some 13,600 refugees had expressed their wish to repatriate under UNHCR auspices.

95. In addition, the Government of Mauritania has initiated a Special Programme of Rapid Insertion (PSIR), which aimed at assisting the integration of some 30,000 Mauritanian returnees from Senegal into the social and economic life of the country. While the task of delivering this programme was entrusted to the Mauritanian Red Crescent, UNHCR has been invited to assist in its funding and implementation.

96. With the improvement of the situation in Mali, UNHCR's overall objective is to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Malian refugees and, thus, gradually reduce its care and maintenance programme. Subject to the creation of conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation, namely success in the rehabilitation of the refugees' areas of origin, the voluntary repatriation of Malian refugees may be completed by the end of 1997 or the beginning of 1998.

97. UNHCR will assist the Mauritanian Red Crescent in the implementation of quick impact projects (QIPs) in the southern part of the country neighbouring Senegal. These projects are expected to benefit both the Mauritanian returnees as well as the local population.

(c) Budget

98. The revised 1996 and the proposed 1997 allocations for care and maintenance were decreased in view of the planned repatriation. UNHCR will launch an appeal for the repatriation of some 110,000 Malian refugees in various countries neighbouring Mali.

(d) Post situation

99. The post of a Field Repatriation Assistant was approved for creation as of January 1996. Since it was expected that repatriation would be completed by mid-1997, 16 posts were scheduled for discontinuation by July 1997. However, because of delays in the repatriation, this situation will have to be reviewed during 1996.

(e) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children, environment)

100. Particular initiatives have been undertaken in regard to refugee women, refugee children and environment. The 1996 and 1997 programmes include activities for literacy education, university scholarships and a campaign against malnutrition among children. In the field of environment, UNHCR made a contribution to the Lutheran World Federation for its anti-desertification programme.

(f) Oversight reports

101. The Board of External Auditors is scheduled to undertake an audit of the UNHCR Programme during 1996.

9. Pakistan

(a) Beneficiaries

102. At 1 January 1996, there were some 865,000 registered Afghan refugees residing in the recognized refugee villages (RVs) in the North-West Frontier Province, Balochistan and Punjab. In comparison with the same population recorded a year ago, this represents a reduction of some 17.8 per cent due primarily to the ongoing repatriation. In addition, there were 2,493 non-Afghan Mandate refugees (mainly Iraqis, Somalis and Iranians) who reside in large urban centres.

103. A country-wide population survey is currently underway, representing an attempt to determine the number of Afghan refugees now present in refugee villages, including those under the categories of registered, de-registered as well as non-registered. Results are expected to become available in April 1996.

(b) Recent developments and objectives

104. During the course of 1996, further efforts will continue to pursue the rationalization of the assistance programme. This aims at targeting assistance at clearly identified needs, whilst simultaneously building the refugees' capacity to attain self-reliance. In this regard, the strengthening of refugee management committees, which facilitate participation in the management of certain sectorial activities on a self-help basis, is an objective.

105. With the conclusion of the camp-based general food distribution in September 1995, UNHCR's assistance for the benefit of Afghan refugee population has been geared primarily towards assisting vulnerable groups, at present estimated at some 180,000 refugees. Food is distributed to these groups through feeding programmes, girls' primary schools and refugee communities. A nutrition survey has been scheduled for early April 1996 in order to monitor and re-assess the impact of food reductions in recent years, results of which are expected to be presented to the 1996 Joint Food Assessment Mission. The ongoing programme reorientation has identified needs to enhance vocational training/income-generating components under the 1996 assistance programme, with all beneficiaries to be selected from vulnerable groups, particularly women.

106. With voluntary repatriation remaining the most viable durable solution for the Afghan refugee population, assistance under this sector has been further streamlined in order to sustain the progress so far achieved. In addition to the upward revision of repatriation grants to offset the currency devaluation, a discussion has been initiated to explore the feasibility of utilizing the Government's National Logistics Cell to directly assist the organization of transportation of refugees for repatriation movements to selected parts of Afghanistan.

(c) Budget

107. There was no overall increase from the 1996 initial approved allocation in the current 1996 budgets. The ongoing programme reorientation could result in a possible budgetary increase if the foreseen additional requirements for vocational training/income-generating activities for the benefit of vulnerable groups cannot be met through existing programme resources. Currently, further budgetary decreases are foreseen for 1997.

(d) Post situation

108. As part of the ongoing rationalization of programme activities, the Office was able to discontinue four support posts by the end of 1995. UNHCR will continue to further streamline the structure of the Field Offices during the course of 1996 without affecting its operational capacity. Currently, 99 posts are on the staffing table. For 1997, it is planned to reduce this figure to 78, if conditions so permit.

(e) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children, environment)

109. The UNHCR/World Bank Income Generation Project for the Refugee Affected Areas is to convene an inter-disciplinary workshop in May 1996 to address *inter alia* the themes of refugee aid and development as well as environment protection and rehabilitation. The exercise is expected to enable participants to share lessons learnt and explore feasibility of replicating this type of activity elsewhere.

(f) Oversight reports

110. An inspection mission to Pakistan was undertaken in February 1996, focusing principally on the urban refugee programme in Islamabad, including a detailed examination of the continuing problems related to the Iraqi caseload. It also examined the role of resettlement and UNHCR's approaches to refugee violence and hunger strikes, as well as their implications for other urban caseloads in Pakistan and elsewhere. An internal United Nations audit of November 1995 reviewed the transport operation (some 900 vehicles) resulting, *inter alia*, in streamlining and improved accountability.

10. Yemen

(a) Beneficiaries

111. At 1 January 1996, Yemen hosted an estimated 53,000 refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR. Apart from some 9,000 Somalis accommodated in camps and who are fully assisted by UNHCR, the beneficiaries of the Office's protection and/or assistance activities in 1995 included 25,000 other Somalis who were either partly assisted or non-assisted by UNHCR, some 15,000 Somalis of Yemeni origin who had not been naturalized by the Yemeni Government; about 2,500 Eritrean refugees scattered on the Coast of the Red Sea as well as in Sana'a and some other major cities; 700 Ethiopian and a similar number of Palestinian refugees.

(b) Recent developments and objectives

112. While no major protection problems had affected the various refugees and asylum-seekers in Yemen since the end of the civil war (1994), the last year saw some events of significance in the field of refugee protection. One such event occurred in late August when the Yemeni Government introduced measures targeting illegal migrants. This affected some Somali refugees who, consequently, found themselves forcibly returned to their country of origin due to lack of documentation. Another major event in 1995 was the dispute between Yemen and Eritrea for control over the Hunaish Islands in the Red Sea, which created tension between the Eritrean refugees and the Yemeni local population, particularly the Red Sea coast.

113. The completion of the construction of the new Shuqra camp, in Abyan province, for initially 10,000 Somali refugees, is one of the major objectives of UNHCR's protection and assistance programme in Yemen. Another objective is to undertake, by May 1996, in cooperation with Yemeni Government, a complete registration of all Somali refugees and asylum-seekers, in order to ensure that genuine cases are not only protected but also assisted.

114. UNHCR will also continue to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees to safe areas, particularly in North-West Somalia, as well as of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees to their respective countries of origin.

(c) Budget

115. The initial 1996 allocation for care and maintenance was increased to permit the completion of construction work in the new Shuqra camp and for the assistance of some 3,000 urban refugees in Sana'a.

(d) Post situation

116. In order to strengthen the UNHCR Branch Office in Yemen and to increase its operational capacity, the posts of a Field Assistant, a Driver and two Guards were created, effective 1 January 1996.

(e) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children and environment)

117. Special care is taken in terms of maternal and primary health care for urban refugee children and women through the services of a local NGO, the International Cooperation for Development (ICD). Since the establishment of the Somali camps in southern Yemen, primary education is delivered to the refugee children in the camps by the Swedish NGO Radda Barnen.

(f) Oversight reports

118. The Board of External Auditors is scheduled to undertake an audit of the UNHCR Programme during 1996.

11. Other countries in North Africa (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco and Tunisia)

(a) Beneficiaries

119. In the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, during 1995, UNHCR undertook protection and/or assistance activities on behalf of some 3,000 refugees, including about 2,000 Somalis, 620 Eritreans, 220 Ethiopians and some 150 individuals of other nationalities. Among them, 550 vulnerable cases benefited from a UNHCR care and maintenance programme. The above figures, however, do not reflect the real number of those who are, or may become, in need of UNHCR protection and assistance since, among the Arabs and nationals of various African countries who had come to Libya during the 1980s and early 1990s, there were many genuine refugees who took advantage, at the time, of the liberal migration and asylum policy of the Libyan Government. However, in view of recent developments in the economic situation in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and, consequently, the change in treatment of refugees, including threats of *refoulement*, the refugees have approached and UNHCR seeking protection and assistance.

120. In Morocco, the beneficiaries of UNHCR protection and assistance programmes number 408 refugees of various nationalities, of whom 104 individuals were assisted with care and maintenance. The latter group consists of vulnerable cases, including Somalis, Liberians and some elderly Europeans. In addition, 48 Palestinian students benefited during 1995 from education grants provided to them by UNHCR.

121. In Tunisia, UNHCR protection and assistance were extended during 1995 to some 60 refugees of various nationalities. A further 10 refugee students were assisted under the Education Account.

(b) Recent developments and objectives

122. The deterioration of the economic situation in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya resulted in the adoption by the Libyan Government of restrictive measures regarding foreigners' entry and sojourn. These restrictions effected, *inter alia*, Arabs and nationals of various African countries. This in turn created a situation whereby large numbers of asylum-seekers of various nationalities who had been in the country over a long period, some even for several years without any need for refugee status, felt threatened with forcible return to their countries of origin where their lives and freedoms may be endangered.

123. A major event of 1995 was the decision of the Libyan Government to expel Palestinians,

in reaction to the peace agreement between Israel and the PLO, and indeed, a large number of them found themselves stranded in the no-man's land between Egypt and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Although, the Libyan Government changed its decision later and allowed Palestinians to return to the country, 179 of them remain to date in a camp at Al-Salloum, at the Libyan border with Egypt.

124. The economic difficulties faced by the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the change in the Government policy *vis-à-vis* foreigners resulted, *inter alia*, in continued pressure on UNHCR to accelerate the process of repatriation of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR. The Office undertook substantial efforts to organize the voluntary repatriation of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali refugees. Some 497 Eritrean and 130 Ethiopian refugee were assisted in their return home between September 1995 and February 1996.

125. The security situation in Algeria, as well as the deterioration of the economic situation and, consequently, the negative change in the treatment of foreigners in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya led to a significant increase in the numbers of asylum-seekers who approached UNHCR in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Tunisia and Morocco seek to both protection and assistance during the reporting period.

126. For 1996 and 1997, UNHCR's protection and assistance activities, including care and maintenance, will continue to be undertaken in favour of refugees and asylum-seekers in the three countries. Particular attention will be paid to the elderly caseload.

127. UNHCR will remain at the disposal of the Governments of the three countries to provide the necessary advice on issues related to refugee protection as well as to the establishment of national procedures for the determination of refugee status. In this regard, a series of refugee law workshops will be organized in cooperation with the Governments of the Arab Maghreb Union, and will target government officials and NGOs from the countries concerned.

128. Resettlement will be sought, as a durable solution as well as a measure to ensure continued protection, for refugees lacking either effective protection or a durable solution in their respective countries of asylum.

129. UNHCR will continue to engage actively in the organization of voluntary repatriation of refugees and other persons of concern to the Office, particularly from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

(c) Budget

130. There are no major changes between the initial and revised 1996 and the proposed 1997 budgets.

(d) Post situation

131. No creations or discontinuations are envisaged during the reporting period.

(e) Oversight reports

132. No reports were initiated during the reporting period.

12. Other countries in Western Asia (Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates)

(a) Beneficiaries

133. At 1 January 1996, the total refugee population of 81,760 was scattered throughout the region with 698 in Jordan, 27,747 in Kuwait, 2,140 in Lebanon, 13,169 in Saudi Arabia, 37,600 in the Syrian Arab Republic and 406 persons in the United Arab Emirates.

(b) Recent developments and objectives

(i) Jordan

134. Of the 698 assisted refugees in Jordan, 415 were Iraqis and 249 were Bosnians. Some 40 refugees of other nationalities are awaiting resettlement, family reunification or arrangements for their voluntary repatriation. As in 1995, UNHCR continues to interview Iraqi cases for status-determination and to provide assistance to needy persons.

135. Two organizations which are new to UNHCR have been enlisted as implementing partners. Using UNHCR project funds, the Jordanian Red Crescent Society will provide monthly subsistence allowances to some 400 refugees and will undertake procurement of domestic items for the needy. The Queen Alia Fund for Social Development will arrange vocational training courses for Bosnian women. UNHCR will also provide a lump sum payment to the Hashemite Charity Organization to cover the accommodation costs for an estimated 100 Bosnians.

136. As in 1995, UNHCR Amman will continue to coordinate with UNHCR Baghdad for the departure of refugees who are resettling from Iraq via Jordan.

(ii) Kuwait

137. At 1 January 1996, there were 3,300 assisted refugees. The majority of this population was made up of Iraqis (1,750 persons) and Palestinians from Gaza (1,500 persons) who are residing outside of UNRWA's area of operations.

138. UNHCR is assisting needy refugees, including detainees, in meeting their basic needs. Needy urban cases are also being assisted to cope with their daily expenses including health, education and residence fees.

(iii) Lebanon

139. At 1 January, 1,590 persons were listed as assisted refugees in Lebanon (1,165 Iraqis, 126 Somalis, 202 Sudanese, and 97 others). Of the refugee caseload in Lebanon, 44 per cent are women and children. The priority has been given to them and families. UNHCR Lebanon has noted an increase in the number of Iraqi and Sudanese refugees. The caseload is also made up of urban refugees who are suffering from an increase in the cost of living and expulsion from the abandoned buildings in which they had been living. The refugees were residing temporarily in buildings which were damaged during the Lebanese civil war. As the renovation of Beirut has accelerated in the past year, these refugees have been forced to leave their temporary accommodation. The Middle East Council of Churches is assisting UNHCR in the implementation of its projects in Lebanon.

(iv) Saudi Arabia

140. The resettlement of Iraqi refugees in Rafha Camp continued to be UNHCR's main activity in Saudi Arabia. At 1 January 1996, the total population of the camp was 13,169 persons of whom 23 per cent are estimated to be females and 29 per cent are children. During 1995, 4,430 persons were resettled from Rafha while 520 persons voluntarily repatriated. From June 1991 until the end of 1995, 16,386 persons were resettled and 2,965 voluntarily repatriated. The entire infrastructure of Rafha Camp is provided by the Saudi Government.

(v) Syrian Arab Republic

141. At 1 January 1996, the total assisted refugee population was 3,522 persons, including 2,000 refugees of Iraqi origin at El Hol camp and others in different locations; another 33,500

unassisted refugees made up the total refugee population of some 37,000.

142. UNHCR continues to provide international protection assistance to Iraqi Kurdish refugees living in El Hol camp and to the needy urban caseload. In addition, the UNHCR resettlement program will continue in 1996.

(vi) United Arab Emirates

143. At 1 January 1996, there were some 400 refugees registered with UNHCR (202 Somalis, 77 Ugandans, 37 Iraqis, 27 Iranians, and 63 others). Of this number, approximately 130 were children.

144. UNHCR continues to provide international protection as well as material assistance to needy cases and will follow up on the situation and the possible needs of stateless Zanzibaris. Depending on the situation in Somalia, UNHCR will assist Somali refugees to return voluntarily to their country of origin. Concerning resettlement, UNHCR will continue to process protection, medical and family reunification cases.

(c) Budget

145. There are no major changes between the initial and revised 1996 and the proposed 1997 and 1998 budgets.

(d) Post situation

Syrian Arab Republic: Two posts (a Secretary and a Driver) were created.

Jordan: Three posts were created (an Eligibility Assistant, a Driver and a Messenger/Cleaner).

(e) Implementation of policy objectives (women, children, environment)

(i) Jordan

146. UNHCR assists ten unaccompanied minors who will receive some 150 Jordanian Dinars a month. The Queen Alia Fund will cover the costs of vocational training courses which will be offered to Bosnian refugee women in order for them to gain additional skills which may be of use in their countries of resettlement or origin. Funds will also be made available to the Queen Alia fund to enable the Bosnian women to initiate small businesses, trades or crafts.

(ii) Kuwait

147. UNHCR covers the school costs for needy refugee children. Equal access to education for male and female children will be promoted. An estimated ten refugee students at the secondary level are to be assisted.

(iii) Lebanon

148. Vocational training courses are organized for refugee women and educational assistance is ensured for 90 per cent of refugee children.

(iv) Saudi Arabia

149. Because of the many physical and psychological pressures in Rafha camp, especially for women and children, a social services counsellor was appointed in late 1995.

(v) Syrian Arab Republic

150. Some 120 refugee women in El Hol camp are involved in vocational training and self-help activities. Some 100 children are attending a kindergarten class in El Hol.

151. During 1996, the Syrian Women's Association will be providing support to UNHCR in the areas of health, vocational training, counselling, and self-help projects to needy urban refugee women and children in Damascus.

(vi) United Arab Emirates

152. UNHCR will continue the payment of school fees to Asian refugees (from Uganda) at the primary and secondary levels.

(f) Oversight reports

153. The Board of External Auditors is scheduled to undertake an audit of the UNHCR Programme during 1996.

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