



WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

# Food Security Assessment Urban Afghan Refugees Pakdasht, Iran



**vam**  
wfp food security analysis

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*Food Security Assessment of Urban Afghan Refugee Populations in  
Pakdasht, Iran (December 2008)*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BAFIA</b>	Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigration Affairs
<b>CSI</b>	Coping Strategy Index
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
<b>EPI</b>	Extended Programme for Immunization
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>FCS</b>	Food Consumption Score
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>HH</b>	Household
<b>IMO</b>	International Migration Organization
<b>JAM</b>	Joint Assessment Mission
<b>MOH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NHDI</b>	Nutrition, Health and Development Institution
<b>NSW</b>	Centre for Public Health Nutrition
<b>PHC</b>	Primary Health Centre
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USCRI</b>	Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

## 1.0 – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Iran has hosted one of the largest Refugee populations in the history of humanitarian assistance. Most of the 2.3 million Afghan Refugees live in cities and villages with only a few thousand living in refugee camps. Iran has witnessed a long history of refugees arriving from Afghanistan on account of many Afghan wars. The most recent large influx a result of the 1979 Soviet invasion and the consequent internal and external wars. There are strong socio-religious ties between the hosts and the Refugees with a shared language and religion.

Iran has adopted a generous approach to the Refugees by providing freedom of movement and access to key subsidies such as health care, primary and secondary education and food on par with Iranian citizens. As a result, there is a dramatic improvement in literacy rates when comparing original migrants and their children. On their part, Afghans have provided much needed labour at low prices thus supporting the massive construction boom.

The majority of Afghan refugees in Iran engage in labour and to some extent in small businesses. These incomes are low and the average family spends about 77% of its income on rental payments. It is fair to categorize the average Afghan Refugee as living around the poverty line. Food consumption is mainly restricted to cereals and occasional proteins leaving dietary diversity severely limited. Income sources are unstable and the family's vulnerability to food insecurity is high.

Presently, Government subsidies play a major role in the Refugees' ability to sustain themselves. Access to health centers and schools are essential to raise a healthy and productive family. Fuel and electricity subsidies allow the families to survive with low incomes. There are also a large number of unregistered Refugees whose access is limited due to lack of documentation.

The World Food Programme in collaboration with local partners conducted a survey of urban Afghan refugees to better understand their food security situation. The survey confirms limiting government subsidies would entail serious food insecurity amongst the Afghan Refugee population. Their coping strategies are stretched to the limit at present. The average family would be unable to sustain further stress. Sending 10 year old children to earn a living would have negative affects on the Afghan and its host populations.

Non-food interventions would improve household food security and reduce poverty among the Refugees. Micro-credit schemes for small businesses, cash-for-work and skills development would render positive results. Nutrition education would improve dietary diversity through better food choices. A food security monitoring system would be able to track changes in the food security situation resulting from any change in government regulations or improvement of the security situation in Afghanistan.

The Afghan Refugee population in Iran is vulnerable and relies heavily on government subsidies to provide food and shelter to their families. Continuation of this support with the addition of access to credit and training would allow the households to improve their income base and reduce vulnerability to food insecurity.

## 2.0 – INTRODUCTION

Food security is a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life ( FAO. 2002). VicHealth (2008) states “irregular access to safe, nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable food from non-emergency sources is known as food insecurity”. Not having sufficient food and experiencing anxiety about acquiring food also contribute to food insecurity (NSW Centre for Public Health Nutrition, 2003). In some studies, food insecure diets are characterized by a low intake of fruit and vegetables and to be deficient in a variety of nutrients (Burns, 2004).

Population groups at great risk of food insecurity include: refugees, people on low incomes, people with disabilities, chronically ill, alcohol or drug abusers and homeless people (NSW Centre for Public Health Nutrition, 2003). Overseas studies also identify refugees as a vulnerable population. For example a study by Hadley et al (2007) examining the prevalence of food insecurity amongst refugees living in the USA, showed that food insecurity decreased with time spent in a new country, usually due to familiarization with new foods and purchasing new foods, increased employment and household income, increased language acquisition and settlement occurring. Furthermore, “cultural differences, the experience of migration or experience of being a member of a minority group can produce stressors which have been shown to influence physical health. Such experiences should therefore be considered risk factors in themselves” (MacLachlan in Renzaho, 2007:xv).

The immediate effects of food insecurity include anxiety and hunger. The long term effects of food insecurity are over and underweight (Vic Health 2005). Over the course of the last few decades, Afghanistan has been torn apart by war, geopolitical power struggles, foreign occupation, and a devastating drought. The Afghan people have struggled to cope with the ravages of manmade and natural disasters that have befallen their homeland. The internal and external conflicts have led to decades of civil unrest and the complete break down of the state structure as well as to the displacement of over twenty percent of the country’s population, the largest refugee population worldwide. The majority of the displaced took refuge in the neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan. The present report explains the food security situation of Afghan refugees living in urban areas of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## 3.0 – BACKGROUND

### 3.1 – Afghan Refugee Influx to Iran

Since the mid-1970s, the Islamic Republic of Iran has played host to millions of Afghan refugees. As the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) observed in 1999: “Geography, as well as the Iranian government’s propensity to seek to demonstrate the Iranian’s generosity toward fellow Muslims, has made Iran the country of choice for refugees from Afghanistan since the mid-1970s” (USCRI, 2003). Both share cultural and historical proximity—language (Persian speaking), ethnicity, and cultural traditions (i.e. *Norooz* celebrations). Afghanistan, with a population of 19 percent *Shia* Muslims has close ties with the *Shia* dominated Iran. These links as well as Afghanistan’s turbulent twentieth century has led to a history of migration to Iran. Modern Afghanistan has had a history of westward migration dating back to the reign of Emir Abdur Rahman (1880-1901) when many ethnic Hazaras, *Shia* Muslims, left for Iran. Stalinist collectivism in Afghanistan accelerated the exile of hundreds of thousands of refugees to Iran (Centlivres, P. 1993).

The largest and most recent influx of refugees is due to the wars that have occurred in Afghanistan. After the 1979 Soviet invasion, millions of Afghans moved as refugees to Iran. They were primarily ethnic Hazaras, *Shia*, and from rural, lower socio-economic classes (Anderson E., 1987). According to the preliminary results of the 1986 national census, 2.6 million persons were listed as refugees of foreign nationality. The largest group, approximately 2.3 million, was Afghans; other groups included Iraqis, Azeri, and other groups from neighboring countries (CMI 2004). The impact of the refugee population is illustrated by the fact that if the refugees were excluded from the 1976-1986 average annual population growth rates, it would drop from 3.8 to 3.4 percent (Aghajanian A. 1991). The size of the refugee population rose dramatically throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, due to the continuing instability and conflict in Afghanistan, at one point reaching over 4 million. In 1988, the number of Afghan refugees was officially recorded as 2.35 million and by 1992 reached 2.8 million (Marsden P. 1996). The migratory movements have subsided in magnitude but continue to the present.

By mid-2003, all Afghans residing in Iran were asked to re-register with the authorities. Those with refugee documents were obliged to hand in their refugee cards and received in return only temporary residence permits, which at the time totaled 2.3 million. Of these, UNHCR considered 1.1 million to be refugees or otherwise of concern to its mandate (CMI 2004). In 2008, some 900,000 registered Afghan refugees remained in Iran. Most live in villages and urban areas, while about 27,000 stay in six refugee settlements managed by the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigration Affairs (BAFIA) (UNTC 2002).

## 3.2 – Government

### 3.2.1 – *Registration*

Over the course of the last two and half decades, Iran's policy towards refugees has evolved from an open door to a more restrictive policy. In 1976, Iran approved both the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (Marsden P. 1996). Despite the large influx of refugees during the 1980s, Iran was a hospitable host and opened its doors to the millions. The refugees were for the most part welcomed and well-integrated into Iranian society (Marsden P. 1996). During the first decade of migration, the government continued the pre-revolutionary practice of issuing Refugee Booklets (or white cards), although on an irregular basis. The white cards are the only government document, which use the Farsi word for refugees, *panahandegan*. The white card provides for rights and benefits, such as, "exemption from taxes, the right to work, and to obtain convention travel documents, but it also requires its holders to renew their status every three months and to report movement and residence to the authorities." (USCRI1999).

For the most part, during the 1980s, the government issued "blue cards" to Afghans as means of official registration and documentation. "The blue cards indicated that Iran recognized its holders not as 'refugees' but rather as 'involuntary migrants,' *mohageren*." (USCRI 1997). Refugees with blue cards are officially registered and documented with the government. The blue cards also permit the refugees to register for assisted transport provided by International Migration Organization (IMO) to various locations in Afghanistan. The most important component of the blue cards is that it entitles refugees to subsidized health care, primary and secondary education, and food subsidies, on par with Iranian citizens (USCRI 2003).

### 3.2.2 – *BAFIA*

After the initial influx of refugees, the government agency, Iranian Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA), set up camps in the eastern and western provinces, where the refugees were processed, provided basic assistance, and allowed the use of municipal services such as free access to public schools for registered refugee children. (ICRI 2008). Iran initially did not restrict the refugees to the camps and have given refugees freedom to move throughout Iran and to find their niche within Iranian society. Consequently, only about 3-5 percent of refugees, generally the most poor, live in camps (Williams R. 1992) "a fact the Iranian government cites with pride, saying, "the Islamic Republic of Iran, in line with its humanitarian policies has never forced refugees to remain in camps (Williams R. 1992). Refugees are dispersed throughout Iran, residing in both rural and urban areas, living amongst the local population. Afghan refugees live in most major cities but the biggest communities are found in Khorasan, Sistan-Baluchestan, Tehran, Kerman, Fars Markazi, and Semnan provinces.

Iran has one of the largest Afghan refugee populations in the world. There were 2,349,068 Afghans living in Iran in April 2001, not including the thousands of Afghan migrant workers living illegally in the country. But for 20 years, Iran has had an exemplary policy towards the refugees living amongst them. Unsupported by the international community, Iran has spent millions of dollars on the Afghan refugee crisis. In fact, comparing the number of refugees that have been living in Iran to the number taken by western countries, and comparative wealth figures, Iran has shouldered a large part of the burden on its own.

The most vulnerable live in the poorer rural sections of two eastern provinces bordering Afghanistan, Sistan and Baluchestan province and Khorasan province (UNHCR 2005). According to BAFIA, 55 percent of refugees live in the three eastern provinces and in some cities the refugee/host ratio is one to one (UNHCR 2005).

### 3.2.3 – Support

Iran's policy of allowing refugees to move about and seek employment has suggested not only a remarkable level of generosity and understanding of the refugee circumstances, but also proved that promoting self reliance of the refugees is best for the refugees and also the most cost-effective approach for the host government and the society as well.

However this policy of Iran is to undergo a drastic change as Iran along with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is planning a massive repatriation programme for the refugees. The programme intends to encourage Afghans, thousands of whom are undocumented, to come forward to register and to be assisted and repatriated. According to the draft plan, those found to have continuing well-founded fears of persecution in Afghanistan will be relocated to designated areas within Iran. This attitude on the part of the Iranian government is understandable given the fact that Iran's economy is slowing down and it is becoming increasingly difficult to bear the burden of the refugee population. (Refugee Watch 17 RW. June, 2000).

Ministry of Interior's Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA) of Iran has maintained a fairly detailed list of Afghans whom it has accepted as refugees. Afghans on this "Amayesh" list have been entitled to basic health and education services provided by the Iranian government. The list is updated periodically, at which time Afghans must re-register with Iranian authorities in order to remain in the country legally. Afghans who are clearly on the *Amayesh* list have encountered increasing difficulties in recent years. Whereas Afghan refugees in the past have received subsidized — or even free — education, health care, and food rations, the Government has begun implementing measures to force Afghans to pay for these resources. These efforts reached a peak in February 2004, when the Government announced Afghans would lose their exemption to paying school fees and have to pay increased health care premiums. Additionally, the Government announced in early 2005 that Afghans would be subject to a nominal tax.

### 3.2.4 – Health Care for Non Camp Afghan Refugees

Primary Health Centre (PHC) is the basic structural and functional unit of the public health services in Iran. PHCs were established to provide accessible, affordable and available primary health care to people, in accordance with the Alma Ata Declaration in 1972 by the member nations of WHO. In Iran, the Ministry of Health and Medical Education provides primary health care through the PHC system which includes: antenatal and postnatal care, immunization, promotion of breast feeding and appropriate complementary feeding, Growth Monitoring, IMCI, iron and multivitamin supplementation for children under 2 years, programme for pregnant and lactating women, family planning, preventive programs for communicable and non communicable diseases. Based on the MOH reports, in addition to the Iranian population, 2 million foreign people including Afghan refugees benefit from primary health care services free of charge.

At the village level, the community health worker (*behvarz*) records health and demographic data of the families in the family files and summarize the data collected on the vital catalogue which is printed on a 50 70 cm sheet of paper. Summaries include information on: the age and sex structure of the population, the number of births by outcome, such as live births and stillbirths, sex and weight of the baby, age of the mother, place of delivery (hospital/delivery centre or home) and persons helping with the delivery (trained or untrained), the number of deaths associated with the pregnancy or delivery, specifying the major causes of death, the coverage of the family planning programme, the number of deaths by sex and age and deaths among infants and children), and the health services provided by the health house during the year. These data are recorded by the *behvarz* in the vital catalogue. The vital health events of Afghan refugees are also recorded in a special vital catalogue through PHC system (Asia-Pacific Population Journal, 2008).

### *3.2.5 – Health Care Services in the Camps*

Health care services are provided by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and include antenatal, postnatal care, immunization, family planning, child growth monitoring, in-patient service and Labour-room services. The refugee health workers are trained by MOH and are the main service providers since 2004 when UNHCR ended its assistance. General ailments that used to be treated by physicians regularly and free of charge are now referred to out-of-camp medical centers on the days that camps do not have physician. Refugees have to pay per consultation on the three days that camp health centre is attended by a physician and full cost of medication if the camp pharmacy is still in service which in most camps is not. This places a heavy financial burden on refugees, as they have to pay for transportation, medical consultation and medication. This program used to benefit from voluntary health worker system within the camps, but the system collapsed with the suspension of assistance. With suspension of assistance, BAFIA, MOH and UNHCR have reduced/withdraw assistance from camps that resulted in voluntary workers unwilling to continue volunteer services. With the withdrawal of assistance, the system became a user-pay-basis. Health services became less accessible to the refugees in comparison to pre-2004 period where services were provided free to all camp refugees on a comprehensive basis. Deliveries which used to be assisted by educated midwives free of charge, now are handled by trained refugee midwives who should be paid by refugees.

The routine follow up for the children with declining growth records is to provide them with iron and multi vitamin drops and a referral to a physician. Refugees cannot afford paying for the recommended medication. Breastfeeding continues to be a common practice in the camps and in a very few exceptional cases MOH provides the formula milk. Extended Programme for Immunization (EPI) is carried out according to MOH standards in terms of cold chain and vaccination protocols. All camp health centers reported high coverage of vaccination, almost 100% coverage. There is no dental care in camp health centers since 2004 when UNHCR suspended its assistance.

### *3.2.6 – Education*

The initial generous policy of the Iranian government of allowing free access to Iranian education services to all arriving refugees during the 1980s also had a profound impact. These steps increased exposure to better, more-modern educational facilities to both boys and girls. According to UNHCR, by the end of 2002, 200,000 Afghan and Iraqi children were registered at 17,000 Iranian primary and secondary schools (UNHCR 2005). In 1986-1987, a few primary and secondary schools were opened for both Afghan boys and girls in the urban and rural areas of Mashad, with the assistance of the Ministry of Education ( Mobin S. 1988). Until 1995, Afghan children could register in Iranian public schools, and as a result many more children are literate (especially girls) than in their parent's generation. After a gap of two years (1995-97), during which only permanent card-holders were allowed to enroll in public schools, it was in 1997 that temporary card-holders were once again allowed to attend public schools.

There are also other schools which UNICEF, international NGOs, as well as the Iranian Ministry of Education have supported and recognized. According to UNHCR estimates, approximately 23,000 Afghan children were attending over 100 Afghan-led schools in Tehran, Mashad, and Zahedan . Those with Refugee Booklets and Registration Slips may enroll their children in Iranian schools. At the end of 2002, UNHCR estimated that 200,000 Afghan and Iraqi children were registered at some 17,000 Iranian schools at primary and secondary levels. In addition, close to 23,000 Afghan children were attending over 100 Afghan community-based schools, in the major cities of Tehran, Mashad, and Zahedan.

The general conditions of the schools vary from camp to camp. All camps have primary schools (grades 1 to 5) for girls and boys but secondary (grades 6-8) and high schools (grades 9-11) for girls are not available in most of the camps (only Torbat e Jam has high school for girls) and girls have to go to the city to continue their education. Students have to pay education fees for secondary and high school when not available on the camps. This situation prevents girls from continuing education because it is not culturally accepted to send unaccompanied girls outside the camp, and the cost of education (transportation, registration fee, text book and stationery) is a burden to the families. Even in the camps that have secondary school for girls, net enrolment rate is low and most of the girls do not register for higher levels (some get married and some stay at home). Ministry of Education has been providing a school snack (milk and biscuits) in formal schools for six months of a scholastic year (September to March). Afghan students also benefit from this program. Afghan refugees are excluded from pre-university grades (12th grade) as well as any institution of higher education since the introduction of Iranian policy on higher education in 2004. Since then, foreign nationals can only access higher education if they pay full tuition fees. Prior to 2004, Afghan refugees were admitted to higher education with the same condition as Iranians. Iran grants scholarship to foreign nationals, in which the scheme applies to both Afghan refugees and residents in Afghanistan. However, winner of a scholarship can only be awarded, in the case of refugees, if the refugee returns to Afghanistan, obtains a passport and gives up his/her refugee ID card.

### *3.2.7 – Labour Laws*

Since the increase of the oil price in 1973 which resulted in a lot of petrodollars being poured into the economy there have been fast and important changes in Iran's economic sectors. The increase in the national income and the expansion of some economic sectors like construction led to a lack of workers particularly in labour intensive industries and in heavy industries like mining and construction. Afghan workers immigrated to Iran and filled in the gap. Therefore the need for unskilled workers in jobs like brick-burning, construction, mining, together with a higher standard of living in Iran attracted a lot of young people from Afghanistan. The change in the Afghan government and the assassination of Daud Khan led to an acceleration of this process. As a result of the influx of Afghan refugees to Iran and Afghan engagement in various economic fields, the production of certain goods has totally become dependent on the relatively cheap Afghan labour. At present less than 500 Afghan refugees have a full work permit and most of them are employed by the government. These people are for the most part highly educated and work in medical and technical fields. There are about 4000 people who have a work permit limited to unskilled labour. These two groups are only a small part of the Afghan work force in Iran. The bigger part is refugees without a work permit who mostly work and live in the same place. Although they are very often exploited by their employers they do not complain since their situation is relatively better than the one in Afghanistan and they are often able to save some money to send to their relatives in their homeland.

Although the majority of refugees are employed as unskilled workers, some have become experts in certain fields with significantly high wages. This group will not be eager to leave their job unless they find work where they can use their skills. Refugee employment opportunities are explored as a principal self-reliance option. Legally, refugees are not permitted to engage in any form of employment. However, in a limited and restricted fashion refugees continue to be engaged in various types of jobs in surrounding towns and farms. Jobs are mostly seasonal and expose the refugees to a variety of risks. However risky the options are, it is these employment options that have helped the refugees to pay for the numerous camp management levies imposed upon them. Issuance of travel document involves payment of fees, which usually is valid for one month. Yet refugees are detained when found working even if they have a travel document, sometimes leading to deportation, and fines to employers of refugees. The Government of Iran's position is that there is no job for refugees with rising unemployment concerns for Iranian citizens. BAFIA maintains the view that those seeking

employment should apply for a visa after returning to their country, and work permit will be issued at the time. But, there is no possibility of easing employment restriction for the refugees. However, refugees are not allowed to participate in some specific types of skills training, such as driving license courses, as an Iranian birth certificate is needed to be eligible for government provided training. Privately owned skills training centers are available; however, it is not affordable for most refugees.

There is ample evidence that Afghan labor migration now plays an important role in both the Afghan and Iranian economies. Remittances from Afghans working in Iran bring a good deal of revenue to their families in Afghanistan, and Afghans continue to be an important source of labor in Iran, where they are particularly prevalent in construction and agriculture. One measure of the continuing importance of Afghan labor in Iran is the fact that Iran has recently offered to permit some 200,000 Afghans to work in Iran as guest workers. A key aspect of this offer is that the Afghan workers will be required to leave their families in Afghanistan, presumably to ensure that they will not attempt to emigrate. In fact, a number of recent research papers commissioned and published by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) show that this migration pattern has already been a model for some time. Many young Afghan men travel to Iran for a period of months or even years to supplement their family income, while the women and other men remain in Afghanistan ( Stigter E. 05).

### **3.3 – UN Assistance**

#### *3.3.1 – UNHCR*

UN assistance to Afghan refugees is generally intended to meet the most basic humanitarian needs, including food, shelter, protection, water and sanitation, health care, and primary education. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), in addition to managing the massive repatriation operation, also oversees shelter construction and water and sanitation activities in Afghanistan. In Pakistan and Iran, UNHCR is responsible for refugee protection and camp management, including provision of health care, primary education, and adequate water and sanitation to refugees. Many of these activities are actually conducted by international and local NGOs with oversight and funding from UNHCR (2007).

Since the beginning of a joint voluntary repatriation program in April 2002 under UNHCR facilitation over 750,000 Afghan refugees have returned to their homeland, over 70,000 since April this year alone. The repatriation process in Iran takes place within the framework of a tripartite agreement, known as the Joint Programme, between the Iranian government, the Afghan authorities and the UN Refugee Agency. The first joint program covered a one-year period until the end of March 2003. Since 2003, UNHCR has been engaged in major voluntary repatriation initiatives. According to UNHCR records, some 859,000 refugees repatriated of which 46,595 were camp-based. In early 2004, to encourage voluntary repatriation, UNHCR decided to suspend major camp services to refugees and WFP subsequently followed by suspending food assistance. Effectively, UNHCR's assistance suspension was introduced in March 2004, while WFP's food assistance continued through to the end of 2005. According to UNHCR records, as of March 2004, there were 31,908 Afghan refugees in 7 camps. This number reduced to 26,376 refugees in 6 camps by 2006.

#### *3.3.2 – WFP*

The United Nations World Food Programme has been assisting Afghan and Iraqi refugees in Iran since 1987. In 2003 Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO 10213.0) was prepared to assist 80,000 refugees in 29 camps. This number has significantly reduced since the start of voluntary repatriation, and supported some 26,376 Afghan refugees in 6 camps at 2006. In 2004 based on a strategy presented by UNHCR to WFP on 14 June and followed by communications to BAFIA thereafter, not least through the Tripartite Agreement 1 July 2004 - 30 March 2005, UNHCR suspended major camp services to refugees and WFP followed with suspending food assistance to Afghan refugee camps as per WFP letter to BAFIA of 14 December 2004. Effectively, UNHCR's assistance was suspended in March 2004, while WFP's food assistance continued until the end March 2005. WFP, under its current PRRO 10213.0 (January 2003 to December 2006) has been supporting encamped Afghan refugees. Activities include general relief distribution and food for education incentives.

## 4.0 – METHODOLOGY

Our research methodology both includes qualitative and quantitative designs.

### 4.1 – Quantitative Design

#### 4.1.1 – *Household Survey*

The quantitative assessment was based on a cross sectional design. A total of 414 households from among the Afghani households living in Pakdasht were surveyed. Due to legal limitations and government regulations surveyors were allowed to interview only those households that had a child attending one of the two schools named by local authorities. Hence the optimal sampling scheme could not be applied and two categories of households were not included in our sample: 1. Households that were not registered by BAFIA and 2. Households that didn't have a child attending one of the two schools introduced by authorities.

Ten interviewers were recruited. All interviewers were qualified nutritionists. Interviewers were provided training on how to interview, how to fill in the different parts of the questionnaire, and how to exactly measure the weight and height of the persons. A pilot test was conducted to test the questionnaire and the interviews. Issues raised were rectified to standardize the procedures so that the inter- and intra- observer variation be reduced as much as possible. Four different types of questionnaire were filled in for each household:

1. Demographics: including weight and height and general health status;
2. FFQ
3. Radimer-Cornel food insecurity assessment
4. Assets and income or expenses.

The validity and reliability of these questionnaires have been proven acceptable in our and other researchers' previous surveys.

The interview team consisted of a supervisor, a nutritionist and an assistant. The interviews were done at the two schools. A day before the actual interview an invitation letter was sent to the families via the pupils asking the mother of the family to come to school with all the members present at home. The weight and height of all members present at the time of interview were measured and recorded. On the afternoon of the same day the questionnaire was quality controlled by the supervisor regarding completeness and accuracy of the gathered data according to the interview instructions. If mistakes were found the questionnaire was returned to the interviewer so that she could correct it or if necessary contact the family to acquire the necessary data.

#### 4.1.2 – *Data Management*

Data gathered were entered into the computer via a designed interface using MS Access environment. Proper validation rules were applied to decrease input errors. Standard data processing schemes for quality control were applied providing clean and sound data for analysis. Analysis was performed both on uni- and bivariate scales to best describe distributions and also show associations.

Food consumption scores were calculated according to the method provided by WFP office using the data gathered via the FFQ on our questionnaire. The food items were categorized into the 10 food groups and standard weights were used for each food group. The consumption frequency was transformed to days per week.

The economic status of the households was determined by factor analysis. The variables on the expenditure, assets and house conditions were put into the model and no rotation was applied. The first component (factor) that described about 25% of variation was selected and the regression coefficient for each household was saved. The households were then categorized into three tertiles with equal number of households in each category indicating poor, average and good economic status.

## **4.2 – Qualitative Design**

### *4.2.1 – Objective*

Main Objective of the study

To explore the views, opinions, and experiences of mothers and key informants (such as teachers, school instructors and health staff in Pakdasht health center) about food security and the coping strategies of Afghan Refugees to overcome the household food insecurity in Pakdasht, in 2008.

Specific Objectives

1-Understanding participants' views, opinions and experiences about food security

2-Recognizing participants' views, opinions and experiences about coping strategies to overcome the household Food Insecurity

### *4.2.2 – Method of the Study*

In this qualitative research, semi-structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-Depth Interviews were used to find out the views, opinions, experiences and practices of Afghan refugees and key informants about Household Food Insecurity in Pakdasht in 2008. The research team consisted of: a moderator, a note keeper and an observer. All team members were trained nutritionists and had expertise in qualitative research. Approval was secured from local authorities. Afghani mothers (who had school children) and key informants in Pakdasht were invited to participate in the focus group discussions and interviews. They were contacted in advance for the interviews. Three focus groups were held. Each focus group consisted of 9 to 11 participants. Five interviews were scheduled with key informants: two teachers, two school instructors and one health staff from the nutrition unit of Pakdasht health center. The interview team consisted of an interviewer, a note taker and an observer.

### *4.2.3 – In-Dept Interviews*

In this part of study the "In Depth Interview" was used to find out the views, opinions, experiences and practices of Afghan refugees and key informants about Household Food Insecurity in Pakdasht in 2008. Five interviews were scheduled with key informants: two teachers, two school instructors and one health staff from the nutrition unit of Pakdasht health center. The interviews were carried out by an interviewer, a note taker and an observer. Interviews were held in the morning and lasted for 45 minutes. Each session was tape-recorded and transcribed to provide a complete record. At the end of each session, the questioning guide was checked and completed. Before analysis, a coding framework was constructed based on the research objectives. After data collection and field activities, the data were grouped and classified. Finally emerging themes were derived.

After designing the questionnaire guide, focus group sessions and interviews were convened in December of 2008. Focus groups/interviews were held in the morning and lasted for one hour. Each session was tape-recorded and transcribed simultaneously to provide a complete record. After an introduction, based on a checklist the moderator facilitated the discussions using a checklist of topics.

The questionnaire guide contained 20 questions about concepts of food security and the coping strategies to overcome the household food insecurity. Questioning flowed from the general to the specific. At the end of each session, the questioning guide was checked and completed. Before analysis, a coding framework was constructed based on the research objectives. After data collection and field activities, the data were grouped and classified. Finally emerging themes were derived. Colored pencils were used for coding.

#### **4.3 – Limitations**

Government permission was granted with the following stipulations:

- a. Interviews would be conducted with families with children attending two schools specified by the government
- b. Interviews would be held in the school premises and household visits were not possible
- c. Non-registered Refugees could not be interviewed.

This restricted the sampling to a subset of the total urban Afghan Refugee population i.e. registered refugees only. The sample consisted of families with school age children that were enrolled in two specific schools of Pakdasht. The sample does not cover residents of other urban areas. However, Pakdasht is the main area where most of urban Afghan Refugees reside. It is a poor neighborhood and the sample is representative of registered urban Afghan Refugees with school age children.

## 5.0 – FINDINGS

### 5.1 – Quantitative

#### 5.1.1 – Demographics

The household sizes varied from 2 to up to 12 members with a median household size of 6. The male to female ratio was higher in each age group (Table 1). About 53% of the population is less than 18 years old and only 3% is above 60 years old.,

Table 1: Gender by Age

Number	<24 months	24-59 months	5-17 years	18 – 59 years	>= 60 years	Total
Male	38	83	541	542	47	1251
Female	24	81	518	525	30	1178
% of total	3	7	44	44	3	100

Households are predominantly male headed with only 5% of households headed by females (Table 2). Almost every household has children less than 18 years old and more than half have children less than 5 years old. Only 15% of households have elderly members but a large portion (almost a quarter of households) have pregnant/lactating women. The overall population is young with average age of the household head being 42 years old.

Table 2: Head of Households

Demographics	Percentage
Male headed households	95
Female headed households	5
Households with children of age 5-17 years	98
Households with children (less than 5 years old)	51
Households with infants (less than 24 months old)	15
Households with elderly (60 and above)	15
Households with pregnant/lactating woman/women	23

As discussed earlier, these refugees arrived in Iran several years ago, some even decades ago. Only 5% of households reported having arrived less than six months ago. This reflects the enormous time they have had to settle and establish links with the host society. Field interviews have confirmed there have been many intermarriages amongst Afghan and Iranian people.

### 5.1.2 – Education

As a result of the free schooling offered by the Iranian government, most school age refugees are attending school. The attendance ratio between boys and girls indicates no particular preference of gender (Table 3). There is a large number of boys (23%) and girls (22%) not attending school (Table 4). Poverty was cited by 47% of the households as the primary reason for not attending school.

Table 3: Education by Gender

Education	Percentage of Households
With boys (age 7-18 years old)	75
With girls (age 7-18 years old)	76
With boys and boy(s) not attending school	15
With girls and girl(s) not attending school	15

Table 4: School Attendance by Gender

Attendance	Percentage of Children Ages 7-18 years	
	Boys	Girls
Attending school	77	78
Not attending school	23	22

### 5.1.3 – Livelihoods

The majority of both male and female wage earners are illiterate. This is a reflection of poor schooling opportunities in the country of origin. Two thirds of households rely on a single wage earner for the family income while about 15% have two and another 5 percent of households have more than two wage earners. Only a small number of households (3%) are totally reliant on female wage earners but a large number (9%) rely solely in child labour (Table 5). This is a reflection on cultural preferences where children older than 10 years are engaged in income generation.

Table 5: Wage Earners

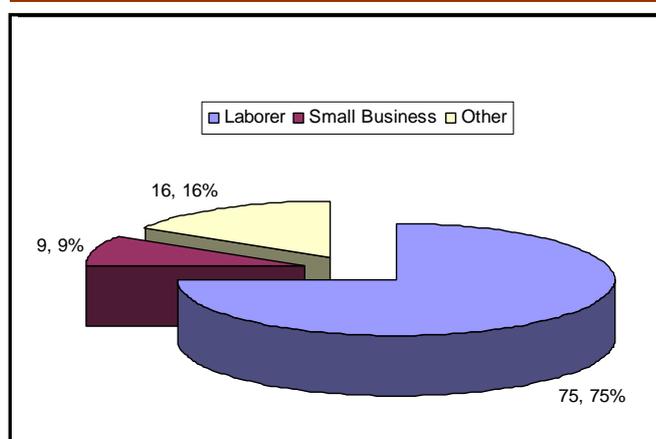
Wage Earner	Percentage of Households
No wage earner	0
One wage earner	76
Two wage earners	16
Three wage earners	5
More than 3 wage earners	1
Only female wage earners	3
Total only child wage earners (<18)	9

Unemployment is high with about 36% of households having one or more adult (age 18-59 years) unemployed and for a quarter of households the head of household is unemployed. The predominant source of livelihood for three quarters of the households is labour while 9% of households are engaged in small businesses (Table 6 and Figure 1)

**Table 6: Source of Livelihood**

Main source of livelihood (Job of head of household)	Percent
Laborer	75
Small Business	9
Driver	1
Farmer	1
Other	14

**Figure 1: Source of Livelihood**



#### 5.1.4 – Housing

Most Refugees live in rented apartments (89%) or with employers (8%). A few have access to free housing (Table 7). The majority of families live in two bedroom apartments while about a quarter have three or more rooms. However, these apartments are small with an average of 10 square meters per person.

**Table 7: Housing**

Housing		Percentage of Households
Ownership	Living in rented house/apartment	89
	Living with employer	8
	Free housing	2
Size	One room house	15
	Two room house	61
	Three or more rooms	24

Based in urban settings, almost every household has access to basic utilities of electricity, gas and piped water (Table 8) though the majority of families do not have access to a phone line and must rely on cellular phones.

**Table 8: Access to Utilities**

Utility	Percentage of Households		
	Private	Common (shared)	None
Electricity	49	51	Less than 1
Gas	38	55	8
Piped water	40	56	3
Phone line	45	5	51

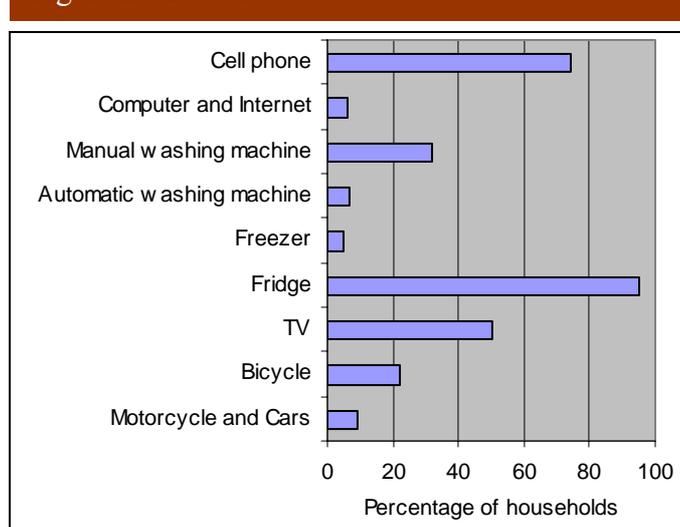
*5.1.5 – Assets*

Refugee families are short on assets. Less than a quarter own bicycles and only 2 percent own cars (Table 9 and Figure 2). Ownership of computers and access to internet are nominal. Presence of a fridge in almost every household improves food utilization through the ability to store and preserve food items.

**Table 9: Assets**

Assets	Percentage of households
Car & Motorcycle	9
Bicycle	22
TV	50
Fridge	95
Freezer	5
Automatic washing machine	7
Manual washing machine	32
Computer	6
Internet account	less than 1
Cell phone	74

**Figure 2: Household Assets**



### 5.1.6 – Expenditure

The average Refugee family incurs a monthly expenditure of Iranian Riyals 2,223,000<sup>1</sup> of which a staggering 77% is spent on rent. This is an enormous burden on families and has resulted in the households having to rely on debt to cover rent. The average household is under debt to the amount of IR 25,390,000 (€1,975).

Table 10: Average Monthly Expenditure by Household Type

Expenditure	Total Expenditure		Rental Expenditure	
	000 IR	€	000 IR	€
All households	2,223	173	1,710	133
Female headed households	1,612	125	750	58
Households with children <sup>2</sup>	2,330	181	1634	127
Households with no children	2,340	182	1940	151
Household with pregnant/lactating woman	2,220	172	867	67

Work as Labour, small business entrepreneurs and farmers brings in about the same amount of income (€170) which is less than incomes earned by drivers (Table 11). Rental amounts are least incurred by households working on farms suggesting most live with their employers. The rental payments of small businessmen seems relatively less suggesting some part of their business premises may be used for accommodation.

Table 11: Average Monthly Expenditure by Livelihood Type

Livelihood	Total Expenditure		Rental Expenditure	
	000 IR	€	000 IR	€
Laborer	2,178	170	1502	117
Small Business	2,167	168	939	73
Farmer	2,170	168	453	35
Driver	2,917	226	1,430	111
Unknown	2,284	177	4,176	324

<sup>1</sup> IR 12,885 = 1 Euro

<sup>2</sup> Less than 18 years old

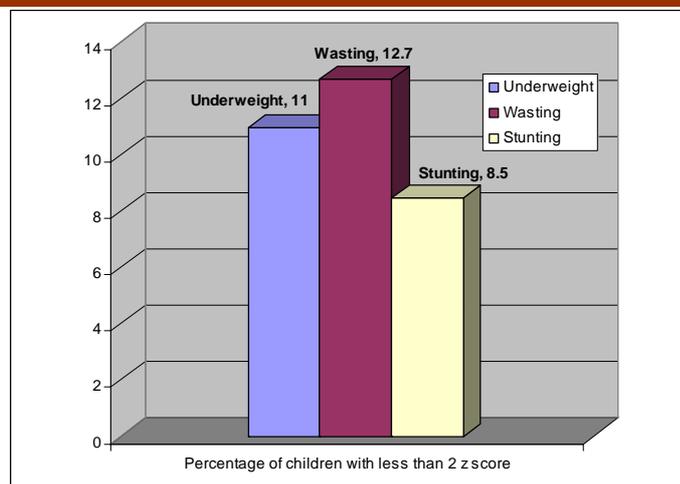
### 5.1.7 – Nutrition

Age, weight and height of children under five years old were recorded. It is important to note that these data were collected from children accompanying the mothers to the interview sessions and may not include all children of the community. Wasting was recorded at 12.7% while stunting was 8.5% (Table 12 and Figure 3). Whereas stunting is prevalent in the country of origin, this rate is higher than the average stunting in urban areas of Iran. Also wasting is higher than the urban average.

Table 12: Anthropometrics

Anthropometrics: Children under 5 years old	Percentage of Children with less than 2 z Score
Underweight	11
Wasting	12.7
Stunting	8.5

Figure 3: Anthropometrics: Children under 5 years



The survey recorded weight and height of adults. The interviews were mostly attended by women. The sample of men that could be measured was too small to generate reliable statistics. Only about 6% of women were underweight and a third had a BMI within normal (Table 13). Of concern is the high percentage of overweight (37%) and obese women (20%).

Table 13: Body Mass Index

BMI of Women ages 18-59 years	Percentage
Severely underweight (<16.5 Kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	1.3
Underweight (16.5-18.5)	4.7
Normal (>18.5-25)	36.2
Overweight (>25-30)	37.3
Obese (>30)	20.3

### 5.1.8 – Dietary Diversity

Dietary diversity of Refugee families was found to be poor. Only 13% consume meat thrice a week and a quarter of households consume fruit thrice a week (Table 14). About every fifth households consumes vegetables thrice a week. About 15% of households had no fruits and vegetables for a month. There is a group of 5 to 7 percentage which had no meat, dairy or oil in a month (Table 15). This is alarming and indicative of very poor diets for that section of the population.

Table 14: Food Groups Consumed 3 or more Days per Week

Food Group	Percentage of households
Meat	13
Vegetables	19
Dairy	70
Fruit	26

Table 15: Food Groups Not Eaten in the Last Month

Food Group	Percentage of Households
Cereals	Less than 1
Pulses	7
Vegetables	15
Fruits	15
Meat and fish	5
Dairy	7
Oil	7

The Food Consumption Score is a method WFP uses to capture dietary diversity. A score less than 21 reflects poor food consumption. A score between 21 and 35 is considered borderline and above 35 is acceptable. Only three percentages of households score poor, a large number, 40% are borderline and the majority has acceptable food consumption (Table 16). Comparing these figures from those of Table 15 indicate there is a small group of Refugees, about 5 to 7 percentage of the population, who have a much poorer consumption than the average. This group would require assistance in improving their food consumption.

Table 16: Food Consumption Score

Category	Percent of Households
Acceptable food consumption	58
Borderline food consumption	40
Poor food consumption	3

A cross-tabulation between food consumptions scores and the Socio-economic Status indicates a strong relation between poverty and low food consumption (Table 17). Based on this cross-tabulation, the percentage of households classified as food insecure is 46 while a bare majority of the households are food secure (Table 18).

**Table 17: Percentage of Households by FCS and SES**

SES Assets/Expenditure	Food Consumption Score		
	Acceptable	Borderline	Poor
Good	23	10	-
Average	20	13	-
Poor	14	17	2

‘-’= less than 1 percent

**Table 18: Food Security Classification**

Food Security Classification	Percent
Food Secure	53
Moderately Insecure	27
Severely Insecure	19

In order to better understand the characteristics of food insecure households, profiles were generated from the database. Among the dominant livelihoods, small businesses resulted in more food security than amongst labourers. Female headed households are less food secure than male headed households. There is no significant difference in the food security of families when considering the gender composition of 7 to 18 year age group. However, for families where this age group is not attending school, the food security is markedly higher for families with boys. This suggests the cash earned by the boys contributing to the purchase of food.

## 5.2 - Qualitative research: Household Food Security in Afghan Refugees in Pakdasht-Varamin

### 5.2.1 – FGD Findings

The findings of Focus Group Discussions are as follows.

#### Main Topics

##### Box 1: Limiting Factors

#### **What are the obstacles preventing a return to Afghanistan?**

All of the participants mentioned that it was impossible for Afghan refugees to go back to Afghanistan. Most of the participants named unemployment. Half of them mentioned war and another half identified lack of security as obstacles preventing them from returning to Afghanistan. Other obstacles mentioned by a few of participants or only one participant were: impossibility of education for girls, lack of fuel, homelessness, hard and unrestrained situation, contrast of Afghan government to the *Shiah*, birth in Iran and not being familiar with Afghanistan (mentioned by young refugees).

#### **What are the three main needs of Afghan refugees?**

Most of the participants named shelter (home), food and job as three main needs of Afghan refugees. Job and education for kids were mentioned by some of the participants.

#### **What is the reaction of Afghan refugees to omission of subsidy on food items?**

Some of participants mentioned that if the subsidy on food were withdrawn by Iran government, they would: a) have to work more b) return to Afghanistan c) migrate to other countries such as Australia, Canada, Greece or Turkey d) not send their children to school and e) women would have to work, too.

#### Key points

- Unemployment, war and lack of security were mentioned by the Afghan refugees as the most important obstacles to returning home.
- The three most important needs of Afghan refugees were housing, food and health.
- Working harder, going back to Afghanistan and working of women were among the most important coping strategies to be adopted the Refugees in case of government withdrawal of subsidies.

Objective 1: understanding participants' views, opinions and experiences about adequate food (Food Security)

##### Box 2: Perceptions and preferences

#### **1-1 What is your perception about "balanced diet" or "adequate food" (in terms of dietary quality, healthiness, and tradition)? What counts more, quality or quantity?**

In reply to the question "What is Afghan refugees' view about "balanced diet" or "adequate food"?" some of participants mentioned rice, a food which had meat and a food that was useful for health. A few of participants replied vegetables, pasta and different kinds of stews.

In reply to the question "How much should be eaten (the adequate food)?" A few answered rice or meat twelve times a month, rice two to three times a month and rice once a week. In reply to the question "Regarding the adequate food, which one is more important, the quality or the quantity?" a few of the participants said both were important." We, Afghanis eat a lot" was said by one participant.

**How often can you afford such a meal? Is there any difference from household to household, in Afghan population?**

In response to the question "Do Afghani Refugees have access to mentioned adequate foods?" a few replied in the negative. Other replies were as follows: less than once or twice a week, once or twice a week and it depends on the situation. A few of the participants by referring to other expenses implicitly made a negative reply and one participant said "nobody can eat red meat once a week".

In reply to the question "Is there any difference between Afghani Refugees in access to adequate food?" some of the participants believed that there was no difference between Afghans in this perspective because all of them were laborer, and some of them confirmed that there were differences between Afghani Refugees. A few participants expressed that Afghani Refugees were the same from this point of view and a few said with better jobs were better off.

**Do Afghani Refugees have access to and consume iodized salt?**

In reply to the question "Do Afghani Refugees consume iodized salt?" the majority did not have access to iodized salt. A few of them mentioned that non-iodized salt was used for cooking and iodized salt was used for pouring in the salt shaker. A few of participants said that iodized salt was used for both, cooking and pouring in salt shaker and that iodized salt was better and more expensive. Most of participants explained that low price of non-iodized salt is the reason for its consumption.

**What kind of foods do you prefer to eat/ not to eat? How often do you eat /prepare such a meal?**

In reply to the question "What are preferred foods by Afghani Refugees?" some of the participants named rice and red meat. Fish, shrimp, *ashak* (a traditional food made of red meat, vegetables and wheat flour) mushrooms and vegetables were mentioned by a few of the participants. Some indicated that they were unable to eat preferred foods because they could not afford them. A few confessed that in some occasions such as when they have guests, during celebrations, less than every two months and rarely they are able eat their preferred foods.

In reply to the question "what foods do Afghani Refugees dislike/have to eat?" some pointed out potatoes, a few mentioned eggplant, bread, bone instead of meat, vegetables, porridge, squash, whatever they find to eat and Thai rice. Pasta, "cheap foods", turnip, cauliflower stew, soup, broth of wing and neck of chicken were mentioned by one participant each. Some participants said that they have one or two times a week the mentioned (disliked) foods and they also added they eat these foods more frequently.

**Who decides about food purchase, cooking and distribution in the household?**

In reply to the question "In Afghani Refugees who decide about purchase, cooking and distribution of food?" most of them mentioned housewives.

**What are the Afghani Refugees' practices on breast feeding and complementary feeding?**

In reply to the question "Are Afghani Refugee infants breast fed?" almost all of the participants made a positive reply. Most of them claimed that the duration of breast feeding was two years. Most of them said that complementary feeding would start from the age of 6 months. Half of them mentioned that infants start eating household foods at first year of age and a few said this time was time of teething and 15<sup>th</sup> months of age.

In reply to the question "Do Afghani mothers cook their babies' food separately?" most of the participants confirmed in the positive.

**Do the Afghani refugee students receive any free snack from their schools?**

Most of them confirmed that Afghani refugee students receive free snacks from their schools and this snack is milk.

## Key points

- "In some of the participants' view "rice", "a food which had meat" and "a food that was useful for health" were enough and adequate foods.
- A few of the participants said both the quality and quantity of adequate foods were important in their opinion.
- In reply to the question "Do Afghani Refugees have access to mentioned adequate foods?" a few made negative reply. A few of the participants by referring to other expenses implicitly made a negative reply.
- Some of the participants believed that there was no difference between Afghani Refugees in access to adequate food because all of them were laborers.
- Some of the participants pointed out to "potatoes", "a few pointed to eggplant", "bread, bone instead of meat", "vegetables", "porridge", "squash", "whatever they find to eat" and "Thai rice" as foods Afghani Refugees dislike/have to eat.
- In reply to the question "Are Afghani Refugee infants breast fed, almost all of the participants made a positive reply.
- In reply to the question "What are preferred foods by Afghani Refugees?" some of the participants named "rice and red meat". "Fish", "shrimp", "*ashak* (a traditional food made of red meat", vegetables and wheat flour), "mushrooms" and "vegetables" were mentioned by a few of the participants. A few of the participants indicated that they were not able to eat mentioned preferred foods because they could not afford it.
- In reply to the question "Do Afghani Refugees consume iodized salt?" reply of the majority was negative. Some replies were positive.

2- Recognizing participants' views, opinions and experiences about coping strategies to overcome the household Food Insecurity

### Box 3: Coping Strategies

#### **1-2 Is there any "food aid" such as food ration /coupon for Afghan households in this area? If yes what kinds of food aid? How?**

All of the participants indicated that Afghani Refugees did not receive any food coupon /stamp.

#### **2-2 In hard situation (diseases, family's bad situation, loss of job, problems with housing, etc.), what do the households (usually) do? Who helps them? (Family, friends, religious affiliation, social programs(? Are there any governmental or private organizations for Afghani Refugees in this area?**

In reply to the question "What do Afghani Refugees do for providing food in hard situation?" some of the participants mentioned that children older than 10 years would work. A few of them said that they would get help from others and all the household members would work. "They won't eat anything", "they eat every thing that has low price" was mentioned by one participant each.

In reply to the question "Who will help Afghani Refugees in hard situation?" most of the participants indicated nobody helps them. Some of the participants said that the government did not help them and a few named "more wealthy Afghanis", "some neighbors or relatives" and "Iranian people" as people who help Afghani Refugees in hard situation.

**2-3 What are household worries regarding "not having enough to eat"? Do they think about it all the time?**

In reply to the question "Are Afghani Refugees worried about food shortage?" all of the participants made a positive reply.

**2-4 In this area, When the Afghan households don't have enough money /lack of resources, what do they do? Do they buy or cook different foods than usual? Do they eat limited variety of foods? Do they eat smaller meal than what they felt they needed? Do they eat fewer meals in a day because there was not enough food? (probe on the quality and quantity of food).**

In response to the question "If Afghani Refugees do not have enough money for food, what would they do?" some answered that at first, they would change type of foods, then its amount and at the end they would buy cheaper foods. A few said that the head of household would work harder, they would consume bread and yoghurt, "potato stew", "bread and egg". These statements were mentioned only by one participant each, in that case Afghani Refugees "eat only bread", "eat rice", "eat bread and potatoes (make chips for children)", "cook nothing and eat bread with tea", "borrow money", "cook some thing easy (cheap)", "buy (foods) in installment", "buy potatoes which is cheaper", "eat bread and milk", "eat egg and potatoes".

All of the participants confirmed that Afghani Refugee households have three main meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner).

In reply to the question "Do Afghani Refugee households omit main meals in case of poverty?" some made a positive and some made a negative reply. Some of the participants expressed that in case of exposure to poverty; mostly the mothers would abstain from eating to save food for their children. A few mentioned in that case both, father and mother would abstain from eating to save food for their children. Most of the participants mentioned that in poverty they would also reduce size of each meal.

**2-4 Are there any Afghani households who have had to choose between buying food and paying for other household expenses, such as medicine, clothes, children education, housing, etc., because they don't have enough money for all? If yes, what do they do?**

In reply to the question "Are there any Afghani households who have had to choose between buying food and paying for other household expenses?" some of the participants mentioned that they mostly did not choose between food and others. A few believed "it happens for some not for all of the Afghani Refugees". One participant said "they ignore the food and take care of kids, more than usual". In reply to the question "Why the importance of food is less than other needs?" some of the participants pointed to "rent for house" as a need which was more important than food.

**2-5 In this area, are there Afghan households who go a whole day without eating anything and go to sleep at night hungry because there was not enough food? What do they do in this situation? Is there any support from friends, relatives, religious affiliation, social programs or food aid?**

In reply to the question "Does it happen for Afghani Refugee households to have nothing to eat and go to bed hungry?" some of the participants made negative and some made positive reply. A few said in that case they would find a job, tolerate hunger and women work as servant in others' home. One participant said it may happen for those who had gone and returned from Afghanistan.

## **2-6 How do Afghani Refugees keep stores of food for the future?**

In reply to the question "Do Afghani Refugee households save food for future?" half of the participants made a negative and some made a positive reply. Some named "oil", "fat", "rice", a few named "rice", "lentil and beans" and only one participant named "pasta" as the food items which were saved by Afghani Refugees for future. Some of them indicated that they save for at most two weeks to one month.

## **2-7 What kind of food intervention do you prefer?**

Most of the participants mentioned that they'd rather receive money in cash as food aid. A few of the participants expressed that money was better than other aids because "they knew what to do with their money", "money would fulfill their other needs". A few preferred food coupons and a few said "it did not make any difference to be money or some thing else".

Most of the participants believed that governmental aid was better. A few mentioned that governmental aid was legal and on time. Some of the participants believed that food aids from foreign organization (WHO, UN, WFP, etc.) were more preferred and some said there was no difference between governmental or foreign aid. One participant mentioned "it is better to be from minister of education and training of Iran".

### **Key points:**

- All participants mentioned they did not receive any food aid.
- Some of the participants expressed that in hard situations they would send their children aged 10 and above to work
- In reply to the question "Who will help Afghani Refugees in hard situation?" most of the participants indicated nobody helps them. A few named "more wealthy Afghanis" as people who would help Afghani Refugees in hard situation.
- Some participants answered in case Afghani Refugees did not have enough money for food, at first they would change type of foods, then its amount.
- Some of the participants expressed that in case of exposure to poverty; mostly the mothers abstain from eating to save food for their children.
- Most of the participants mentioned that in exposure to poverty they would also reduce size of each meal.
- A few believed if Afghani Refugees had nothing at all to eat they would find a job, tolerate hunger and women would work as servant in others' homes.
- In reply to the question "Do Afghani refugee households save food for future?" half of the participants made a negative and some made a positive reply.
- Most of the participants mentioned that they'd rather receive money in cash as food aid.
- Most of the participants believed that governmental aid was better.

Box 4: Limiting Factors: In- Depth

**Main Topics**

**1-what are obstacles for returning of Afghani refugees to their country?**

In opinion of three key informants ("B", "C" and "D") insecurity, unemployment, homelessness, bad situation in a nutritional perspective and war were among the most important obstacles preventing Afghani refugees from returning to their country.

**2-What are three main needs of Afghani refugees?**

In key informants' view three main needs of Afghani refugees without considering priority were home, food, hygiene, job, education (of their children) and financial affairs.

Except of "D" who mentioned food as the first need of them, in "A", "B" and "C"'s view food was the second and in "D"'s opinion was the third priority in Afghani Refugees' life.

**3- What do you do, If the food subsidy be omitted?**

Four of the key informants ("A", "B", "D" and "E") said that in case of subsidy omission there would a possibility of migration. "C" mentioned they would have to work all together and save for future. She added they would be present in Iran but migrate to more deprived areas like villages, because they were satisfied with Iran, they had job and security in Iran. "D" believed that their families would be harmed, possibly the men would migrate toward Afghanistan and would leave their families, some would beg. "A" said they would migrate to the UK and Canada. "E" believed they would migrate to Afghanistan.

"A": principle of girls' primary school, "B": Teacher of girls' primary school, "C": Teacher of boys' primary school, "D": Deputy of boys' primary school, "E": Nutrition officer of Health center

**Key points**

- In key informants' view insecurity, unemployment, being homeless, bad situation in a nutritional perspective and war were among the most important obstacles for return of Afghani refugees to their country.
- In key informants' view three main needs of Afghani refugees, without considering priority were home, food, hygiene, job, education (of their children) and financial affairs.
- Four key informants mentioned in case of subsidy omission Afghani refugees would possibly migrate.

Objective 1: understanding participants' views, opinions and experiences about adequate food (Food Security)

**1-1 What is Afghani refugees' perception about "balanced diet" or "adequate food"? What counts more, quality or quantity?**

Three key informants ("A", "B" and "D") believed that at first the quantity of food then the quality was important for Afghani refugees. Only "C" believed that quality of food was very important for Afghani refugees and although their income was low, 70% of them emphasized on quality of food.

**1-2 Can they afford such a meal? Is there any difference from family to family, in Afghan population?**

Two of the key informants ("C" and "E") believed that access to adequate food is rare, whereas two other key informants ("B" and "D") believed that they had less or more access to adequate food and "A" believed that in proportion to their income there is access to adequate food for Afghani refugees. "D" believed that Afghani refugees who got "ID card" were in a better condition.

**1-3 Do the Afghani Refugees have access to food coupons?**

Four of key informants mentioned that Afghani refugees do not have access to food coupons.

**1-4 Do Afghani refugees consume iodized salt? Do they have access to non-iodized salt too? If yes, what do they use it for?**

"B" indicated that Afghani refugees did not know iodized salt and when she was a seller, they never requested iodized salt and "D" believed that if they consume it was not aimed and they were not aware of it. Only "C" said that iodized salt was very important for Afghani refugees and they consume it. All of the key informants said that Afghani refugees had access to non-iodized salt. Two of the key informants ("A" and "D") believed that they consumed non-iodized salt for cooking and "E" believed that not refined (not iodized) salt was for cooking rice and refined salt (iodized) was used for (other) foods.

**1-5-1 What are preferred foods by Afghani refugees? How often do they have it?**

Four of key informants("A", "B", "C" and "D") named foods which were served with bread, vegetables and foods which had flour and oil/fat in their recipe, legumes, pasta, foods which had meat in their recipe, and protein foods were among more liked foods. "C" and "D" said that they ate their preferred foods twice to four times a week.

**1-5-2 What foods do Afghani refugees less like/have to eat?**

"D" answered that they had their well known food, *kachaloo*, potatoes, cereals, bulky breads, traditional foods, onion, and low quality foods for example animal fat instead of meat. "A" believed that they did not like "fantasy foods" (sausage, salami, etc.) because they'd rather keep their culture. "C" mentioned that they knew the importance of their traditional foods and remained loyal to them.

**1-6 Who decides about food made in the household? (in terms of purchase, food item, distribution, etc.)**

Three of the key informants ("B", "C" and "D") believed that mostly the women decided about purchase, cooking and distribution of foods. "E" believed the men were responsible for purchase but women decided on cooking and distribution.

### **1-7 Are Afghani refugees' infants breast fed? How long? When do they start complementary feeding? How long continue it? Do Afghani mothers cook their babies' food separately?**

Four key informants ("A", "B", "C" and "E") believed that Afghani mothers breast fed their infants. "D" believed "in more traditional communities, possibility and duration of breast feeding could be more", he mentioned also that a few of Afghanis who were present in Pakdasht fed their babies by breast milk and others use bottle feeding. "A" and "B" believed the duration of breast feeding was up to 2 years. "D" said that the time was 1.5 to 2 years and "E" mentioned 26 months for boys and 21 months for girls. Three of the key informants ("A", "D" and "E") said that start time of complementary feeding for infants was from 8, 10 and 12 months of age and "D" believed as soon as the infant was weaned, they would try family foods for him or her. "C" had no comment on this question. "A" and "D" believed they fed their babies with family foods (no foods were cooked separately for the infants)

### **1-8 Do Afghani students receive free snack from their schools? If so, which snacks?**

All of key informants expressed that Afghani students (like Iranians) get milk as free snack from schools.

### **1-9 How is class performance of Afghani refugees' students?**

Three key informants ("A", "C" and "D") mentioned that class performance of Afghani students was better than that of Iranian students. "B" believed that class performance of Afghani students were either very good or very bad.

A": principle of girls' primary school, "B": Teacher of girls' primary school, "C": Teacher of boys' primary school, "D": Deputy of boys' primary school, "E": Nutrition officer of Health center

#### **Key points**

- The key informants believed that at first the quantity of foods then the quality was important for Afghani refugees.
- Two of the key informants believed that access to the adequate food is rare, whereas two other key informants believed that they had less or more access to the adequate food.
- Key informants mentioned that Afghani refugees did not have access to coupon for foods.
- All of the key informants said that Afghani refugees had access to non-iodized salt.
- Foods which were preferred by Afghani refugees were as follows: foods which were served with bread, vegetables, foods which had flour and oil/fat in their recipe, legumes, pasta, foods which had meat in their recipe, and protein foods.
- Foods which were not preferred by Afghani refugees were as follows: potatoes, cereals, bulky breads, onion, animal fat, sausages and salami.
- Mostly the women decided about purchase, cooking and distribution of foods in Afghani households.
- Afghani mothers breast fed their infants up to 2 whole years.
- All of key informants expressed that Afghani students get milk as free snack (like Iranians) from schools.
- The key informants mentioned that class performance of Afghani students was acceptable.

Objective 2- Recognizing participants' views, opinions and experiences about coping strategies to overcome the household Food Insecurity

**2-1 Is there any "food aid" such as food ration /coupon for Afghan households in this area? If yes what kinds of food aid?**

The key informants ("A", "B", "D" and "E") made a negative reply.

**2-2 In times of hard situation (diseases, family's bad situation, loss of job, problems with housing, etc.), what do the household (usually) do? Who helps them? (family, friends, religious affiliation, social programs or food aid?)**

Four key informants ("A", "B", "C" and "E") believed that in such a situation their relatives, fellow citizens and other Afghans would help them. "D" believed they consume foods of lower quality. Regarding the above question, the key informants also added social welfare, charitable Iranian people, governmental clinics, people who deal with Afghans.

**2-3 What are household worries regarding "not having enough to eat"? Do they think about it all the time?**

Three key informants ("B", "C" and "D") made a positive and two key informants ("A" and "E") made a negative response. "A" mentioned they spoke less about the subject and were less worried about food shortage.

**2-4 In this area, When the Afghan households don't have enough money /lack of resources, what do they do? Do they buy or cook different foods than usual? Do they eat limited variety of foods? Do they eat smaller meal than they felt they needed? Do they eat fewer meals in a day because there was not enough food? (probe on the quality and quantity of food)**

In reply to this question "A" and "D" mentioned that they initially decrease the quality. "A" said that they emphasize a lot on quantity of food then quality, (for example) if they used to eat rice, in that case would select bread. "B" and "C" said the quality would be remained but the quantity would change. "B" mentioned that they would prepare their usual food by installment in another word would keep the quality and decrease the amount of foods. Four key informants ("A", "B", "C" and "D") mentioned that Afghans have three main meals. "A" and "B" said that in case of poverty a main meal would be possibly omitted and "C" added in that case the mother or even older children did not eat to save food for others. "D" believed in that case lunch would be omitted and amount of food in each meal would be decreased. "A" and "B" mentioned the three main meals would be kept. "A" said that if there was a problem they would reduce size of each meal and "B" added the mother would omit her portion to save food for others and the size of each meal would be possibly reduced.

**2-5 Are there Afghan households who they have had to choose between buying food and paying for other household expenses, such as medicine, clothes, children education, housing, etc., because they don't have enough money for both? If yes, what do they do? (Do they sell food items for cash without using them for household members' consumption?)**

Two of the key informants ("A" and "D") made a positive reply and "A" confirmed that they would select food. "D" said "food. always has been the first worry of Afghans and they always have sold their other needs to prepare food". "C" said "they do not emphasize on food but (in their opinion) education (of their children) is very important." "A" and "B" in reply to the question "Has it happened to Afghans to sell the food inside their home to buy other needs?", made a negative reply.

**2-6 In this area, are there Afghan households that go a whole day without eating anything and go to sleep at night hungry because there is not enough food? What do they do in this situation? Is there any support from friends, relatives, religious affiliation, social programs or food aid?**

Two of the key informants ("A" and "B") made a positive reply and two of them ("C" and "E") did not know the reply. "D" said "I myself have not seen (such a situation) but I'm sure it persists." "A" mentioned in that case they receive help from their countrymen. "D" said they would borrow or tolerate. "C" and "E" did not have any comment on this question.

**2-7 What are some of the things households do to make sure they always have enough to eat? Do they keep stores of food for the future?**

Three of the key informants ("A", "B" and "C") believed that Afghani refugees save food for their future (to make sure they always have enough to eat). "D" believed they save money rather than food and buy food daily. "C" said that they would store non-perishable food items. "A" believed they would save bread, flour and dates and "B" mentioned hydrogenated vegetable oil and rice as foods which were saved by them. "C" said that they would save flour and oil.

**2-8 What kind of food intervention do you prefer for Afghani refugees?**

Four of key informants ("A", "C", "D" and "E") believed that it was better for them not to receive (food aid in cash) or (real money as food aid) and food items were preferred by them as food aid because (real) money would be spent on other items. "A" believed that if they had enough money, they would save for future and decide to migrate to more developed countries. "B" mentioned that governmental aid in the figure of food coupons and real money are better because they would have authority to buy whatever they would like. "A" said that food aid from international organizations was more suitable and Afghani refugees would prefer to be similar to other countries. "C" mentioned governmental aid was much better because it was possible that foreign organizations forget or neglect Afghani. "D" preferred food aid from non governmental and faithful/believer agencies. He added "I'd rather employees of minister of education and training; the aid should be nearer to the society and comes from up to down. NGOs were preferred by "E" because in her idea governmental aids would causes governmental employees to protest against the aids, NGOs were not known for people and everybody would work for them without expectation and voluntarily.

A": principle of girls' primary school, "B": Teacher of girls' primary school, "C": Teacher of boys' primary school, "D": Deputy of boys' primary school, "E": Nutrition officer of Health center

**Key points**

- Two key informants mentioned that in case of hard situation Afghani refugees initially decrease the quality and secondly the quantity of foods. Other two key informants said the quality would be remained but the quantity would change.
- A key informant said that food was the first worry of the Afghani refugees
- Most of the key informants believed there were Afghani refugees who had nothing to eat and go a whole day without eating anything and go to sleep at night hungry
- The key informants believed Afghani refugees save food for future.
- Most of the key informants preferred food items as food aid because in their opinion real money would be used to meet other expenses.

## 6.0 – RESPONSE OPTIONS

Most refugees have been for a very long time in Iran and it is unlikely that many will return to Afghanistan soon. The survey results indicate that almost none are currently planning to return due to a variety of reasons. The main reasons being: no place to return home, lack of security, unemployment and having been born in Iran. While living conditions may deteriorate because of the changing government policies, the Refugees consider the living conditions in Iran better than Afghanistan, and would prefer to migrate to the west than to return to their home country.

The causes of food insecurity in the refugee population in Pakdasht are mainly related to two factors. The first one is limited access to livelihood opportunities in the normal urban economic sector and employment/labour market. Many households are dependent on insecure income sources which are dependent on the economic situation and government policies. The second one is related to health and nutrition. While malnutrition rates are relatively low, food consumption is of poor quality and inadequate maternal and child-care practices need special attention.

Given the current government policies in Iran for Afghan refugees, response options for the refugees are limited. The political implications of support to non-registered refugees need to be clarified as well as the implications of registering the refugees.

Priority needs for the refugees include livelihood security followed by food, health care and education. Possible response options include:

### 6.1 – Livelihood Support

Livelihood support will improve self reliance of the refugees whose income generation options are limited primarily to labour or small businesses. The lack of income earning opportunities is an important consideration when looking at different aspects of food insecurity. On average, sampled households spend around 15% of their monthly expenditures on food. Their biggest non-food outlay is for rent—an estimated 77% of their income. Given the lack of stable streams of income, meeting food and non-food needs might increasingly become difficult when government policies continue to change and limit support.

Non-food interventions can complement food interventions and will help to both increase household food security and reduce poverty among the refugees. They could include micro-credit schemes, public works programmes, training programmes and longer-term poverty reduction programmes. Increased availability of micro-credit facilities will be beneficial to help them build their asset base and business related activities.

Food for training of Adults can be an important modality for strengthening both basic education and certain specialised skills for food insecure households. For example, carpentry and masonry are in high demand and could provide an escape from low-skilled, low-wage employment. The combination of training for men and women (on caring and health issues) will be beneficial for several aspects of their livelihood and food security.

## **6.2 – Health and Nutrition Programmes**

Health sector programmes that provide health and nutrition education programmes and possibly fortified blended food could contribute to improved food consumption, utilization and child care. The provision of fortified food to vulnerable groups (expecting and nursing mothers, pre-school children and adolescent girls) will limit the risk of micronutrient deficiencies. The education component should contain information on appropriate caring practices, hygiene, nutrition, sanitation and the use of iodized salt and iron rich foods. Nutrition programs could be offered for pregnant women, nursing mothers, and pre-school youngsters to sustain and improve the health and learning capacity of children before they enter school.

## **6.3 – Monitoring Food Security**

A better understanding of the economic security is necessary to anticipate a possible deterioration of the food security situation, and to adapt programmes to the actual needs. In particular, the impact of the changing government policies on the refugee's food security situation will need to be better understood. This monitoring can be done through a longitudinal survey, which will also be used to adjust targeting criteria over time. An important issue here is to monitor the evolution of the willingness of the refugees to return to their home country, in case the hardship of the most vulnerable households changes.

The monitoring system will also cover market related issues. Improved information on commodity markets, market access and cost of living will be useful for further interpretation of the food security situation of the refugees. The monitoring system would also track access to subsidies on food and non-food items such as fuel, electricity and drinking water.

To summarise: food insecure households (a) do not consume sufficient quantities and diversity of key food items; (b) have an insecure livelihood (c) do have very few alternative options for income generation (d) are likely to have future generations with limited education options and (e) do have limited access to essential basic services. This makes them very vulnerable continued food insecurity in the short and long term.

## **Annex 1: Food Security Questionnaire**

Food Security Assessment of Urban Afghan Refugee Populations in Pakdasht, Iran

Qualitative Research: Focus Group Discussions

Questionnaire Guide

### **Objective 1:**

1- Recognizing participants' views, opinions and experiences about adequate food (Food Security)

#### **Questions:**

1-1 What is your perception about "balanced diet" or "adequate food" (in terms of dietary quality, healthiness, taste and tradition)? What counts more, quality or quantity?

1-2 How often can you afford such a meal? Is there any difference from family to family in Afghan population?

1-3 What kind of foods do you prefer to eat/ not to eat? How often do you eat /prepare such a meal?

1-4 How are decisions about food made in the household? (in terms of purchase, food item, distribution, etc.)

1-5 Can you afford to feed your children the way you think you should? If not, why? What do you (usually) do?

### **Objective 2:**

2- Recognizing participants' views, opinions and experiences about coping strategies to overcome the household food insecurity

#### **Questions:**

2-1 In times of crisis (diseases, family's bad situation, loss of job, problems with housing, etc.), what do the household (usually) do? Who does help them? (family, friends, religious affiliation, social programs or food aid?) Are there any social or private services for Afghan population in this area?

2-2 Is there any "food aid" such as food ration /coupon for Afghan households in this area? If yes what kinds of food are provided?

2-3 What are household worries regarding "not having enough to eat"? Do they think about it all the time?

2-4 When households don't have enough money or resources to pay for everything, what do they do? Do they buy or cook different foods than usual? How do their meals change?

2-5 Are there Afghan households who have had to choose between buying food and paying for other household expenses, such as medicine, clothes, children education, housing, etc., because they don't have enough money for both? If yes, what do they do? (Do they sell food items for cash without using them for household members' consumption?)

2-6 In this area, are there Afghan households who eat a limited variety of foods due to a lack of resources? What do they (usually) do in this situation? Do they eat smaller meal than they felt they needed/ eat fewer meals in a day because there was not enough food?

2-7 In this area, Are there Afghan households who go a whole day without eating anything and go to sleep at night hungry because there was not enough food? What do they do in this situation? Is there any support from friends, relatives, religious affiliation, social programs or food aid?

2-8 What are some of the things households do to make sure they always have enough to eat? Do they keep stores of food for the future?

**Annex 2: Food Security Assessment of Urban Afghan Refugee Populations in Pakdasht, Iran**

"مشخصات عمومی خانوار"	
شماره سریال:	کد شناسایی خانوار:
Serial	HH_ID

"محل سکونت"	
نام محله:	شهر/روستا City/Village
Neighbourhood	City/Village
	شماره خوشه ClusterNo
	ClusterNo
	نشانی خانوار Address
	Address
	کد پستی خانوار PostalCode
	PostalCode
	تلفن Telephone
	Telephone
نام و نام خانوادگی مصاحبه شونده:	Interviewee
کد مصاحبه شونده:	IntervieweeCode

نام و نام خانوادگی پرسشگر:	Interviewer
امضاء:	Signature
	Interviewer
	Signature
	تاریخ Date of Interview
	پرسشگری: 13 / /

کد ناظر:	Supervisor Code
پرسشنامه مورد تأیید است	
نام و نام خانوادگی ناظر:	Supervisor Name
امضاء و تاریخ:	Date and Signature
	Supervisor Name
	Date and Signature

قد به سانتی متر	وزن به کیلوگرم	نوع شغل برای افراد شاغل		وضع فعالیت در 7 روز گذشته	وضعیت زنان (ازدواج کرده)	وضعیت زناشویی (افراد بالای 10 سال)	دلیل مدرسه نرفتن	وضع سواد برای افراد 6 ساله و بیشتر	مدت اقامت در این شهر یا روستا (برای سرپرست و همسر)	بستگی با سرپرست	نان آور	سن به ماه	BOD تاریخ تولد			جنس	نام و نام خانوادگی اعضای خانوار	شماره ردیف
		شغل اصلی	شغل دوم										سال	ماه	روز			
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## Housing Conditions

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		<b>Kitchen</b>																																	
<p><b>Total monthly expenses :</b></p> <p><b>Monthly Rent</b></p>																																			

بار مصرف در ماه No per month	بار مصرف در هفته No per week	بار مصرف در روز No per day	در صورتیکه در 3 ماه گذشته مصرف نشده علامت بزنید Not eaten during last 3 mo	ماده غذایی Food Item	ردیف
				شیر Milk	(1)
				دوغ Dough	(2)
				پنیر Cheese	(3)
				ماست Yoghurt	(4)
				تخم مرغ Eggs	(5)
				مرغ Chicken	(6)
				ماهی Fish	(7)
				میگو Shrimp	(8)
				گوشت قرمز Red Meat	(9)
				سبزی خوردن Leafy Veg	(10)
				سبزی داخل غذا Veg in dish	(11)
				خیار Cucumber	(12)
				گوجه فرنگی Tomato	(13)
				قارچ Mushroom	(14)
				سیب Apple	(15)
				پرتقال/ نارنگی Orange	(16)
				انواع انگور Grape	(17)
				گلابی Pear	(18)
				موز Banana	(19)
				کیوی Kiwi	(20)
				سایر میوه ها: Other fruit	(21)
					(22)
					(23)
					(24)
					(25)
				روغن جامد Hydrogenated Oil	(26)
				روغن مایع Liquid Oil	(27)
				روغن زیتون Olive Oil	(28)
				خرما Dates	(29)
				انواع نوشابه گاز Colas	(30)