



# COUNTRY FACTSHEETS, EURASIAN NARCOTICS

## IRAN 2004

### General Information

Population: 69,789 million (UN estimate for 2004)  
 UNDP Human Development Index ranking: 101 out of 177 states (2003)  
 TI Corruption Indicator: 2,9 (0 highly corrupt; 10 highly clean)

Iran is a major transit corridor for opiates and hashish smuggled from Afghanistan and eventually through Pakistan to the Persian Gulf, Turkey, Europe and Russia. Following the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran's opium poppy crop was largely eradicated, and the old traditions of opium consumption were wiped out, with opium production shifting to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Despite its aggressive narcotics control efforts, Iran has experienced significant penetration by trafficking networks and has seen a dramatic increase in addiction ever since. Iran continues to record enormous seizures of opiates, though its seizures in morphine and opium have been lower in recent years than during the late 1990s, probably due to the increased manufacturing activities in Afghanistan, as well as to the shift in drug trafficking through Central Asia. However, since 2003, seizures in Iran have been rising again.

### Smuggling of Drugs

About 50% of the total opiate production of Afghanistan flows through Iran. There are three main trafficking routes: Northern (Khorasan), Southern (Sistan/Baluchestan), and Hormuzgan. Khorasan province hosts a large number of Afghan refugees, and drug traffickers along this route, usually organized in smaller groups of up to ten people, are mainly Afghans. The Mashad-Tehran road continues to be major trans-shipment highway. Some 90 entry points have been identified along the Khorasan-Afghanistan border. Local Sistani and Baluchi tribes along the Southern route may themselves get involved in drug-trafficking, which is carried out by large well-armed motorized convoys, or by camel caravans which are trained to move along the route without human leadership. Around 50 smuggling routes are currently in use, most of them converging in Mirjaveh (Pak-Iran border check point), Zahedan, and Iranshahr. The Southern and Northern routes are connected to the traditional Balkan route network, maintained from central Iran onwards by Azeri, Persian and Kurdish mafias. The third route flows to Bandar Abbas, Hormuzgan capital, whose important airport, and a port with ferry links to Dubai, make Bandar Abbas an easy trans-shipment point for outgoing deliveries to Europe and to the Gulf, as well as incoming chemical precursors destined for heroin labs in Afghanistan.

### Health and Economic Aspects

**Corruption:** There are periodic reports of corruption among lower-level law enforcement staff, which is consistent with the flow of huge amounts of drugs through the country. 500 police staff have been fired for corruption in 2004 alone. Narcotics account for 70% of total cases of corruption in Iran. Although Iran has consistently fared poorly in TI Corruption perception index, with scores ranging from 1.5 to 3.6, there have been no charges of higher-level governmental officers being involved in or compliant in drug trafficking.

**Money laundering:** Iran has a robust underground economy, which according to some prominent Iranian banking experts would encompass 20% of Iran's economy. The use of hawala and other alternative remittance systems to launder money is widespread and some records point further to Iran's real estate market being used to launder money. A new law governing money-laundering control was adopted by the Majlis (Parliament) in October 2002.

**Drug abuse and HIV:** Opiates abuse has dramatically increased following the increase in drug trafficking across Iran. Iran's Drug Control Authority estimates the number of drug users has reached two million people in 2004, however, the Ministry of Health and UNODC double the figure. In 2002, the number of deaths from drug abuse increased by 470% (2989 individuals) as compared to 2000, reflecting a shift in Iran to intravenous abuse of heroin. The first HIV case was reported in 1987. In 2003, officially there were already 5086 recorded HIV/AIDS cases, of which 67% are associated with drug abuse. Nevertheless, the actual HIV/AIDS prevalence is expected to be substantially higher, and the risks of potential spread of infection from IDUs to general population are high.

### Political and Societal Aspects

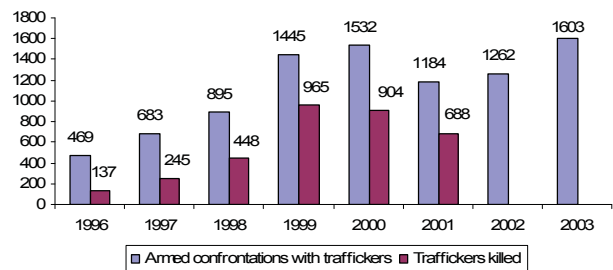
Disruptions caused by traffickers along Iran's eastern border have become a major security concern in Iran. In Khorasan, it involves significant killing, kidnapping, and intimidation of villagers along the border by the Afghan traffickers as a means to ensure the logistic support of locals. The situation is very different in Sistan-Baluchistan province, where the tribal links ensure the overall support for traffickers by local communities. Some local tribes therefore may cooperate with the traffickers against the law enforcement units in the area. Since 1979, the Iranian law enforcement authorities have lost over 3,500 staff in armed confrontations with the drug traffickers.

In 2004, more than 1100 drug distribution networks were active in Iran. The daily need of drugs in Iran is reported to be more than 2 tons. Distribution of such an amount of drugs is not possible unless drug trafficking networks have become more powerful. In 2003, the police and drug dealers were engaged in 1603 armed clashes which mark a 27% increase compared to 2002.



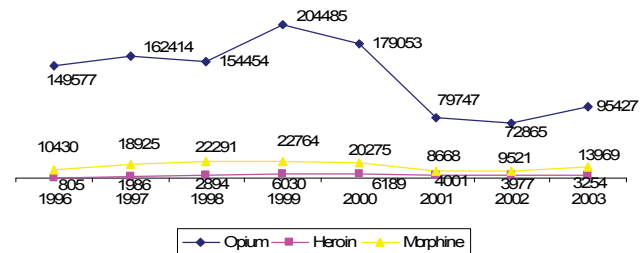
Armed confrontations with traffickers 1996-2003

source: UNDCP, ECODDCCU



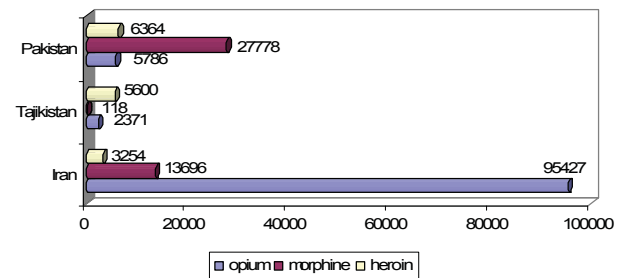
Opiates seizures in kilograms

source: UNDCP, ECODDCCU



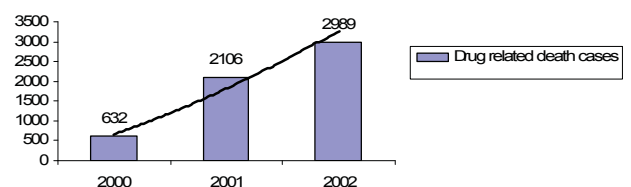
Regional seizures in 2003 in kilograms

source: ANF (Pakistan) and ECODDCCU



Drug related death cases

source: UNDCP



## Counter-Narcotics Efforts

### State

Established in 1988, the Drug Control Headquarters (DCH) is the main policy-making body responsible for planning and monitoring different aspects of the anti-narcotics campaign. DCH coordinates the drug-related activities of the police (the leading enforcement unit in terms of drug seizures), the customs, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Ministries of Intelligence, Security, Islamic Guidance and Education, and Health. DCH's budget in 2004-2005 has almost doubled compared to last year, exceeding 600 billion rials. Provided for by the October 2002 law on money-laundering counter-measures, a special body comprising applicable ministers and the Governor of the Central Bank has also been formed to deal with all sorts of economic crime related to drug trade.

The continuous raids by drug trafficking bands into the Iranian territory have forced Iran to adopt innovative strategies, including the creation of villagers' paramilitary armed units, relocation of border villages previously used for drug trafficking, and the launching of alternative crop substitution projects in Afghanistan. In addition to actual deployment of 50,000 anti-drug staff along the 1,975 km Afghan - Pakistani border, an extensive system of physical barriers have been established, including construction of a chain of fortifications at a cost exceeding US\$ 1 billion.

Drug offences are under the jurisdiction of the Revolutionary Courts. Punishment for narcotics offenses is harsh, with death sentences possible for possession of more than 30 grams of heroin or 5 kilograms of opium. More than 60% of the inmates in Iranian prisons are incarcerated for drug offenses, ranging from use to trafficking. Iran has executed more than 10,000 traffickers in the last decade.

### Civil Society

Significant demand reduction activities are managed by the state, on which Iran is now spending some 50% of its budgeted counter-drug expenditures. This points to a significant shift from recent policies, where most funds went for enforcement-related supply-reduction. The shift seems a clear response to the growing social and health impact of more dangerous drug abuse (a shift to heroin and its intravenous mode of application, and needle sharing). Approximately 90 government centers offering abuse treatment programs are operating in Iran, the number of such centers having tripled since 2000. *Narcotics Anonymous* and other self-help programs can be found in all districts and several NGOs, such as AFTAB Community and Drug Control Community, focus on drug demand-reduction activities, counseling and rehabilitation programs.

### Regional Cooperation

Acting as a strong proponent of an integrated regional approach to combating drug trafficking from Afghanistan, Iran is a party to the Paris Pact mechanism initiated in May 2003 for countries affected by trafficking in Afghan opiates. In

April 2004, Iran signed the Berlin Declaration on Counter-Narcotics, providing for the increased cooperation in the fight against narcotics among Afghanistan and its six neighbors, and the establishment of a security belt around Afghanistan (the so-called 'Six plus Two' group, comprising Afghanistan's six neighbors, as well as Russia and the US). In particular, under the SAID Initiative (Strengthening Afghanistan Iran Drug Control Border Cooperation), Iran proposed to train Afghan experts in countering drug trafficking, and co-finances the establishment of 25 new checkpoints along the border in Afghan provinces of Herat, Farah, and Nimroz.

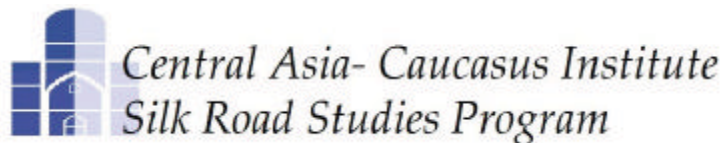
Moreover, Iran is a party to several narcotics control memoranda, signed under the auspices of the Regional Gulf Cooperation and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Iran is namely a signatory to the Protocol on Drug matters with ECO countries, which established a Drug Control and Coordination Unit (DCCU) as a part of ECO Secretariat, based in Tehran. Since 2000, Iran has been hosting annual Conferences of Drug Liaison Officers posted in Pakistan and Turkey

Iran is also a signatory to two Southern Caucasus quadripartite Member of Understandings (MOU) on cooperation in drug control and combating money-laundering activities: facilitated by UNODC, they have been signed by UNODC, Iran, and respectively Armenia and Georgia, and Azerbaijan and Georgia.

### International

Iran is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, as well as the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs and the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, it also signed and ratified the 1972 Protocol amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs in 2001. Iran has signed but has not yet ratified the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime.

Iran has shown an increasing desire to cooperate with the international community on narcotics control issues. The UNODC is working with Iran through the NOROUZ Programme (Narcotics ReductiOn Unitized Programme, launched in June 1999, and totaling a budget of US\$ 13 million in 2002-2005) to modify its laws, train the judiciary, and improve the court system. The UN Joint Initiatives Against Drugs (UNJIAD), another program run by UNODC, focuses on awareness raising on opium production and abuse, and targets specifically the Afghan refugee community in Iran.



Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center

### The Project on Narcotics, Organized Crime and Security in Eurasia

The Project on Narcotics, Organized Crime and Security in Eurasia is conducted by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program. The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program form a Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center affiliated with the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC; and the Departments of East European Studies and Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Sweden.

#### Latest publications:

Niklas L.P. Swanström, "Multilateralism and Narcotics control in Central Asia", *CEF Quarterly*, the journal of the China-Eurasia Forum, February 2005.

Niklas L. P. Swanström and Maral Madi, "International Cooperation Against Drug Trafficking, in Central Asia," *United Nations: Multilateralism and International Security*, in C. Uday Bhaskar et. al., eds, Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses & SHIPRA Publications, 2005.

Svante E. Cornell, "Stemming the Contagion: Regional Efforts to Curb Afghan Heroin's Impact", *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 6 no. 1, Winter/Spring 2005.

Kairat Osmonaliev, *Developing Counter-Narcotics Policy in Central Asia: Legal and Political Dimensions*, Silk Road Paper, January 2005.

Svante E. Cornell, *Narcotics, Radicalism and Security in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*, East European Studies Working Paper no. 84, December, 2004.

Maral Madi, "Drug Trade in Kyrgyzstan: Structure, Implications and Countermeasures", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 23, No 3-4, December, 2004.

#### Database:

The current version of the database contains information on illegal drugs and related issues in Central Eurasia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), Russia and the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan). These countries are the primary focus at Silk Road Studies. The database can be accessed at [www.silkroadstudies.org/drugsdatabase.htm](http://www.silkroadstudies.org/drugsdatabase.htm)

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