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Human Rights Law Network

**Report of Refugee Populations in India**  
November 2007

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## Introduction

India is neither party to the 1951 Convention on Refugees nor the 1967 Protocol. The lack of specific refugee legislation in India has led the government to adopt an ad hoc approach to different refugee influxes. The status of refugees in India is governed mainly by political and administrative decisions rather than any codified model of conduct. The ad hoc nature of the Government's approach has led to varying treatment of different refugee groups. Some groups are granted a full range of benefits including legal residence and the ability to be legally employed, whilst others are criminalized and denied access to basic social resources.

The legal status of refugees in India is governed mainly by the Foreigners Act 1946 and the Citizenship Act 1955. These Acts do not distinguish refugees fleeing persecution from other foreigners; they apply to all non-citizens equally. Under the Acts it is a criminal offence to be without valid travel or residence documents. These provisions render refugees liable to deportation and detention.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is based in New Delhi. Once recognized, Afghan, Burmese, Palestinian and Somali refugees receive protection from the UNHCR. Many refugees receive a small monthly subsistence allowance and all have access to the services provided by the UNHCR's implementing partners in Delhi: the YMCA, Don Bosco and the Socio-Legal Centre (SLIC).

The YMCA helps refugees to find accommodation and provides access to education for children and young adults in government schools through the provision of an education allowance. Don Bosco provides psychosocial support and vocational training such as English language classes and computer courses. It also funds other vocational courses such as beautician training and driving lessons. The support of these organizations is vital, providing a degree of support to the refugee community. In addition to these initiatives, SLIC provides legal aid, legal trainings and sensitization programmes, carries out file renewals for the UNHCR and provides naturalization assistance for eligible refugees. Despite the support provided by these organizations, the majority of refugees in India experience great hardship, both economically and socially.

The largest refugee populations in India do not fall under the UNHCR's mandate, but are nonetheless considered refugees by the government. At present, there are over 150,000 Tibetans and 90,000 Sri Lankans who have fled violence and persecution and sought refuge in India. These groups are accommodated and assisted in accessing education, healthcare, employment and residence to varying degrees. This is discussed in more detail below.

## **TIBETAN REFUGEES**

### **Country of origin background**

As recently as 1914, a Peace Convention was signed by Britain, China and Tibet that formally recognized Tibet as an independent country. Representatives from the major monasteries governed the country with the Dalai Lama heading the government. The Tibetan people have a deep-seated faith in religion and Buddhism ruled every aspect of their lives. In 1949 China invaded Tibet. Two years later Chinese troops forcibly occupied Tibet; killing, detaining and arresting thousands of Tibetan citizens.

### **Reason for flight**

Following the Chinese incursion in 1951, China continued to perpetrate human rights violations in Tibet despite pleas from the Dalai Lama and his government. The efforts of the Dalai Lama to find a peaceful solution to the ongoing violence proved futile and his personal security was threatened. Calls for help to the international community went unheeded and the Dalai Lama was forced to flee. His flight was followed by an exodus of Tibetan people unable to live under Chinese oppression. In 1959, approximately 80,000 Tibetans fled to India with a steady flow filtering into India in the years that followed. Today, there are approximately 150,000 Tibetan refugees living in India.

### **Legal status**

Tibetans who arrived in India in the late 1950s and early 1960s were accorded refugee status by the Indian government despite India not being party to either the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or the 1967 Protocol. These Tibetans were issued registration certificates, which must be renewed once or twice a year. Tibetans who were born in India are also eligible to obtain a registration certificate once they are 18 years old.

Although the Indian government continues to allow Tibetans to enter the country, it has not afforded them the same legal status as the first wave of Tibetans. However, some Tibetans who arrived in the second-wave were able to obtain their registration certificates by claiming that they were born in India.

Tibetans are given more rights than most other refugee groups in India. They are provided with residence permits, which enable them to seek formal employment. They are the only refugee group to receive travel permits from the Indian government

### **Socio-economic conditions**

Tibetans in India live in 37 different settlements and 70 scattered communities in Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, South Sikkim, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Orissa. Of the settlements, just under half are based on agriculture, while one-third are agro-industrial and a fifth are handicraft-based. The scattered communities consist of smaller groups of Tibetans outside of the official settlements who were not willing, or not able, due to limited resources, to be accommodated in the settlements.

### **Specific protection issues**

Indians and Tibetans generally co-exist peacefully but there have been isolated cases of anti-Tibetan violence. There have been no cases where any specific groups within the Tibetan Community have been targeted.

## **SRI LANKAN REFUGEES**

### **Country of origin background**

For the past 20 years Sri Lanka has been embroiled in conflict between the Sri Lankan army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who are fighting for independence for the minority Tamil population. The conflict has left as many as 70,000 people dead and one million people displaced. Tamils from Sri Lanka have been fleeing their home country for India since 1983 when the conflict began. There are no signs of the conflict abating in the immediate future. The armed conflict has escalated since the beginning of 2006 and in March 2007, after four years of negotiations, the peace process between the warring factions officially collapsed.

### **Reason for flight**

The majority of the fighting in Sri Lanka occurs in the northern and eastern areas of the country. The population in these areas is exposed daily to the risks of air strikes, bomb blasts and landmines and many leave their homes in search of safety. In addition, many are forced to flee the country in order to escape torture, rape and disappearances perpetrated by the security forces. The warring parties are Buddhist Sinhalese and Tamil Hindus. The ethnic dimension to the conflict leads the civilian Tamil population to seek refuge in India.

The majority of individuals fleeing the Sri Lankan conflict for India arrive by boat; risking a dangerous journey across the Palk Strait. In June 2007 it was estimated that approximately 18,000 Tamils had undertaken this journey to Tamil Nadu in the previous 18 months. On arrival they are accommodated in the main refugee camp near Rameswaram, 600km south of Chennai, before being sent to camps in other parts of Tamil Nadu. On arrival, refugees are questioned by Indian police in order to establish their identities and to discover whether they have links to the Tamil Tigers, which is an illegal organization in India.

### **Legal status**

The legal status of Sri Lankan refugees in India is officially governed by the Foreigner's Act 1946 and India's Citizenship Act 1955 which defines all non-citizens who enter without visas to be illegal migrants, with no exception for refugees or asylum seekers. Sri Lankans who are considered to be a threat to national security are deemed to be militants and detained in 'special camps' in Chenglepet or Vellore and. Nonetheless, in general the Government of India recognizes Sri Lankans fleeing violence at home to be refugees and accordingly grants them protection.

### **Socio-economic conditions**

Sri Lankan refugees remain largely in Tamil Nadu and live in refugee camps scattered across the state. At present, more than 72,000 thousand Sri Lankan refugees live in over 120 camps in Tamil Nadu. In addition to this, a further 30,000 Sri Lankans are living outside the government camps. Those that choose to live outside must register with the local police and visit the camps on a fortnightly basis to register their attendance.

Refugees living within the government camps are housed in warehouses or in temporary shelters and are subject to an evening curfew at 7 p.m. Each adult refugee receives a small monthly stipend. Though not officially permitted to work in India, the refugees worked as unskilled labour in the informal sector to supplement their incomes. The Indian Government provides basic medical care and education for school-age Sri Lankan children as well as subsidized food grain for the camps' inhabitants. Despite these provisions, conditions in the camps are generally poor with insufficient health and sanitary facilities available for the refugee population.



## **Bhutanese refugees in India**

### **Country of origin background**

Ethnic Nepalese people started arriving in Bhutan in significant numbers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the 1980s they accounted for a quarter of the Bhutanese population. In the mid to late 1980s, the authorities began to view the growing numbers of Hindu Nepalese in Bhutan as a direct threat to Bhutanese ethnic identity. After this time, discriminatory measures were employed to restrict the Nepalese from government service jobs, from obtaining promotions and receiving passports. Alongside these measures, the government introduced a national campaign to revive traditional culture. Teaching Nepali as a second language in schools was banned and Bhutanese national dress was to be worn at school as well as on official occasions.

A census was carried out in the early 1980s which determined the number of Nepalese living in Bhutan. As a result of the census, the Citizenship Act of 1985 was enacted which set out new conditions for citizenship of Bhutan. A great number of Hindu Nepalese became illegal residents overnight. The only way to regain it was to prove their residence in Bhutan for the previous 15 years. As a result, many naturalized citizens lost their status. The Act also allowed for any naturalized citizen to be stripped of his or her status if they had shown, by act or speech, to be 'disloyal' to the King, country, or people of Bhutan. This provision has been used frequently to revoke citizenship from Hindu Nepalese under the pretext of 'disloyalty'. Expulsions of Hindu Nepalese who fell foul of the Citizenship Act began in 1988. Street protests and hunger strikes took place in the south to demonstrate against the measures taken against the Hindu Nepalese population.

### **Reason for flight**

In response to the protests by the ethnic Nepalese in Bhutan in the south against their deportation and discrimination, the government's military presence increased. After several raids and bombings, the Bhutanese authority ordered the closure of local Nepalese schools, clinics, and development programs. Many ethnic Nepalese were forcibly evicted and forced to cross the Indian borders into Assam and West Bengal. The Indian states would not accept the expelled Bhutanese and they were forced to move on. Most went through Nepal to go back into India at different entry points, while approximately 100,000 stayed in UNHCR refugee camps in Nepal. There

are between 15,000 and 30,000 ethnic Nepalis living in India. For them, obtaining recognition as refugees remains an impossible task.

### **Legal status**

Since 1949, Bhutanese citizens have been permitted to move freely across the Indian border. An open border between India and Nepal and India and Bhutan is provided for by a treaty between the respective states, last updated in February 2007. A reciprocal arrangement between Indian and Bhutan grants its citizens equal treatment and privileges. The right to residence, study, and work are guaranteed without the need for identity papers. For this reason, the Indian government has not acknowledged the ethnic Nepalese Bhutanese who were forced to flee to be refugees, and nor has it provided any sort of assistance. The UNHCR does not carry out status determination for the Bhutanese. This is most likely due to the friendship treaty between the two countries.

### **Socio-economic conditions**

Under its reciprocal arrangement with Bhutan, the Indian government affords the Bhutanese more freedom of movement and residence than to recognized refugee groups. Nonetheless, because the Bhutanese are not recognized as refugees, they are not eligible to receive the amenities and assistance afforded to refugees. They too fled their country with little or no possessions and are in dire need of assistance. Despite being officially treated as equals to Indian citizens the refugees still experience difficulties in securing driving and business licenses, travel documents, cooking gas and school and university admission.

## Hindu Pakistani refugees

### Country of Origin Background

India was partitioned in 1947, leading to the creation of two sovereign states: India and Pakistan. The Hindu population of Pakistan, numbering roughly three million, is largely concentrated in the southern province of Sindh. The majority of the population are Dalits, impoverished landless labourers. Although some minor clashes occurred from time to time prior to partition, relations between Hindu and Muslims in Sindh were generally peaceful. After 1947 an influx of Urdu speaking Muslims from India arrived in Sindh province. Communal violence erupted and the first wave of Sindh's Hindus was forced to flee. Finding themselves subject to religious persecution, they sought refuge in India.

### Reason for flight

The tense inter-communal relations between the Hindu and Muslim communities in Pakistan have become more apparent since the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971. Growing insecurity amongst Hindus, particularly with the rise of right-wing Islamist groups in the country caused more Hindus to leave for India. The Islamisation of the country under the dictatorship of Zia ul-Haq made life for religious minorities in Pakistan difficult in the late 1970s and 1980s. After the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992, the backlash against the Hindu population caused many more to flee to India.

### Legal status

Roughly 115,000 people displaced from Pakistan have arrived in India since 1965 and most have settled in Rajasthan or Gujarat. The Indian government does not recognize this group to be refugees and as a result, they are unable to acquire residence permits and find it difficult to gain employment.

The Indian Constitution and the Indian Citizenship Act 1955, however, make specific provision for those who were born or whose parents were born in undivided India to apply for Indian citizenship. The Citizenship Amendment Rules 2004 specifically provide for Pakistanis to apply for citizenship in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The conditions for citizenship are that the individual must have been continuously

resident in India for five years, rather than for 12 years as is the case with other foreigners applying for citizenship, and intend to settle permanently in India. As a result of this legislation, which dramatically sped up the application process, the Indian government awarded 13,000 Hindu Pakistanis Indian citizenship between 2005 and 2006. Once Pakistani refugees have attained citizenship they are afforded the same rights as Indian citizens. The amendment of the Citizenship Act in 2005, however, has drastically increased the fee structure for citizenship application. For the poorest Pakistanis these fees are prohibitive, leaving them permanently disenfranchised.

### **Socio-economic conditions**

Despite the acquisition of India citizenship, some Pakistani Hindus report ongoing problems with accessing the associated benefits including ration cards and other government schemes. The Pakistani communities generally work in the informal sector and often take jobs as manual labourers and in quarries to earn a living. As with many other refugee groups in India, they often experience exploitation in the work place and often do not earn enough to adequately support themselves and their families.

## **Burmese refugees**

### **Country of origin background**

Burma gained independence from Great Britain in 1948. Following the 1962 coup d'état, the leadership shifted from democracy to a military junta, the fore-runner of the current ruling regime; the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). In 1990, despite multi-party legislative elections that resulted in the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), winning a landslide victory, the SPDC refused to hand over power. The leader of the NLD, Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest.

### **Reason for flight**

In 1988, the Burmese government began suppressing the pro-democracy movement forcing 3,000 refugees to cross the border into India. The increased militarization under the SPDC and its effects continue to cause flight from Burma, especially in the western region. Torture, disappearances, forced labour, rape and extra-judicial killings are among the human rights abuses perpetrated by the military junta against its perceived opponents. Ethnic and religious persecution of the minorities, in particular the Chin Christians in the Chin state.

### **Legal status**

Most of Burmese enter India from the northeast and very few asylum seekers who travel to Delhi are recognized as refugees by the UNHCR. The UNHCR in Delhi assists about 2,000 Burmese refugees, the majority of whom are from Chin state. The organization provides the more vulnerable individuals with a small monthly stipend, which is often not enough to cover basic necessities.

In addition to the Burmese who are recognised refugees by the UNHCR, there are also a large number of Burmese asylum seekers living in India. The majority live in Mizoram in northeast India; they belong to the same ethnic group and find integration easier. Employment opportunities are also better there.

### **Socio-economic conditions**

Daily life is a struggle for many Burmese refugees in New Delhi. Many live in the slums or share cramped accommodation with other refugees. Refugee families also host several asylum seekers, adding to their financial burden. In some instances the lack of privacy leads to frustration and domestic violence as well as greater instances of marital discord.

Unlike some other refugee groups, Burmese refugees are granted residence permits to stay in India. Despite this benefit, joining the formal workforce remains a serious challenge. Most refugees are from rural areas in Burma and do not have the same level of education as those from urban areas. Furthermore, they often do not speak English or Hindi, nor possess the skills to allow them to compete with Indian citizens to secure jobs. As a result the refugees seek work into the informal sector where they are often exposed to exploitation. Employers in the informal sectors often do not grant leave or grant it on a weekday making it difficult for Burmese refugees to attend church on Saturdays or Sundays.

Access to education is formally ensured for every child protected by the UNHCR mandate; however, educational institutions require a birth certificate and papers for registration and fees, which refugees cannot always provide. In government schools the medium of instruction is Hindi, which often discourages parents from sending their children to these schools. This often presents a barrier to education for Burmese children.

### **Specific protection issues**

Burmese women bear the largest burden among the refugee population. Some women are widows or are the head of large families. In addition to taking care of their families they must also work to provide for them. Burmese women refugees are regularly harassed at work. Working in the informal sector means that they are often overworked and underpaid. The necessity of providing for their families leads many Burmese refugees to attend the night markets after they close in order to search for left-over vegetables or rummage through the rubbish. In order to provide their families with basic necessities the refugees are often out alone late at night, putting them at greater risk of harassment and assault. Their precarious situation is

compounded by the fact that Burmese refugees are often unable or unwilling to obtain police protection when they are the victims of crimes.

## **Somali refugees in India**

### **Country of Origin Background**

Somalia has been without a government since 1991, following the overthrow of President Siad Barre. After he left the country, warring factions of rival clan-based groups turned on each other, throwing the country into a civil war which has raged ever since. Interventions by the United Nations to stop the war and the resulting humanitarian crises have proved ineffective. There have also been numerous attempts since 2000 to reach a lasting peace. To date, none of these have been successful. In January 2007, the United States backed the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia to overthrow Mogadishu's Islamic Courts Union and install the weak, and largely secular, transitional federal government. At the present time, the transitional government struggles to impose its authority on the country and its forces face daily attacks from opponents.

### **Reason for flight**

The civil war has killed thousands and left millions displaced. Human rights violations are commonplace and include extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detention, torture and forced disappearances. Discrimination and abuse of marginalized groups and minorities, sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation of women are also widely perpetrated. Approximately 400,000 Somali refugees have fled the country to seek refuge from the daily violence and instability. 71% of the population of Somalia is classed as undernourished. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) believes that Somalia is experiencing its worst humanitarian crisis in 16 years; it estimates that 1.8 Somalis are in need of aid. Since July 2007, an increased number of civilians have fled Somalia due to the deteriorating security situation.

### **Legal status**

Somalis constitute the largest African community in India, numbering approximately 400 people, although less than 200 are officially registered. Somalis who reach Delhi apply for refugee status under the UNHCR mandate.



Somali refugees are not provided with residence permits by the Indian government rendering them unable to work. Refugees recognized by the UNHCR receive a subsistence allowance of Rs. 2,225 for the principal applicant and Rs. 750 each for the dependents for the first six months. After six months, the allowance is cut to Rs. 1,400. Some Somalis report problems in the past in accessing the subsistence allowance from the UNHCR but state that the situation has improved since the beginning of 2007. Nonetheless, the subsistence allowance is not enough to cover the refugees' basic needs, and many rely on small donations from friends and families living abroad to support their stay in India.

### **Socio-economic conditions**

Somalis face greater challenges than other refugee groups in finding housing, gaining access to education and medical treatment and seeking employment. There are two reasons for this. First, the majority of the Somali community in India cannot speak English or Hindi. Secondly, they are discriminated against because of their colour. They stand out from the local population. Somali refugees report that it is extremely difficult for them to find housing since many Indians do not want to lease properties to them.

Whilst Afghans and other refugee groups often find it relatively easy to find work in the informal sector, this is often impossible for Somalis. Employers are reluctant to give them work because they do not have residence permits and their appearance would attract the attention of the police.

Somali women face particular problems in accessing transport, healthcare and education. They are less likely than their male counterparts to learn English or Hindi and are isolated from the local community.

It is estimated that 80-90% of the Somali community in India lives in Hyderabad rather than in Delhi. The majority of the community consists of unaccompanied minors and young adults who share cramped accommodation and have no way of making a living. Whilst the UNHCR's implementing partners in Delhi, the YMCA and Don Bosco, help refugees access housing and education there are no equivalent opportunities or assistance in these matters in Hyderabad. As a result the refugees in Hyderabad often feel depressed, lonely and without support.

Nonetheless, some refugees report that living conditions are easier in Hyderabad due to the lower cost of food and housing. Somalis also experience a friendlier reception amongst the large Muslim population of Hyderabad than in Delhi. The problem with living in Hyderabad, however, is the distance from the UNHCR in Delhi. Many Somali families move to Delhi, despite the expense, in order to be close to the UNHCR, the YMCA and Don Bosco who assist refugees in accessing services and provide a degree of protection.

## **Palestinian refugees**

### **Country of Origin Background**

After the establishment of the State of Israel, about two thirds of the Palestinian Arabs fled or were expelled from their territories, which came under Israeli control after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. More and more Palestinians were forced to flee to the neighboring countries and the mass expulsion of the Palestinian Arabs from their homes, villages and towns uprooted an entire population. In most cases these refugees have not been permitted to return to their homes to date. They have either been languishing in sub-human conditions in their host countries facing hostilities and discrimination, or volatile political situations in the countries in which they seek refuge. Many Palestinians fled to neighbouring Iraq and lived there as refugees.

### **Reason for flight**

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein's government, Palestinian refugees in Iraq have increasingly become targets of violence and persecution since these refugees were issued special travel documents, had the right to work and were given full access to health, education and other government services. They were also provided with government-owned housing or subsidized rent in privately-owned houses. This was a source of resentment for Iraq's poor, mostly Shia' population, who believed that Palestinians were receiving preferential treatment over Iraqis. Palestinians were not given citizenship, however, nor were they allowed to own assets such as cars, houses, or land. The precariousness of their situation was revealed starkly after the US invasion, and their preferential treatment; more superficial than real, made the Palestinians targets for reprisals. As the American invaded Iraq and the country was pushed to the brink of a civil war, most Palestinians living there fled to various countries, some of them to India.

### **Legal status**

160 Palestinians are currently seeking refugee status and are the most recent refugee group to arrive in India. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Delhi has recognized some of the Palestinians as refugees and the applications of others are under consideration. Unlike Afghans and Burmese refugees these refugees are not issued residence permits by the Indian government.

### **Socio- economic conditions**

The Palestinians who fled Iraq under threat of persecution had to pay huge amounts of money to agents to gain entry to India. Many of them had therefore already spent their savings before entering India. Their only means of income in India is through the UNHCR. The majority of the Palestinian refugees stay in New Delhi.

Palestinian refugees in India experience severe hardship. They are keen to work and to support themselves but it is difficult for them to find a job due to language problems and not possessing residence permits. In terms of accommodation and housing, their living conditions are very poor. Since the rent is often too high the refugees live in very cramped conditions. The education of the school-age refugees in New Delhi is another serious concern. Most Palestinian children do not attend school since they find difficult to learn Hindi whilst English medium schools (private schools) are prohibitively expensive. The language barrier also makes it difficult for Palestinian children to socialize.

The UNHCR provides only the newly recognized refugees with a subsistence allowance of Rs.2245 per principal applicant, plus Rs.750 each for the dependents. A maximum of eight people in a family are supported. This amount is valid only for six months after which it is reduced to 50% for the next six months. After one year, financial assistance is discontinued except for particularly vulnerable cases.

## **Afghan refugees in India**

### **Country of Origin Background**

In 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Over the next ten years, there was fierce resistance to the Soviet presence from the United States-backed Mujahadeen. During this time, approximately 60,000 Afghans sought refuge abroad. The Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. By 1992, however, the country was embroiled yet more violence; this time a civil war between the Taliban and the ruling Najibullah regime. The civil war, lasting four years, destroyed more than 80% of the capital city, Kabul and saw yet more Afghans forced to flee the country. The Taliban came to power in 1996. Their oppressive regime was based on the strictest interpretation of Sharia law. Under the Taliban, it was forbidden for girls or women to be educated after the age of eight, to watch television, listen to music or to clap during sporting events. Following the events of 11 September 2001, the United States and the United Kingdom, along with other NATO supporters, launched a military attack on Afghanistan. The Taliban withdrew to the Afghan-Pakistani border where they continue their protracted campaign against the new Afghan government.

### **Reason for flight**

There are over 9,000 recognised Afghan refugees in India and 90 percent of them belong to the Hindu or Sikh faiths; religious minorities in Afghanistan who could not openly practice their religions in their home country for fear of persecution. Most of the Afghan Sikh and Hindu refugees in India sought asylum after 1992, with the fall of the Najibullah regime.

Three decades of fighting have destroyed the country's economy and infrastructure and government security bodies continue to commit human rights violations with impunity. Widespread human rights violations include: extra-judicial killing, torture, rape, violence against women and tight restrictions on freedoms of press, religion, movement and association. Between July and October 2007, it is estimated that a further 15,000 people were forcibly displaced by the conflict.

### **Legal status**

India has not signed the 1951 Convention on Refugees or the 1967 Protocol and the Indian government does not officially recognize the Afghan community to be refugees. Instead, they are recognised and protected under the UNHCR mandate.

The Indian government has issued most Afghan refugees with valid residence permits. This affords them a degree of legal protection, which allows them to stay in the country despite not having valid passports. Attaining residence permits has been more difficult for the newer arrivals that arrived in India between 2004 and 2007.

Socio-economic conditions

Newly recognised Afghan refugees receive a small subsistence allowance for the first six months: Rs 2,225 for the principal applicant and Rs 750 for each dependant. After six months, only the most vulnerable Afghans such as female heads of household, the disabled and the elderly, receive this sum.

Whilst most Afghan refugees live in Delhi, there are also a large number living in Faridabad, Haryana. The Afghan Hindu and Sikh community are generally well integrated into Indian society since they share religious beliefs and often speak Hindi. Since the majority of the Afghan community holds resident permits, many Afghans are able to work in the informal sector, for example, running shops and working as salespeople. Whilst there are some prosperous Afghan refugees, a large number live in poverty; sharing cramped living quarters with other families and seeking work in the informal sector. Those that are in need receive some support from their community and from various welfare societies like Khalsa Diwan Society and Gurudwaras.

The UNHCR also runs various assistance programmes through its implementing partners for the benefit of Afghan refugees. Through its implementing partners, it provides refugees with access to academic resources, including an education assistance programme in association with the Young Men's Christian Association, Delhi. Educational assistance is provided to all Afghan refugee children who are pursuing primary and secondary education.

### **Specific protection issues**

Afghan refugees who do not possess residence permits often struggle to support themselves and their families. A large proportion of the Afghan community are widows and single mothers. Workers in the informal sector work very long hours and often find it difficult to get time off work. They are at risk of exploitation and harassment at work and it is reported that Muslim Afghan women are particularly discriminated against. The employment of Afghan refugees who do not possess valid

resident permits is illegal and extortion and harassment by the police is an ever-present threat.

Whilst education is open to all Afghan refugee children, most Afghan boys only study up to primary level before starting work to support their families. The drop out rate among Afghan girls is also high in the primary level for a variety of reasons: to take care of ill relatives, because they get engaged and for financial reasons.

### **Naturalisation**

The majority of Afghan refugees are Hindus and Sikhs who arrived in India in the early 1990s after the Taliban came to power. A large number of them have shown interest in becoming naturalised Indian citizens. The eligibility requirement is that a refugee must have lived in India for 12 years or have been married to an Indian for seven years.

In addition to these groups India also hosts small numbers of refugees from Sudan, Iraq, Iran Ethiopia and Eritrea amongst others.