



Holding the Middle Ground

Experiences of Displacement, Community Relations, and Conflict
between IDPs, Returnees and Host Communities in Herat,
Nangarhar, and Takhar

Scoping Report

December 2020

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Front cover: IDPs in Shaidaiee Camp near Herat City, November 2019.

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Abbreviations

ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy	LAS	Land Allocation Scheme
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces	MoRR	Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation
CVRRP	Comprehensive Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration Policy	NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
DiREC	Displacement and Returnees Executive Committee	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix	OCHA	UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
IARCSC	Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission	PTRO	Peace Research and Training Organization
IDP	Internally Displaced Person/People	RRIS	Refugee Return and IDP Sector Strategy
INGO	International non-Government Organization	SSAR	Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees
IOM	International Organization for Migration	UN	United Nations
IS-K	Islamic State Khorasan	UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
JWF	Joint Way Forward		

Executive Summary

For four decades, Afghanistan confronts one of the world's most protracted and complex population displacement challenges. In 2019, 578,000 Afghans were displaced from their homes due to conflict, violence, or disaster. A further 490,000 Afghans returned from abroad under distressing circumstances, who continued to live a life of displacement even after returning home. They were either unwilling or unable to return to their place of origin or, after returning, forced to leave their home district again due to a lack of opportunities or insecurity. At the end of 2019, an estimated 4.2 million Afghans were considered internally displaced persons (IDPs) (IDMC, 2019). The protracted displacement crisis affects not only displaced people but the communities that receive them. In a context struggling with deepening insecurity, economic fragility, and political uncertainty such as Afghanistan, protracted displacement strains the already thinly stretched and often poor-quality public services even further, intensifying competition for scarce livelihood opportunities.

Furthermore, displacement produces new yet fluid and disjointed communities of new migrants, old migrants, and host communities, requiring both displaced and host community members to negotiate a new environment with new groups of people. Therefore, both national and international policy-

makers have struggled to grasp the fluidity and extent of forced internal migration amidst a prolonged armed conflict. Their response to the growing crisis has been hindered by a lack of data and coordination problems.

This report provides an in-depth review of the realities and impact of the internally displaced people and their host communities in Herat, Nangarhar, and Takhar provinces, which have the highest numbers of displaced people. The report focuses on three areas: understanding the experience of being displaced, the dynamics between host populations and displaced communities, and vulnerable groups' experiences, specifically women and youth. The research for the study was carried out over five months from October 2019 to January 2020. The findings are based on data collected from surveys, interviews, and focus groups conducted with IDPs, returnees, host communities, local officials, and aid workers in Herat, Nangarhar, and Takhar, key informant interviews with policymakers and international aid workers in Kabul. The research team adopted a bottom-up approach and used community-based and participatory research methods to better understand these dynamics. Therefore, while policymakers and aid workers were included in the study, the bulk of the report focuses on the communities' perspectives and experience.

Key Findings

Policy Frameworks: The 2017 Returnee and IDP policy is a significant step forward for the Afghan Administration. It addresses many of the issues that previous policies have failed to recognise, including the possibility of other options beyond return for IDPs. However, for the policy to realize its potential, it requires a more adequately staffed government office to guide the implementation and monitoring of the new guidelines, clearer communication and mentoring of implementation at the sub-national level, and improved coordination among national and international actors.

Displacement: The internal displacement journeys in all three provinces were characterized by uncertainty, insecurity, and vulnerability. The Returnees' and IDPs' journey to their new home location was fraught with the lack of security and abuses. For returnees, both deported or those who returned on

their own, the abuse and hurdles included police harassment, detention, and torture. Analogously, many IDPs were robbed, drained of their resources, and subject to maltreatment. Though this is one of the most perilous times during displacement, there was little to no assistance for these families. The settlement experience was significantly influenced by the events that took place during the journey after leaving home. Fear, mental stress, and diminished resources often placed participants at further risk of exploitation once they arrived at the new location, further contributing to secondary displacements.

Drivers of Displacement: Lack of security, poverty, and food insecurity were commonly cited drivers of displacement among returnees. The results from the household survey, focus groups, and interviews conducted for this report reflect the official numbers. The majority of participants stated that violent

conflict was the main reason they were forced to leave home. The conflict's nature varied; however, there were multiple factors driving displacement, further intensified by the onset of conflict. These factors include food insecurity, ethnic tensions, abuse and harassment, and natural disasters being the most common.

Aid and Assistance: Both host and displaced community participants expressed concern and frustration over the perceived lack of assistance from national and international actors. Many displaced families did not receive assistance, but among those that did, the emergency aid provided was insufficient even to meet their short-term needs. The government and aid agencies' slow and inadequate response impacted the IDP families and placed immense pressure on various host communities who already struggle with poverty and unemployment. Consequently, the lack of assistance to both communities served as a catalyst, further fuelling inter-community tensions. While it was clear that most families were struggling with a range of issues, including poverty, food insecurity, the lack of access to land, water, and sanitation; they often balanced this with living in a secure area and improved access to services. However, the security did not negate the difficulties of displacement and the lack of assistance from local and international actors. Corruption, the absence of government participation, and insufficient aid were all seen as contributing factors to IDPs and their host communities' untenable circumstances.

Community Tensions: Our research indicated that inter-community conflict was much lower than expected or as commonly suggested in policy and aid agency reports. Displaced families were sometimes viewed with fear and blamed for increased crime rates. The main sources of conflict were land, failure to pay rent or wages, and cultural differences often around women. Cultural and regional differences led to discrimination in daily life, including employment, housing, or even restricting the IDPs' access to social networks. A common perception within host communities was that the population increase in their areas placed pressure on the already weak essential health and education services and employment availability. While this created some negative sentiments towards the IDPs, many residents acknowledged that the poverty in displaced communities was direr than in the host communities and identified job training and employment support

as a key area for international aid and national government actors to provide support to displaced people. The most common source of support for displaced families was the local community.

Collective Community Works and Resilience: Rather than pervasive inter-community conflict, evidence from all three provinces pointed to the existence of efforts to enhance collective community resilience. Local communities helped displaced families despite the scarcity of resources, strained public services, and ethnic divisions. This shift, noted at different levels across all the three provinces, is partly attributed to a growing acceptance by host communities that internal displacement is a common occurrence. Displaced families are seen as suffering due to the shared experience of violence, insecurity, and poverty that affect Afghan families all over the country. Therefore, host communities feel a moral obligation to assist IDPs and returnees where possible. There was evidence across all the research sites that displaced families received support for daily basic needs from other displaced families and host community members. Without negating the existence of inter-community conflict, the study found that local community cultural norms, often constructed in policy documents and reports as driving ethnic divisions and violence, are the impetus for an essential and growing source of informal humanitarian assistance to displaced families. More importantly, they further strengthen overall community resilience to violence and uncertainty.

Environmental Challenges: Low-quality food, water, cooking methods, and food storage practices have had detrimental health effects on women and their families. The emissions released from materials utilized to make cooking fires, such as plastic bottles, containers, old wires, and cotton, lead to various illnesses and have damaging environmental and health impacts.

Mental-Health and Women: Local networks and social groups play a crucial role in providing psychosocial support to displaced women and children and building community resilience. Displaced women and children face significant challenges to their mental health and well-being due to living with decades of conflict, displacement, and poverty. The national healthcare systems' mental health support is imprecise and inadequate and often inaccessible due to limitations around social and gender norms. Community-based groups, however, are stepping in

to provide support to address these gaps. Investment in longer-term mental health facility-based services and professional training in Afghanistan is crucial. However, immediate engagement with and support from donors to informal support networks is necessary and could significantly impact displaced women and children's psycho-social well-being.

Struggling Youth: Youth among both the displaced and host communities, had varied experiences of education, violence, family obligation, and voluntary commitments, often running alongside high

Recommendations

The recommendations at the end of the report are made to all stakeholders reflecting the coordinated and comprehensive approach that is starting to take place in Afghanistan and is desperately needed to respond to the needs of displaced people and host communities. The recommendation focus on the following areas:

Moving Beyond Coordination Obstacles and Complexity: Both national and international actors need to take serious steps to move beyond debating the same obstacles to providing practical humanitarian assistance to the IDPs in Afghanistan that have dominated the conversation for over a decade. Complexity should no longer be used as a justification for the ineffective or fractured response.

Improve Coordination: While significant advances have been made recently, partnerships at the national and international levels need to be strengthened. Government agencies' capacity to record displacement data needs to be improved, including better data collection systems.

Invest in Innovation and Prioritise Skill Transfer: Data must be gathered regularly over extended periods and across borders. Further innovation must be introduced to improve data collection and focus on national and local authorities' skills development to better understand the relationship between displacement, cross-border movements, and durable solutions.

Engage with Local Resilience: The voices of affected populations should not be an afterthought because they are integral to developing a collective and targeted response to addressing displacement. Stake-

holders should diversify their programming to become more relevant and aligned with local needs. International actors need to shift focus from what international agencies can do for communities instead of supporting the resilience emerging in both the host and displaced communities.

levels of economic vulnerability. Instances of conflict were among the youth could be observed, e.g., about access to unskilled daily labour or unpaid loans. Nonetheless, there was also an overwhelming commitment to move forward personally and transition into adulthood. However, the desire and enthusiasm for a peaceful Afghanistan and a certain future among the young people is tempered by the ongoing experiences of forced displacement, the legacies of war, and the fear of inheriting a future rife with conflict.

holders should diversify their programming to become more relevant and aligned with local needs. International actors need to shift focus from what international agencies can do for communities instead of supporting the resilience emerging in both the host and displaced communities.

Strengthen Accountability Measures: Accountability tends to flow upwards to donors or political actors. Donors can, however, use their influence to encourage aid organizations to have greater accountability to local communities using community-based evaluations and post-assistance participatory forums.

Invest in Community-Based Mental Health Services: The widespread impact of mental health challenges in local communities, particularly displaced populations, needs to be fully acknowledged and prioritized in assistance programming. More significant investment in community-based mental health services and women's and youth networks is necessary, providing accessible and immediate support to local communities.

Invest in Understanding the Youth's Needs: A growing population of young, displaced, marginalized, and alienated Afghans will directly impact the governance, security, and development prospects of Afghanistan. This particular group needs to be taken seriously beyond the countering violent extremism and radicalization agenda. Further research into Afghan youth's lives and needs should be prioritized, which will enable the stakeholders with techniques to better support millions of young Afghans struggling with insecurity, displacement, and violence.

1 Introduction

Afghanistan struggles with one of the most pervasive and longstanding internal displacement problems in the region. Decades of protracted conflict in the country have led to significant levels of external migration accompanied by waves of returning Afghans and mass internal displacements. Estimates suggest that over 76 per cent of the population has experienced some form of displacement (ICRC, 2015). Worsening insecurity, growing civilian casualties, and persistent development challenges have produced increasing numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs), several of whom are also returnees from various countries. During 2019, conflict and violence forced 461,000 Afghans to flee from their homes, and a further 117,00 were displaced due to natural disasters. By the end of the year 2019, an estimated total of 4.2 million Afghans were living in displacement due to ongoing conflict and violence, vulnerable environmental conditions leading to disaster, and poverty (IDMC, 2019). Afghans refugees and asylum seekers in Iran, Pakistan, and Europe have faced an increasingly hostile environment since 2015 marked by harsh immigration regulations, deportation threats, detention, harassment, and poor living conditions. Many of the 2 million Afghans that have returned since 2015 were displaced again since their return. A protracted conflict, consistently increasing numbers of newly displaced persons, a high potential for post-return, and secondary and multiple displacements combined produce a complex, protracted, large-scale displacement across Afghanistan.

Since 2004, a handful of global commitments, national policy frameworks, multi-stakeholder and inter-agency coordination forums, and tracking mechanisms to address displacement have been put in place in Afghanistan. The designation of Afghanistan as a post-conflict country in 2001, the lack of political will by the national government to acknowledge the plight of the internally displaced, and reluctance by international actors in the early 2010s to acknowledge the growing humanitarian crisis¹ in the country, however, contributed to a dearth of investment in resources to address the burgeoning internal displacement crisis. More re-

cently, there has been agreement among the Afghan government, the international community, Afghan civil society, and the local population that forced displacement is a significant problem in Afghanistan requiring concerted attention. The IDPs are one of the most at-risk and vulnerable groups in Afghanistan, yet, many cannot access assistance from government and international actors due to several complex barriers preventing a timely response and the achievement of durable solutions (NRC, 2018). Despite recent developments in data collection and assessment systems, national and international stakeholders still struggle to generate reliable data to overcome coordination pitfalls, implement effective programming, and understand the experiences of returnees, IDPs, and host communities.

Forcibly displaced persons often migrate to new areas that are populated by communities who are also struggling with the effects of years of conflict and a lack of development. The dynamics between these groups, the newly displaced, and their local hosts can be tension-ridden and even violent. While the potential for conflict between groups cannot be ignored, in reality, these relationships are complex, can differ across regions of the country, and are dependent upon a range of intersecting social, economic, and cultural factors. Numerous briefing notes, short reports, and policy documents have provided insights into displaced populations' short-term protection needs (see Annex II for a list of documents consulted). However, less is known about the experiences of IDPs during different phases and protracted periods of displacement. Moreover, the impact of displacement on host communities and the dynamics between IDPs, returnees, and host communities remains ambiguous. In response to the shortcomings listed here, this report explores the realities of forced migration in Herat, Nangarhar, and Takhar Provinces, which have significant displaced populations. Through grounded and participatory research, this study aims to shed light on these nuanced experiences to inform evidence-based policy initiatives and actions to address IDPs and host communities' needs.

¹ The UN strategic review of 2017 reclassified Afghanistan from a post-conflict country to one in active conflict.

1.1 Background

Afghans are a people on the move as they have experienced large-scale internal and external population movements over the past 40 years due to successive waves of conflict that are unprecedented globally. Undeniably, insecurity and displacement have become synonymous with Afghanistan in the post 9/11 era. As such, Afghanistan has the most extended traceable history of migration in centuries. Afghanistan's location along the Silk Road made it a link between the East and West and a major trading country. The land divisions set-up in the 1800s divided ethnic groups between Afghanistan and neighbouring territories, precipitating movement between countries (Siddique, 2012). The 1970s oil boom and slow economic development saw thousands of Afghans migrate to Pakistan and Iran, where they were cheap labour for the host governments but enjoyed higher wages than they would have at home. Therefore, migration has long been a means of increased opportunities and a source of income. In more recent times, forced migration, which includes refugees' movements, and persons displaced internally, whether due to conflict or disaster, has accounted for a significant amount of travel.

Externally, this trend has produced millions of Afghan refugees over the past 40 years. Afghans are the largest protracted refugee population in Asia, and the second-largest refugee population globally, after Syria. Ethnic and language connections, geographic proximity, and the existence of functional labour markets have meant that the vast majority of those displaced from Afghanistan since 1978 have migrated to Iran and Pakistan. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Germany, and the United Kingdom (UK) are also home to significant numbers of Afghan refugees.

The Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989 produced widespread displacement, and over 6 million Afghans - roughly two-fifths of the country's population - fled to Iran or Pakistan with smaller numbers going to Europe, the Gulf countries, and Turkey. Pakistan received significant international assistance to support the Afghan refugees, including funds for setting up several refugee camps. On the other hand, Iran received less support, and as a result, there were fewer camps, leading to most of the refugees settling among the wider host population. In the

post-Cold War era, Iran and Pakistan were less welcoming to Afghan refugees and began implementing forced repatriation programmes. The international community continued to support refugees, mainly in Pakistan, but aid and assistance dropped significantly after the 1980s. Throughout these different conflict phases, the external migration was accompanied and often preceded by internal mass displacements. Additionally, six subsequent waves of displacement in the 1990s during the Mujahidin conflicts and the Taliban regime led to an estimated 1.2 million Afghans IDPs (Knowles, 1992).

Ongoing conflict, disaster, and chronic poverty have kept the numbers of Afghan refugees high. Simultaneously, an increasing number of Afghans have returned to Afghanistan, both voluntarily and involuntarily. After 9/11 and the fall of the Taliban, between 2001 and 2011, an estimated 4.6 million registered refugees returned to Afghanistan from all over the world but mainly from Iran and Pakistan, marking the most extensive assisted returnees process in the history of the world. The returnees were diverse and varied in financial wealth, family connections, education levels, and skills. Those with substantial social capital could settle without much external support, often relocating to areas where they had relatives. Others rented or purchased properties in Kabul or their provinces of origin.

Refugees from Pakistan and Iran returning home through assisted return programmes received support from international agencies and the Afghan government to a limited extent. This support enabled their access to education and skills training programmes while living abroad, which increased their chances of securing employment upon return. Host communities that were initially welcoming, however, began to receive the new arrivals with more caution. Concerns surfaced that aid needed by local communities was being diverted to returnees and allowing them to fare better than local families (Maastricht University and Samuel Hall, 2013). Regardless of the reality on the ground, this perception created resentment within host communities who were simultaneously struggling to navigate poverty and conflict. The host communities felt that returnee families were being given unnecessary support from the government, while local Afghans were left out (Kuschminder, Siegel, and Majidi,

2014). However, the new government struggled to accommodate the growing number of returnees who had fewer resources and networks. An increasing number of registered refugees who had returned by the end of 2005 fell into this group.

Between 2006 and 2014, security steadily deteriorated, economic development stalled, and new uncertainty emerged regarding international military withdrawal. The international community was unsure whether this would impact humanitarian and development aid assistance and programming. During this time, the number of returnees dropped while the number of IDPs steadily increased. Approximately 325,000 Afghans were internally displaced in 2009 due to conflict and disaster (IDMC, Afghanistan). By 2014, this figure had more than doubled to over 820,000.

The government and the international community were slow to respond to the signs of an emerging large-scale crisis. Repeated calls by Afghan civil society and certain INGOs to international donors and UN officials to recognise the worsening humanitarian situation in Afghanistan for increased investment received disappointing responses. International aid agencies and the UN provided ad hoc assistance, but they struggled to coordinate with government counterparts and each other. Over a decade after 9/11, as the international troops and funding began to drawdown, little was achieved to collect baseline data, create effective tracking systems, and develop comprehensive assistance programming to address the internal displacement crisis.

The returnee population began to increase again in 2015. This increase was, at least in part, due to the shifting political dynamics and increasingly restrictive immigration and employment policies in Pakistan and Iran (HRW, 2017), new deals such as the Joint Way Forward (JWF) umbrella agreement between Afghanistan and the European Union in

1.2 About this Report

With FES's support, the Peace Research and Training Organisation (PTRO) conducted a five-month study from October 2019 through February 2020. This study examined the experiences of displacement and inter-community dynamics between IDPs and returnees with host communities in Herat, Nangarhar, and Takhar Provinces of Afghanistan.

2016 (JWF, 2016), the bilateral repatriation agreements between Afghanistan, Germany, Sweden and Finland, and the sometimes painful realities of immigrant life in other countries (Ruttig and Bjelica, 2016). Between 2015 and 2017, over 2 million Afghans returned home (World Bank Phone Survey, 2018). Many of the post-2015 returnees blurred any standardized distinctions between voluntary and involuntary return. The returnees were increasingly vulnerable to the armed and tribal conflicts, droughts, floods, and earthquakes, contributing to internal displacement. Consequently, an unknown number of returnees also became IDPs. Simultaneously, worsening insecurity and chronic environmental and development challenges produced staggering quantities of newly internally displaced persons.

By 2017, over 1.3 million Afghans were IDPs, and since then, the numbers have continued to rise exponentially (IDMC, Afghanistan). Relatedly, local Afghan communities have continued to receive and host millions of displaced families, for short and more extended periods, while struggling with the effects of decades of conflict and scarce resources.

Over the last forty years of conflict, violence and natural disasters have displaced millions of Afghans from their homes. The extent of the forced migration situation in Afghanistan means that most people today have been displaced at least once, if not multiple times during their life thus far. As new communities form, displacement requires negotiating a new environment with new groups as mixed, fluid, and disjointed communities. The experiences of displacement and interactions between these various groups are undoubtedly complex pitted against an environment characterized by a challenging political landscape, ongoing conflict, foreign intervention, and seemingly unending aid dependency.

All three provinces have significantly higher numbers of IDPs. The study employed mixed methodologies, including community-led participatory research tools to:

- Develop a deeper understanding of the realities of IDPs and host communities in Herat, Nangarhar, and Takhar Provinces focusing on displacement experiences and the tensions

among the displaced and local communities.

- Highlight challenges faced by the displaced and host communities and identify coping strategies and mechanisms.
- Examine the specific challenges of marginalized groups within the IDP communities, including women and youth; and
- Provide recommendations to critical national and international stakeholders based on the research findings.

This report presents an overview of the key themes that emerged from the research. Within the report,

1.3 Methodology

This study incorporates insights from secondary sources but draws mainly upon primary data collected in Herat, Nangarhar, and Takhar. The authors adopted a multi-site case study approach to facilitate comparative analysis across and within the provinces, including identifying local particularities and broader shared trends (Table 1). Critical considerations for field site selection include the extent of displacement in the area, including recent increases or decreases, regional and geographic diversity, including the urban/rural split, ethnic representation, and security conditions. Researchers employed an iterative and mixed methodology using quantitative (household surveys) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews and focus groups) tools. Attempts were made to balance gender and age among participants in the surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Researchers spoke to 207 community members (see Table 2) throughout the study in the context of 89 surveys, 27 interviews, and 18 focus groups in which a total number of 73 respondents participated. Focus groups consisting of four to five individuals were held with displaced and host community members. Specific focus groups with displaced youth and women were conducted in each province. Of the 18 key informant interviews held, six took place in Kabul with Afghan government officials and international aid workers, and four were conducted in each province with national aid workers and provincial government officials. To be included in the study, displaced participants must

there are specific sections on women, youth, short provincial case studies, and concise recommendations for stakeholders at the local, national, and international levels. The findings presented here are based on the perspectives of the displaced and host community members in Herat, Nangarhar, and Takhar Provinces. The study results raise essential questions about inter-community conflict perceptions, the provision of assistance to communities in need, and national and international actors' accountability to displaced and host communities in Afghanistan. Simultaneously, perhaps the most important finding that has emerged from the report is evidence of growing resilience within the communities across all three provinces.

have experienced displacement within the last five years, including IDPs that had been forced to leave their home villages or returnees returning to Afghanistan from abroad. The majority of returnees, however, had also been displaced after the return. Therefore, recent internal displacement was the most common experience of most participants and is, therefore, the main focus of this report. Host community participants were those that were domiciled in what they considered to be their district of origin.

The research methodology was designed to ensure that community experiences and input lead the study. Researchers focused on exploring community perspectives and on the ground reality in three areas: the experience of displacement, the dynamics between displaced and host populations, and the strategies and coping mechanisms, including aid assistance, being used in communities impacted by displacement. The responses to the wider-ranging questions used in the household survey were to identify themes for further exploration in the focus groups and interviews.

Specific attention was paid to avoid providing a constructed narrative for community members, and instead, they were strongly encouraged to present ideas and provocations for discussion. In both the focus groups and interviews, people were encouraged to speak of their own experiences and voice their opinions freely.

Table 1: Research Tools Breakdown

Tool	Takhar	Herat	Nangarhar	Kabul	Total
Locations	PD3, Taloqan City; Yunasabad, Bagh-e-Zakhira; Pol-e-jalad, Safi District; Nawabad, Safi District	Maslakh camp, Herat City; Jebrayel, Herat City; Ishaq Suliman, Enjil District	Sheik Mesri Camp, Surkhrod Centre, Behsud Centre	Kabul City	-
Household Surveys	27	32	30	0	89
Semi-Structured Interviews	8	11	8	0	27
Focus Groups	6	6	6	0	18
Key Informant Interviews	4	4	4	6	18
Total	45	53	48	6	152

Table 2: Community Research Participants Divided by IDPs and Host Communities in the Three Provinces

Province	Host Community	Displaced Community	Total
Herat	30	44	74
Nangarhar	24	44	68
Takhar	23	42	65
Total	77	130	207



An IDP carrying plastic bottles and garbage as fuel for a fire. Kamaluddin Behzad town, Area 13, Herat, October 2019.

Photo © FES / Jamshid Ismail

2 Policy, Coordination, and Analysis

Rather than providing a top-down analysis of policy and programming, this study focused on adopting a bottom-up approach to understand Afghanistan's internal displacement. However, this section briefly identifies some of the main policy frameworks, programming, and implementation obstacles facing

critical national and international stakeholders in Afghanistan. The issues reflected in this report were reflected in the displaced and host community members' narrative and interviews throughout the study.

2.1 National Policy Frameworks

Policy and programming on the return of refugees to Afghanistan have historically been much more straightforward than the official guidance on internal displacement. Legal and policy instruments and decrees on displacement adopted before 2001 mainly focused only on returnees but failed to cover IDPs and asylum seekers. Post-2001, there was a slight shift, but returnees maintained their central position in a range of new official Afghan policy frameworks. The post-2001 Bonn Agreement ensured Afghan refugees' participation in the transitional process, and the new electoral law drafted in 2004 contained protections for IDP and returnee participation.

Though short-lived, the Special Property Dispute Resolution Court (2002-2007) was established specifically to adjudicate over the returnees' land disputes. In 2005 the Afghan government endorsed the Land Allocation Scheme Policy to assist the high numbers of returnees and IDPs with securing land tenure (See Box 5). While in theory, IDPs were included in some of the new regulations; in practice, they were given little consideration. There have been official government documents specifically on IDPs in Afghanistan since 2004; however, the political landscape, a lack of awareness, resistance to co-ordination, and poor implementation have proved to be persistent challenges to effective responses by both national and international actors on the ground.

The first National IDP Plan was adopted in 2004 but was never fully implemented and remained widely unacknowledged by government officials and the aid community (MRRD, 2004). Internal displacement is a highly political issue. The Afghan government's focus has tended to be on displaced families to return to their place of origin. This approach also avoided upsetting local landholders, powerbrokers, and elected officials who did not want displaced communities encroaching on their land and resources. The Refugee Return and

IDP Sector Strategy (RRISS) was developed in 2008 under the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) as a means to implement the Afghanistan Compact's benchmarks on protecting IDPs and returnees (GoIRA, 2013). Subsequently, a framework and an inter-agency cluster system were established at the national level, aiming to improve response, rapid needs assessments, and communication among NGOs, UN agencies, and the government. However, much of the policy focused on returns and included several scenarios for refugees, yet specific guidelines on addressing internal displacement were mostly absent from the rhetoric.

Huge spikes in conflict-induced displacement in 2012 and 2013 highlighted the need for concrete policy and dedicated funding (UNHCR, 2013). In 2013, the National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons was endorsed by the Afghan government and followed by the Comprehensive Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration Policy (CVRRP) in 2015. Both aimed to address repatriation in line with international norms and included provisions for documented and undocumented returnees. In 2015 the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), as the lead government agency for forced migration and displacement issues, developed a five-year Strategic and Work Plan (2016-2020) to administer "displacement affairs relating to refugees, asylum seekers, returnees and IDPs" and support the implementation of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR).

The 2017 National Policy Framework for Returnees and IDPs, inspired by the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, came into effect and continues to guide government activities. The framework has been widely hailed as an achievement by national and international actors and is the first such policy within the region. The new policy represents a unified instrument on IDPs and returnees and is a comprehensive

attempt to address earlier problems in the government's approach. Unlike previous policies, the new framework outlines several specific rights ensured to displaced persons, including long-term security of land tenure and flexibility in identification and registration procedures. The document also provides three possible routes to end displacement: returning home, transferring to a third site, or settling in the new community. This last option, which includes settlement on private land, represents a shift in direction from previous government policies where a return was the prioritized, most desirable, and potentially the only feasible option

2.2 Coordination Among the Actors

Coordination problems are not a new obstacle, and in fact, poor coordination between national and international stakeholders has been a consequential challenge since 2004. Until recently, without an official Afghan IDP policy, one that acknowledged the full range of solutions to end displacement, including local integration and resettlement, international actors were unwilling to invest additional funding in programmes for the IDPs (Roehrs, 2013). Sub-national government offices were chronically understaffed, and the policy and responsible party for implementation were often unclear. Moreover, local officials were reluctant to provide assistance that might lead to permanent settlement.

The new 2017 Afghan IDP policy lays out a multi-level coordination system. At the highest level, the High Commission on Migration, the Council of Ministers' Sub-Committee on Migration Affairs, and Council of Ministers on Forced Displacement issues are responsible for policy determination decision-making. At the national level, the policy's implementation is led by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) and the Displacement and Returnees Executive Committee (DiREC). The DiREC is chaired by officials from the Office of the Chief Executive, MoRR, and the UN.² The Committee maintains three different working groups: Policy Support Group, Technical Support Group, and Financial Support Group. The MoRR coordinates the national IDP Working Group with membership from key ministries, civil society, INGOs, and UN agencies involved in implementing 14 IDP policies. At the provincial level, the responsibility for developing implementation plans rests with the provincial governors and sub-national displacement policy groups. The coordination system is meant to close the gaps in providing

for IDPs. Assessments of the new policy have called for the establishment and maintenance of effective registration and data collection systems, including forced displacement, facilitated access to documentation, a simplified procedure for replacement of lost and damaged documents, and greater access to shelter and housing, among other things (World Bank, 2017). However, the new policy is a significant step forward for the Afghan Administration with a more adequately staffed government office to guide the new guidelines' implementation and monitoring.

timely and responsive assistance to the IDPs and returnees; however, government officials and INGO staff still cited the lack of coordination as an obstacle to implementation. Communication and information sharing between national and international actors and between central and sub-national government offices remain inconsistent despite the new mechanisms. Correspondingly, due to political concerns, particularly around land redistribution to displaced families, the national officials continue to face resistance from provincial governors to develop provincial strategic plans.

According to key stakeholders, these patterns of coordination remain an obstacle despite different policy variations and changing international actors. The increasing likelihood of post-return displacement, growing numbers of newly displaced persons, and the ongoing protracted displacement further complicates coordination. Decisions regarding who assists, what kind of assistance, which groups, and determining the aid duration are not easily answered. Furthermore, the challenges of ongoing protracted conflict combined with the current political landscape, including a newly formed government, the possibility of a contentious and strenuous peace dialogue may hinder a coordinated and improved response to the internal displacement situation in the country. Ironically, the same circumstances will undoubtedly heighten the protraction of displacement and the needs of both displaced and host communities. However, the new policy and mechanisms created are still relatively new, and the attempt to put an effective process in place should be recognised.

² Membership includes the Office of the President, the National Security Advisor, the Ministry of Finance, the Office of the State Minister for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Affairs, ARAZI, the World Bank, UNHCR, IOM, and OCHA.

2.3 Information and Data

In 2017, a new tracking system was put in place with an increased capacity to map internal movements and generate demographic statistics. The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) was rolled out in 2017. Funded by Germany, Japan, Norway, and Sweden, the system was piloted in Nangarhar, Laghman, and Kunar Provinces (IOM, 2017). In 2018, an agreement among several major international agencies to use this data set had been made to improve coordination and provide more targeted and practical programming. There are multiple other tracking systems in use across national and international agencies. For example, the United Nation's Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) maintains a separate system, while other agencies and government offices rely on field assessments or other sources. Triangulation of information can provide a clearer picture of the dynamics on the ground. However, vastly different numbers and analyses can confuse stakeholders and external audiences seeking to understand the situation better. As a result, statistics on internal displacement are still arduous to substantiate, and with a lack of comprehensive baseline data in many areas of the country, it remains a challenge to understand the trajectory and experiences of migrants displaced by force.

Agencies and governments have focused on identification and statistical generation as priorities; however, little systematic analysis has been conducted on the continuum between internal displacements, cross-border movement, and return in Afghanistan. There is a lack of information and data about the frequency of multiple or secondary internal displacements, how often IDPs become refugees, or when returning refugees become IDPs. Any figures tend to be estimated as it is challenging to capture

2.4 The Humanitarian – Development Relationship

The humanitarian-development peace nexus is now widely accepted within policy circles (Zamore, 2019). In the case of Afghanistan, however, the relationship between humanitarian action and development processes is difficult to contextualise, given the lack of understanding of the country's humanitarian needs, including the forced displacement crisis. Understanding the experience of displacement

IDPs living in urban areas, often dispersed among economic migrants and the urban poor, or those inaccessible due to the terrain or lack of security. Another layer of complexity concerns refugees and undocumented Afghans who, over the past decade, have returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran; voluntarily or involuntarily. Substantial numbers of these returnees have been unable to return to their places of origin due to the lack of security, services, and livelihood opportunities. They find themselves in conditions very similar to IDPs displaced by conflict or disaster. Though tracking systems, such as the DTM, have improved data analysis, a deeper understanding of the forced migration experience as a continuum is still lacking within policy circles. Understanding the experiences would facilitate comprehensive planning to address the longer-term needs of the displaced populations and host communities. As such, a deeper understanding of this continuum may need to be driven by qualitative research that goes beyond statistics to provide greater substance to our understanding of displacement patterns, needs, and experiences.

On the one hand, significant advances have been made, including the use of innovative technologies. On the other hand, there are many challenges still present, including the lack of access to unsafe areas to conduct monitoring and assessments, poor coordination among agencies, and weak human resources capacity of government agencies at the provincial level. Ultimately, the lack of reliable data and information sharing and coordination on Afghanistan's internal displacement contributes to programming and policy development. There is still heavy reliance on generalized assumptions and estimates, pre-packaged solutions, and pre-existing organizational norms.

in Afghanistan is made difficult by numerous factors. They include the prolonged nature of the conflict in Afghanistan, growing uncertainty, the legacy of missteps and disinterest on the part of national and international officials in addressing humanitarian needs, the internal displacement crisis, and strategic geographical choices about the placement of development investments by international actors.

Displacement is caused by multiple factors and can last for short or long periods, even years – often including repeated displacements. In practice, internal displacement is still often viewed as a short-term emergency requiring a distinct humanitarian response. While many of the families interviewed for the report required emergency assistance at some point, the study showed that the causes, nature, and length of displacement and needs, even within the same community, vary greatly and can change over time. As the report below details, some of the challenges facing the displaced and host communities are linked to issues traditionally considered to fall under development activities such as employment, shelter, education, and healthcare. Beyond the lack of investment in addressing the needs of displaced Afghans, the dynamics of forced migrant communities, however, mean that neither standard short-term assistance nor traditional development aid meets their needs or the needs of the communities where they settle.

Due to their perceived lack of interest and assistance in addressing the communities' challenges, distrust and low confidence are prevalent among Afghan communities in both national and international actors. Important questions need to be further examined by both national and international officials. For instance, what innovations are necessary to address the needs of people on the ground? How can long-term humanitarian assistance differ from development programming? What are the different points at which displaced communities require assistance? What is needed to comprehensively address the host and displaced community's needs, or the community of origin and the displaced settlement simultaneously? If left unanswered, many displaced families will remain in perilous situations without assistance with host communities struggling to cope with the additional pressures created by an influx of people to the area.



Afghan IDPs waiting for assistance in Sorkhrod, Nangarhar, September 2019

Photo © FES / Jamshid Ismail

3 Provincial Overviews

3.1 Nangarhar Province

Nangarhar is one of Afghanistan's most populated eastern provinces. A large province with 22 districts, Nangarhar has had a significant representation in the central government throughout the era of ex-president Hamid Karzai and in the current government of President Ashraf Ghani. Several ex-Mujahidin leaders or commanders are prominent MPs with considerable influence over members of the Cabinet. The influence has also provoked competition at the local level in elections as their clients are often placed in prominent local government positions. This trend has been decreasing since 2019 with the appointment of a new provincial governor, Shah Mahmood Miakhil, who has taken steps to address patronage within the provincial government. Moreover, the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC) has also been crucial in the employment vetting processes carried out in the province.

Nangarhar is home to a significant number of returnees and IDPs. The province's border with Pakistan makes it a focal point for commerce and constant travel between them. The province also has a high returnee population, with approximately 20 per cent of post-2013 Afghan returnees from Pakistan settling in Nangarhar (World Bank Group and UNHCR, Phone Survey, 2018). The returnees are a mixed group composed of those who originate from the province and others who chose to settle there, often close to the provincial urban centre, to access health, education services, and employment.

The province has consistently ranked among the top five provinces in Afghanistan for numbers of displaced people. In 2019, it was fourth with 37,911 displaced individuals. Nangarhar has been one of the most volatile places in the country since the Islamic State Khurasan (IS-K)³ announced its presence there four years ago. Using extreme means of torturing and killings, the IS-K captured six districts attached to the mountainous area of Spinghar. All six districts were populated by the Shinwari tribe, who left their houses and were displaced to the provincial capital, Jalalabad, and nearby districts under the

government's control. These districts were severely damaged due to the continued fighting between IS-K and the Taliban, government military operations, and NATO air offensive. More recently, the IS-K was defeated in the area, and the districts are cleared of their presence. Defeating the IS-K has had a visible impact on the overall security improvement in the province. The number of suicide bombings and complex attacks decreased in the latter half of 2019. The government, Taliban, and NATO forces equally claim their role in defeating the IS-K. However, it will take longer for the IDPs to return as they need to rebuild their houses and cultivate their agricultural land. Some families moved to the neighbouring province of Laghman, while others went to Balkh and other provinces depending on their connections, presence of relatives, and financial means. However, most travel to Behsud, Surkhrod, and Jalalabad City, which offer employment and housing opportunities.

Table 3: Distance Travelled by Most IDPs to Jalalabad City

District of Origin	Distance (km)
Door Baba	70
Nazyan	55
Spin Ghar	47
Acheen	45
Haska Mena	40
Ghani Khil	33

The returnee-IDP continuum is evident in Nangarhar. Years of high returns coupled with persistent armed conflict have led to repeated displacements for the IDPs and returnees. Conversely, IDPs may attempt to migrate to Pakistan if they have the financial resources or family ties. Some of the returnees, who migrate to Pakistan, eventually return to Afghanistan and choose to settle near Jalalabad's urban centre or one of the displaced communities spread throughout the province. These repeated movements further complicate attempts to identify and distinguish between IDPs and returnees.

³ The Islamic State (or Daesh) announced its expansion to the Khurasan region in 2015, which historically encompasses parts of modern-day Iran, Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Islamic State Khurasan (IS-K) is the group's Central Asian operations (CSIS, 2018).

3.2 Takhar Province

Takhar is located in the north-east and shares a border with Badakhshan, Baghlan, and Kunduz Provinces in Afghanistan and with Tajikistan to the north. The mainly rural province is almost twice the size of Nangahar but has a significantly smaller population of approximately 933,000 people. Although the province shares a border with Tajikistan, this has benefitted the province little with trade and economic opportunities. Moreover, Takhar's shared borders with Kunduz and Baghlan have made it more insecure as the Taliban can easily infiltrate its districts from these areas.

The Taliban frequently block the road from Kunduz to Taloqan, ambushing the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), and there is a continuous threat that ordinary citizens will be stopped and held for ransom. The Taliban collect taxes from the farmers in these districts and tax vehicles carrying passengers and trucks transporting goods on the main Kunduz-Taloqan road. Of the province's 17 districts, Darqad, Chahaab, Yangi Qala, Khwaja Bahauddin, Dashte Qala, and Ishkamish are prone to Taliban influence and considered the most insecure.

In September 2019, the Taliban came close to Baharak district, only 20 km away from the provincial capital Taloqan, and there were fears that the city may get captured. The Afghan government forces supported by NATO successfully launched multiple military operations to pull the Taliban out of these districts. However, due to the limited number of security forces stationed in the province, they do not leave many soldiers behind to hold the ground, which leaves the areas open for the Taliban to return. Therefore, Takhar Province and Taloqan district are home to many displaced people from rural provincial districts and other provinces, including Kunduz and Farah.

The Taliban have a strong presence in both provinces and have captured the provincial centre several times over the past two years. Therefore, due to the lack of security, both aid organizations and the government have limited access to most of the provincial districts, and as a result, little development aid reaches the areas under the Taliban control.

Takhar had the highest number of displaced persons in 2019 (92,750) in Afghanistan. However, many of the families in Takhar that were displaced in 2019 returned to their home villages for two reasons.

First, the fighting in rural areas had subsided, and the government forces had recently taken over several districts that were embroiled in armed conflict. Also, in areas where fighting was ongoing, more significant numbers of residents returned to their homes in Takhar despite the area being under the Taliban control compared to Nangarhar. This was mainly because the Taliban in Takhar did not use the same harsh means as the IS-K did in Nangarhar. Second, Taloqan City, the provincial capital and the location where most IDPs were temporarily located, is a small city that does not offer much to persons not originally from the area. Economically, the city is less attractive for employment opportunities compared to Jalalabad and Herat cities. Taloqan has fewer opportunities for small business development or even daily wage labour. Therefore, most IDPs from the rural districts in Takhar abandoned Taloqan and returned to their village life, mostly to agriculture and animal husbandry as their primary means of livelihood.

Table 4: Distance Traveled by Most IDPs to Taloqan City

District of Origin	Distance (km)
Chahaab	150
Ishkamish	120
Rostaq	120
Darqad	100
Yangi Qala	100
Khwaja Bahauddin	80
Dashte Qala	60
Khwajaghar	50
Baharak	20

3.3 Herat Province

Herat is the largest and most populous province in the study. Like Takhar, this historic province has 19 districts and over 1,000 villages. With a population of approximately 1,780,000, Herat is the second most populated province in Afghanistan following Kabul Province. Herat has a vibrant civil society and a high level of political participation and awareness among its population. Despite an overall drop in voter turnout for the recent 2019 presidential elections, the province still recorded its sixth-largest voter turnout (Kazemi, 2019), including a high number of female voters (Bezhan, 2019).

Compared to many other provinces, Herat is considered a relatively secure province despite kidnappings, forced robberies, and targeted killings in the eponymous provincial capital. The province borders Turkmenistan to the north and Iran to the west; therefore, business and employment opportunities are relatively healthier than other provinces in Afghanistan. However, corruption and constant threats of kidnapping have made it challenging for businesses to invest. The government and aid agencies can deliver services to most districts, but the Taliban presence in rural villages has made it difficult to distribute aid more widely to other districts, including in Poshte Koh, Zawal, Zer Koh, Chesht, and Farsi.

Compared to the Nangarhar and Takhar Provinces in 2019, Herat had the lowest number of IDPs in the study—10,524—; however, the province is believed to be home to approximately one million IDPs (UNOCHA Displacement Base, 2019). The one million IDPs are from districts within the province and various provinces, including Badghis, Ghor, Farah, Helmand, Bamiyan, Daikundi, Takhar, and Kunduz. In the western region, a large-scale drought in 2018 prompted the displacement of over 371,000 people creating Afghanistan’s largest disaster-related displacement in over a decade (IDMC, Global Displacement Report, 2019).

As a result, thousands of out-of-province IDPs relocated to Herat, making the displaced population one of the most diverse in the study. In contrast to Takhar Province, fewer IDPs return to their home districts since health services, and education is more accessible in Herat and generally better. However, some of the respondents reported that security forces and

host communities in the province somehow associate the insecurity in the City with the influx of IDPs from other provinces, but often without clear proof.

Table 5: Distance Traveled by Most IDPs to Herat City

District of Origin	Distance (km)
Chakhcharan, Ghor Province	413
Farah Province	300
Farsi, Herat	280
Khozor, Herat	200
Posht-e-Koh, Herat	180
Chesht Sharif, Herat	170
Zerkoh, Herat	170
Qala-e-Naw, Badghis Province	157
Koshk Kohna, Herat	150
Zawal, Herat	140
Shindand, Herat	135
Pashtoon Zarghoon, Herat	100
Oba, Herat	100
Robot Sangi, Herat	50

4 Being Displaced

4.1 Returning

Between 2012 and 2018, 3.2 million Afghan migrants and refugees returned home from abroad. Around 95 per cent among them returned from Iran and Pakistan. Shared borders and similar languages have made the two countries preferred places of refuge and employment for Afghans fleeing conflict over the last 40 years. The remaining 5 per cent of returnees, approximately 170,000, came mainly from Europe and Turkey (IOM, DTM, 2019). The number of returnees spiked in 2016 due to numerous internal and external factors. They include the shifting political dynamics and increasingly restrictive immigration and employment policies in Pakistan and Iran, new international frameworks such as the Joint Way Forward (JWF) agreement between Afghanistan, the European Union, the bilateral repatriation agreements between Afghanistan and Germany, and Sweden and Finland. During the first two weeks of January 2020, over 10,000 Afghans crossed the border from Iran into Afghanistan. Therefore, the number of returnees remains steady despite decreasing security and rising civilian casualties.

"I am a returnee from Norway. I lived there for 2 years but after two years our [asylum] cases were rejected. This was disappointing for us. Therefore, we planned to return back to our country because we were not allowed to work after our cases were rejected by the host country." – IDP Returnee, Focus Group, Herat

Among the returnees interviewed for the report, each had a unique journey. In line with the overall trends, most displaced participants in the study had returned from Iran or Pakistan with a small number coming from Turkey, Belgium, and Norway. Returnees in Herat and Takhar had mainly come back from Iran, while in Nangarhar, they were more likely to have returned from Pakistan. Some had lived in Europe, while others had spent years in Pakistan and Iran. Meanwhile, a few returnees had tried to transit through Iran or Turkey to reach Europe. However, they had been captured and forced to return to Afghanistan. One participant had lived abroad in two

European countries and Iran at different times during his life, having made multiple attempts to leave Afghanistan. Others were displaced internally either before going to another country or after returning. A few participants indicated that they were displaced both before and after the return. The interviews with returnees exemplified the complexity of and differentiated between migration journeys that characterize Afghan returnees' experience.

Returning home was rarely an easy decision. Deported participants, who came back through assisted voluntary return programmes, complained of harsh living conditions and harassment in foreign countries. Several of the study respondents recalled the hostility towards asylum seekers and migrants they experienced in host countries, including Pakistan, Iran, and some European countries. Moreover, stories of police brutality and harassment were common among returnees. Returnees spoke of being forced to leave Pakistan because their refugee camps were destroyed by police, preventing them from accessing services or employment. Returnees from Europe and Turkey were deported after failed asylum claims or placed in detention while living as undocumented migrants.

Turkey is responsible for the largest number of forced Afghan returnees. In 2019 alone, Turkey deported approximately 22,000 Afghans reported by Afghanistan - Snapshot of Population Movements (UNOCHA, January to December 2019). The deportees were treated poorly, detained in terrible conditions, and provided no support once they returned. Notably, a small number of non-assisted voluntarily returnees had been disappointed with life abroad and returned to Afghanistan to be reunited with their families and contribute to their own country's

"After a long immigration, we return[ed] 7 month ago from Iran to Khowaja Ghaar [district] and after [the] district [was] crashed by [the] Taliban, now it [has been] 20 days we came to Taloqan City" – IDP Returnee, Interview, Takhar

development. The circumstances around return often included a combination of events, including deportation, unemployment, or escape from frequent structural and direct violence and discrimination. The voluntary and involuntary nature of these processes is unclear at best, and though returnees do exercise agency, this is often in a challenging context and with a limited selection of choices.

Returning Home from Abroad

"We were living in Istanbul, Turkey, which is an economically developed country. When I was in Turkey, my life was better and was going well, as I was able to work. But then I was arrested by the police and deported. When the Turkish police arrested me, they were very violent. They were beating us, and there was no food for us while we were in a temporary prison for migrants. Then we were deported and put on a plane to Kabul. After I arrived in Afghanistan, I came from Kabul to Takhar by car, with my own money. In our new place where we live, we are suffering from insecurity and unemployment. I cannot afford to take care of my family and take loans sometimes. My experience in Turkey and return home taught me that others' countries could not be ours. So, we should get educated and build our own country like other countries; otherwise, we will keep living in poverty and misery or disaster." – *Abdul, IDP Returnee, Interview, Takhar*

A combination of multiple factors such as incurred debts to traffickers or family members, the failure to find work abroad, and previously having sold off their assets in Afghanistan, can leave Afghan returnees without any resources to draw from after they return home. After returning, they find themselves in more destitute economic situations than they were in before leaving Afghanistan. Many returnees interviewed in the study confirmed that they had been able to find work abroad, but the jobs were mainly low-wage or in the informal sector.

Registered migrants and asylum seekers do not always have the right to work or may only secure low-wage jobs or temporary jobs. For undocumented migrants finding work can be more daunting and even dangerous. Several families in Herat had spent their savings to send one or two family members abroad, hoping that they would be able to find

work and send remittances home. Few of the families interviewed had received no assistance; however, often because their sons were unable to secure employment or were indebted to traffickers. Since most Afghans travel to Iran through Nimroz Province, according to the respondents who have travelled themselves or their relatives, the smugglers' fee is approximately USD 200 (around 15,300 Afs) to be transported from Nimroz to multiple major cities in Iran. While not a large sum, repaying the debt can take months if one does not find work quickly.

Refugees or migrants, particularly those who had left with plans to go to Europe or further, may have sold their business or land to gain sufficient funds to make the journey and settle in a new location abroad. This, according to some respondents, leaves them without a safety net to come back to when they return because post-arrival assistance provided by aid agencies, often IOM, is not sufficient to support a sustained and efficient reintegration. Therefore, returnees return home still in debt or with minimal savings to support their families. Many of the returnees in the study became dependent upon families that are already struggling. Several returnees who were married came back with their families but had lost most of their possessions and, therefore, struggled to start from scratch with limited resources.

The increased vulnerability of returnees coming back under such conditions places them at an additional risk of exploitation and displacement. Poverty and the lack of security and food were commonly cited drivers of displacement among returnees. For example, Jamila and her family were originally from Takhar Province but had lived in Pakistan for several years as refugees. When they returned to Afghanistan approximately three years ago, when tensions between the Afghan and Pakistani authorities worsened, they settled in Kunduz Province, which had better services and more jobs than Takhar. They could not afford their 4,500 Afghani rent per month, and without regular employment, they faced severe food insecurity and were forced to move yet again. Therefore, Jamila decided to come back to Takhar, where she has relatives. She and her family live in a temporary shelter close to Taloqan City. As head of the household with five children, Jamila struggles to secure work, and the constant upheavals have depleted their savings. All her children are in school, but she often has to depend on

family and food purchased on credit from local shops. Each move was an attempt to improve her and her family's circumstances, but new hardships followed and drained their resources further. Although a familiar story among the returnees, Jamila's return, and subsequent movements resulted from various overlapping and compounding factors, including conflict, food scarcity, poverty, economic vulnerability, gender, which are heavily intertwined and difficult to separate from one another.

Research suggests that most returnees are looking to re-migrate, given the lack of security, support, and prospects in Afghanistan (World Bank Group & UNHCR, 2018 & 2019). However, the majority of returnees interviewed during the study planned to remain in the area where they currently live. Among those surveyed, only two returnees, both in Herat, said they planned to go abroad again. One participant had been deported from Iran six months ago and wished to return to her family, who she had been forced to leave behind.

4.2 Leaving Home: Displacement

Except for 2018, conflict is the most widespread driver of displacement in Afghanistan. The conflict has contributed to the displacement of 2.9 million of the 4 million displaced Afghans, (IDMC, Afghanistan, 2019). In 2019, 461,000 Afghans across 32 provinces were recorded to be conflict-induced new displacements representing a 24 per cent increase from the previous year (IDMC, Afghanistan, 2019). Another 117,000 people were displaced due to disasters, mainly due to flooding in six provinces, including Badghis, Farah, Ghor, Helmand, Herat, and Kandahar (Ibid).

Table 6: Conflict-Induced Displacements Across the Three Provinces (2019)

Province	Displaced from Province	Displaced to Province
Herat	3,311	10,524
Nangarhar	32,137	37,911
Takhar	93,765	92,750

The results from the household survey, focus groups, and interviews conducted for this report reflect the official numbers with the majority of participants stating that violent conflict was the main reason they were forced to leave home. The conflict's nature varied; however, multiple factors drove

The other had left Afghanistan three times, including staying in Iran and Belgium but planned to leave again if circumstances allowed. Nevertheless, there is little research about returnees' experiences after returning home or documentation of the specific trajectories and circumstances that can lead to further displacement. Despite several evaluations and reports on assisted return programmes, there is little systematic analysis of reintegration programmes' longer-term impact, which is an area that requires more in-depth research.

displacement as outlined below. Conflict-induced displacement can be triggered by a single event, such as depleting resources over time or group decisions involving dozens of families coming back together. For example, a sudden significant spike in fighting left families in the Baharak district of Takhar Province with no choice but to leave immediately without possessions. Displaced families always hope

"We were living in Baharak District of Takhar province; our life was going well there. We had farming agriculture, and two of our household members were teachers, and our life was going on well. In the last days, our village security became worse, and the Taliban attacked our district, making it insecure, so we left our village and district. Right now, the security of our village is good to some extent during the day, but during the night, the security gets worse, as Taliban are still active, and some other anonymous armed people also misuse the title of Taliban." – IDP, Interview, Takhar

to return home, but they are uncertain when or how that would be possible. Other participants chose to remain in their villages for as long as pos-

sible despite constant armed battles, aerial bombardments, and a spike in civilian casualties. In 2019, multiple factors contributed to an increase in displacements in Shinwar and Pacheragaam districts of Nangarhar Province. Some of these factors include the violence from clashes between the government forces, Taliban, and IS-K; the pressure for male family members to join one of the armed groups; and threats against the Afghan soldiers.

Results from the household survey across the three provinces found that the lack of security was the main driver of displacement (60 per cent), but other issues such as food insecurity (20 per cent), ethnic tensions, and abuse and harassment (10 per cent), natural disasters (7 per cent), and unemployment (3 per cent) contributed to displacement as well.

Participants from the drought-affected districts in the Western region stated that the drought, combined with other factors such as insecurity, access to health, education, and the lack of employment opportunities gave them no choice but to abandon their homes. A young woman who had settled in Maslakh camp in Herat explained that her village was struggling with chronic food insecurity caused by multi-year droughts and the lack of services when fights between Taliban and government forces erupted and forced her to leave with her family. IDPs from Faryab and Ghor Provinces, who had been displaced to Herat, explained that the lack of

schools, high unemployment rates in their home districts, clashes between the government and insurgent forces, and ethnic clashes made it challenging to feed their families or even leave the homes at times.

During the interviews, the discussions highlighted ways in which families in rural areas were being overwhelmed by relentless and multiple challenges. A participant in Jebrayel camp in Herat explained that though his village had struggled with drought for several years, they had managed to adjust to the circumstances. The community was recovering from the food insecurity and damage to livelihoods caused by the disaster when fighting spread into the area. Soon after this, his home was occupied by armed groups, and they were forced to flee. Conflict alone can drive displacement and act as a catalyst to break down the resilience and coping strategies put into place by families and communities.

Such strategies have often been put into place without assistance from the aid community and little government support or presence to address a wide range of development and humanitarian challenges. Across all three provinces, participants stressed the importance of not separating the drivers of displacement from the detrimental effects of years of neglect of the communities by government agencies and international actors.

4.3 The Journey

During the interviews, all participants shared that finding a new home was often challenging and treacherous. Little is known about the realities of the transit phase, during which people are mainly at risk and have little in terms of resources for assistance or support. Low-income families, women, and other vulnerable groups are, particularly at risk. However, the long-distance between areas, lack of security, and environmental factors make the travel to new areas perilous for many displaced people regardless of their pre-existing circumstances.

IDPs try to stay close to home if possible, and nationally most displaced people continue to reside within their home province (Table 7). In Nangahar and Takhar, 84 per cent and 97 per cent of IDPs respectively came from within the provinces.

“When we were moving here, we faced many problems. We had no money to pay for transportation, had to walk for miles, and brought the house tools on donkeys. We have been living in Shaidye camp for one and a half years now.” – IDP, Interview Herat

Table 7: IDPs from Within vs Outside the Provinces (2019)

Province	IDPs from within the Province	IDPs from Outside the Province
Herat	3,305	7,219
Nangahar	31,709	6,202
Takhar	90,027	2,723

Herat was the only province surveyed where the percentage of out of province IDPs (69 per cent) was much higher than provincial IDPs (31 per cent). The increase is partly due to the 2018 displacement in the Western region discussed above in section 3.3. Even intra-province travel, however, often still means covering arduous long distances. Settlement in the closest town or district is not always possible, and after leaving the village, the journey may take days before reaching a new safe location. IDPs from remote villages in Door Baba district of Nangarhar Province faced a 70 km journey to Jalalabad City.

"We just moved to live in this new place in a rental house. We pay 4000 Afghanis per month. Before we were in the city of Taloqan but the house rent was too high. But even now we cannot pay the monthly rent, as we are jobless and there are no work opportunities... This new place is good for us from security perspective, but not for employment as we do not have money in hand to run a business here, or even to buy from shopkeepers and sell on the road. My father is doing labor work in the bazaar to afford the family." – *IDP Interview, Takhar*

Comparatively, displaced families from Kunar Province going to Jalalabad had a slightly longer trip of 85 km, but along a mostly paved road. The journey from Kunar, however, presents different challenges and can be more dangerous.

Displaced families in Takhar, a mainly rural province, travelled over 150 km to reach Taloqan City. IDPs made journeys of approximately 260 km in Herat from Farsi district, located on the province's southern edge. Many others travelled even further distances from other provinces, including trips of over 400 km from the point of origin to Maslakh, Shai-dayee, and Jebayel. During these lengthy journeys, families often deplete their resources paying for transportation, food, and bribes.

The remoteness or lack of security that can make locations inaccessible to outsiders hinders those wanting to leave similar areas. As a result, participants from districts that were cut off from main roads or plagued by ongoing fighting had to walk for long distances or struggle to find transportation to secure areas. Eshkamash district, located 120 km from Taloqan City in Takhar, was cut-off from the rest of the province due to violent clashes between the Taliban and government forces in 2019. Due to

"Travelling from our village in Maidan Wardak to Kabul, we had no problem and very smoothly moved, but during Kabul-Herat highways, we have faced a financial problem as well because the Taliban appeared suddenly along the road." – *IDP, Interview, Herat*

the uncertain and sporadic nature of the fighting, travel to the area was limited even in periods of relative security. As a result, recently displaced families from the district struggled to find vehicles to transport them out of the area when fighting intensified. Ehsanullah, a recent IDP, explained that his family did not own a car, and the few available rental taxis were charging high fares - more than he could afford. He later found a driver who charged 6,000 Afghanis to get him to a secure area near Taloqan City, leaving him with little money in his pocket after arrival for food and shelter.

IDPs must deal with the fear and shock of leaving one's home behind and the uncertainty and danger of travelling to a sometimes-unknown place amid an ongoing conflict. Some participants travelled through several insecure areas before reaching a safe place. IDPs from Nangarhar and Takhar discussed paying tax to pass through roadblocks set up by security forces and non-state armed groups before reaching the provincial centres where they settled. Enroute to safety, IDPs continued to face insecurity, particularly if the fighting was not contained to one location but had spread throughout the area or to the neighbouring districts and provinces.

The internal displacement journeys in all three provinces were characterised by uncertainty, insecurity, and vulnerability. Afghans faced considerable risk during their attempts to reach a safer place, and along the way, there is little to no assistance available for these families. Ultimately, the experience of settlement is influenced by what happens before and during the journey and the receiving community's dynamics. However, much more is known about the process that refugees go through when returning to Afghanistan than IDPs' internal journey. The lack of information about the trajectory and the fluidity of forced internal migration in Afghanistan hinders our understanding of displacement and IDPs' needs once they relocate.

4.4 Arrival and Assistance

Understandably, since conflict is the most common driver of displacement, the most frequently cited reason for choosing a location to settle was better security in the area. Other considerations, such as improved access to services and employment, also ranked highly. Lastly, proximity to relatives and the community of origin and ethnic ties were also important factors for both the IDPs and returnees across all provinces. However, several families surveyed and individuals from focus groups confirmed that they had moved multiple times after being displaced due to economic circumstances or a lack of material resources.

Families stop in several locations before deciding on one place to settle. These smaller movements were usually attributed to an inability to find suitable housing or schools for their children. The IDPs who had gone to provincial centres, such as Taloqan City, sometimes moved to the outskirts of city boundaries where they could find cheaper housing but still had access to the city's services and employment opportunities. This common trend is often not tracked by international agencies or government and not necessarily viewed as secondary displacement.

According to the survey results, just over 50 per cent of displaced families had received assistance from the government, local NGOs, UN, or international agencies. The most commonly provided assistance was emergency food and non-food items, water, and emergency shelter (usually tents). Several returnees in Nangarhar and Herat had received legal aid, financial support, and transportation, and only three displaced families in Takhar were given emergency medical treatment. There was little offered in terms of longer-term assistance, though officials in Herat spoke of recent job training programmes in the area aimed at improving employability.

One of the obstacles to receiving aid is the IDP registration process required by government offices and aid agencies to access emergency assistance. To be recognised as an IDP, one must present a *Tazkira*—the Afghan national ID card—, and two witnesses from the area to confirm the individual's identity. Persons without a *Tazkira* can be barred from receiving assistance. The combination of an official document and external corroboration is meant

to reduce attempts at corruption. Corruption may have less influence on national and international actors' ability to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced Afghans than is assumed in policy circles.

The most cited incidents of corruption involved local government officials or community leaders demanding bribes from families seeking assistance. Another widely cited experience was host community or non-IDPs trying to access aid packages or resources allocated for IDPs and returnees. Beyond the consensus in several focus groups that corruption does occur, there was little information regarding the drivers, extent, and impact of local corruption on addressing displaced communities' needs. The protracted nature of the conflict in Afghanistan, a history of circular migration, and the fluidity of population movements at all levels—community, family, and individual—however, have made efforts to categorise displaced people difficult, even for Af-

"Security is better here than our original place of residence. People of this place are more educated than our people and have a good economy compared to our people. Because of the war, we were unable to get educated and cannot provide the same for our children now." – IDP, Interview, Herat

ghans themselves. Many IDPs have never held a *Tazkira* or may have lost their documentation during displacement. A new *Tazkira* can only be issued in one's district of origin. It is unlikely that recently displaced families would be able to return to their districts immediately after leaving to get a new *Tazkira*.

Even if they could return, there was no guarantee that the local administrative offices responsible for registration would be functioning or distributing ID cards. In many secure areas, the local government offices operate on a limited basis. Therefore, Afghans who require a *Tazkira* would be forced to travel to provincial centres to register themselves and their families. After recognising these obstacles, recent government policy has created more flexibility regarding the registration process.

However, during this study, there was a lack of knowledge of the recent policy provisions by government officials. Rather strict adherence to the already established registration and aid distribution process continued to be the norm, which keeps the much-needed assistance out of reach of IDPs without identification.

Additionally, both host and displaced community participants expressed concern and frustration about the perceived lack of assistance from national and international actors for displaced people. Many families did not receive assistance, and the emergency aid provided was insufficient even to address their short-term needs. The government and aid agencies' slow and inadequate response impacted

4.5 Quality of Life and Work

After relocation by IDPs, the most cited problem was unemployment, followed by a lack of access to food and land (see Box 5 below). While pre-existing poverty was not uncommon among IDPs, even those who worked and owned land or assets in their place of origin faced a significant drop in their quality of life after displacement. Those fleeing often left with few belongings. Resources may be used up along the way, as discussed above. However, in several cases, families sold their belongings for cash to afford housing as they struggled to find work in the receiving community.

"Though our economic condition is not good, the situation is better than in our hometown. I am a Mullah in a Mosque and receive 3000 Afghanis monthly as salary from people in the community. We have a shelter problem. I have rented a house and can hardly collect the amount to pay the owner of the house. The only advantage we have here is at least we have access to health and education services." – IDP, Interview, Herat

Among most IDP families, at least one member of the household was working. Displaced participants included skilled workers and professionals who could sometimes find work in schools and health centres or set-up a small business. In Herat, women also worked as cleaners, nannies, or teachers. Nevertheless, day wage and survivalist jobs were the most common source of employment. Daily wage labourers receive approximately 300 Afghanis (4

the IDP families and placed greater pressure on host communities to navigate the IDPs' challenges. Host communities rarely received support to help them absorb the new arrivals (GIZ, 2019). Therefore, the lack of assistance to both communities acted as a catalyst fuelling inter-community tensions. Moreover, native residents often expressed frustration regarding IDPs' negative impact on the local economy and services. The government and aid agencies, however, were often held accountable for inaction. Corruption, lack of governance, and insufficient aid were all seen as contributing factors to untenable circumstances for IDPs and host communities. The most common source of support for displaced families was the local community.

U.S. dollars) per day, but work is highly precarious. Without a regular income, families were stuck in temporary housing, unable to pay rent, or vulnerable to evictions. Persistent unemployment led to food insecurity and prevented families from sending their children to school, further contributing to child labour.

Subsequently, the lack of sustainable job training programmes and loans for businesses further contributed to this problem. Among the host residents surveyed, 31 per cent also identified unemployment as a significant challenge facing their communities. The influx of displaced people was perceived to hurt the already strained economy. While this created some negative sentiments towards the IDPs, many residents acknowledged that poverty in displaced communities was direr than in the host communities. They further identified job training and employment support as a critical area for international aid and national government actors to support displaced people.

While it was clear that most families in the study were struggling with a range of issues, including poverty, food insecurity, and lack of access to land, water, and sanitation; they often balanced this with living in a secure area improved access to services. However, the security did not negate the difficulties of displacement and the lack of assistance from local and international actors.

4.6 Staying or Returning Home: Services vs Assistance

Returning home is not a viable option for many IDPs. Due to the ongoing fighting, their homes have been occupied or destroyed. Returnees may have lost contact with relatives after years of living in exile or sold their land before leaving the country to make money. While 36 per cent of the participants interviewed said they would try to go back home, more than half of them, 54 per cent, said they would stay in their new community. The time since displacement and the availability of services in the area were two essential factors in the decision-making process. Only 3 per cent said they would try to go abroad, though several participants said they had sent a member of their family overseas.

If participants had been displaced within the last six months, they often planned to return home as soon as possible. This included returnees that may have come back to Afghanistan several years ago but had been displaced recently from the home they had established upon return. The families who planned to return home tended to live in temporary shelters such as tents; more importantly, their children were often not enrolled in local schools. They still hoped their circumstances were temporary and many felt that if they stayed in the area, their family's circumstances would deteriorate.

The decision to remain in the new areas was closely linked to the availability of essential services and employment opportunities in the area. Factors such as the existence of relatives in the area were important considerations. However, in over 50 per cent of the cases where displaced families said they were planning to remain, their access to services and jobs, even daily wage labour, were among the most important deciding factors. This was particularly the case for families coming from rural or remote areas where only essential health services and informal or primary education were available, and employment was scarce. Access to essential services was a more dominant factor than the provision of aid. This last finding challenges government and aid

agencies' perception that longer-term emergency support to displaced communities will prevent families from returning home.

Many of the villages where IDPs in the study came from were poor and marked by food insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and the lack of essential services and local government offices. Over the past twenty years, the focus on insecure provinces and the lack of attention to rural areas by international donors have contributed to the lack of development in these areas. Neglected for years now, most of these districts were previously peaceful but are now exhausted by ongoing armed conflict, and there-

"The main reason we have left our hometown was poverty; our daughters could not go to school because of insecurity and harassment, access to health services was very limited. These are the reasons that three-years ago, we left our hometown and came to Herat. To some extent, life is better here, we have access to education, and our children can go to school with no fear that access to health services is good but not sufficient. After all, we feel much better than we were living in our hometown." – IDP Interview, Herat

fore, struggle not only with a lack of development but also insecurity. This combination both contributes to displacement and prevents return.

The emergency aid provided by the government and aid agencies often includes food, water, and non-food items, including cooking utensils and other essentials. However, none of those interviewed considered short-term aid as a means through which they could improve the life chances of their families. Ultimately, it is not the availability of aid after displacement but the lack of development in the community of origin before displacement that acted as a stronger deterrent to returning home for displaced families.

5 Displaced and Host Community Dynamics

5.1 Inter-Community Conflict

Both IDPs, returnees, and host community members acknowledged that inter-community conflict existed, but few participants had been involved in a dispute themselves. Less than 30 per cent of all participants surveyed or interviewed said they had been involved in a conflict with someone from “the other” community, referring to the host community. Except for one host community in Nangarhar, and a few residents from Herat, host communities did not see the displaced families as a possible insurgent threat but instead focused on the new arrivals’ impact on increased crime levels and community conflicts.

Reported conflicts,⁴ 75 per cent of which occurred among young men or children, were mainly verbal disputes, while a few incidents involved criminal activity or physical violence. Among survey participants, most recorded conflicts⁵ were verbal altercations over money, unpaid rent or wages, or cultural issues, particularly relating to the treatment of women. Some participants mentioned severe crimes such as murder and brutal assaults during the interviews and focus groups.

Conflicts over money were frequently related to IDPs’ vulnerability or their lack of social networks in the area. Local landlords attempted to raise the rent, and employers sometimes refused to pay workers their wages. Disputes also emerged when

displaced families could not pay back loans to local residents. In these cases, the IDP families’ poor economic conditions made them dependent upon community loans, and unable to refuse work even if payment was not forthcoming. However, financial disputes rarely ended in violence; instead, they were often verbal and resolved quickly. Conflicts over cultural differences or land were more likely to end in physical altercations. There were few recorded incidents, however, which fell into these categories. More often, participants from both communities described experiencing a violent incident but were unsure of the circumstances surrounding the argument.

There was little evidence or fewer reports of inter-community conflict occurring due to disputes over aid assistance provision. Eighty-five per cent of the host community respondents felt that displaced families had not received sufficient assistance from the government or international community. Aid officials stated that corruption by host community leaders and residents sometimes reduced the amount of assistance available to displaced families. However, this issue was not raised by the IDP participants because either the level of corruption is low, or it may seem unimportant to them. There was, however, noted tension over shared services, including basic needs such as education and health services.

5.2 Tensions Over Services: Health and Education

The most significant source of tension between IDPs and host communities in the study was over access to essential services. In many areas across the country, ongoing and increasing attacks on schools, hospitals, and the historical and continued focus on quantity over quality by international donors have resulted in a functioning but fragile health system and educational sector. Across all three provinces of the study, there was great concern expressed by local residents regarding the impact of IDPs and returnees on the provision and quality of already stretched health and education services. In certain

areas, the population had nearly doubled in recent months, and the primary service providers struggled to cope with the burgeoning numbers and range of issues that faced the displaced families.

The host community participants’ perceptions were influenced by the types of health facilities that were present in their districts. Health clinics and basic health centres with few workers and limited supplies struggled to accommodate even small increases in the numbers of clients, whereas areas with large clinics, hospitals, or private doctors were

⁴ Reported conflicts are conflicts which participants were not directly involved in but had knowledge of to some degree.

⁵ Recorded conflicts are those where participants were directly involved in.

sometimes able to hire additional staff, which helped address the increased need for medical assistance within the community. In Nangarhar, a few host community members stated that while IDPs had placed pressure on the existing health care facilities, they were also helping to improve the quality of services. Several IDPs in the area were trained medical professionals and, therefore, positively contributed to the medical centres' human resource capacity.

"IDPs are affected by the service delivery badly because they face the lack of resources and services which are not sufficient for all population in the community. For instance, in Jebrayel there is only one clinic and limited number of personnel, but the number of patients is high and clinic staff are unable to provide standard and proper services for all patients in one day". – *Host Community, Focus Group, Herat*

Host communities viewed the impact on maternity and child healthcare services as the most significant.

5.3 Land Conflicts and Access to Land

Land ownership is a well-documented source of conflict in Afghanistan. However, throughout the study, the land was not frequently mentioned by participants as a major source of tension between displaced and host communities. Many of the displaced families lived in IDP camps or on government-owned lands. In the peri-urban areas, they also rented houses from landlords on private land, and a small number of returnees owned their own homes, whereas a few participants were squatting on private land.

Purchasing land was strenuous even among those living in formal IDP camps or under LAS. Migrant applicants often do not meet government requirements to purchase land, and officials can be hesitant to distribute land to displaced families. Therefore, there were minimal, if any, land encroachment threats from the IDPs. Host community members were more likely to express frustration over the increase in housing rent due to the IDPs' arrival rather than the local land's occupation or encroachment.

Correspondingly, one of the most severe obstacles facing displaced people in Afghanistan is the lack of

Khatera, a nurse from Taloqan City, explained that IDPs' arrival had weakened the level of services in the maternity and childcare wards not only because of the increased number of patients but also because of the additional time and care that the displaced women and children required. Most IDP patients came from rural areas with little or no access to healthcare services. Therefore, more time was needed to explain primary health care and hygiene practices to the families. Besides the regular check-ups and care provided to pregnant women and children, additional care was required to address the patients' underlying health issues that had often gone untreated. Therefore, the three provinces' health services sectors were consistently perceived as the most affected by recent displacements. Several IDPs surveyed, however, were still unable to access healthcare in their new settlements. In some cases, this was due to the lack of facilities within the area. However, in other cases, families were chronically poor and unable to afford medical treatment, transportation to clinics, or medicine. It is unsurprising then that if access to health services was available in their newly settled areas, the IDPs were less likely to return home.

access to land and tenure security. The implementation of government resettlement programmes has been slowed by arduous administrative processes and further hindered by corruption and a lack of investment and resources from both the government and international actors. To avoid conflict with host communities and powerbrokers, officials continue to discourage resettlements outside of IDPs' areas of origin, and therefore, government officials are cautious about enforcing land reallocation policies or awarding tenure to IDPs. International aid organisations have been hesitant to provide long-term development assistance to the areas identified through government initiatives for returnees and IDP resettlement.

Commonly expressed concerns have focused on the inhabitable and dire nature of land plots and a perceived lack of government commitment to provide basic services and contribute to sustainability. Therefore, since 2005, despite numerous national government policies and programmes, landlessness and a lack of adequate housing remain major obstacles for displaced Afghans. The government pro-

grammes and policies aim to allocate land to displaced persons, formalise and upgrade IDP camps, provide access to social housing in urban centres,

improve the slow-paced response of national and international actors to address these problems.

A Case Study from Nangarhar: Land and Housing in Sheikh Mesri Township

To assist in the resettlement of landless returnees and IDPs, a Presidential Decree governing the allocation of public land to landless returning Afghan refugees and IDPs was issued in December 2005. Under the auspices of the MoRR and its provincial offices, the National Land Allocation Scheme (LAS) legalized the distribution of uncultivated government land to address the needs of displaced families for land and shelter construction.

Since its inception, the LAS has faltered due to problems with transparency and accountability and the lack of adequate sites and infrastructural planning. The scarcity of land has meant that returnees are often allotted land 50 km away from urban centres and usually in areas where they have no means of livelihood or family connections. Furthermore, providing essential services to the sites have been delayed and disrupted, creating emergency relief assistance. Ultimately, of the 60 planned LAS sites, only 29 have been established across the country.

Established in 2006, the Sheikh Mesri Township was the first of five LAS in Nangarhar Province. The camp is located 15 km from Jalalabad City in a desert-like setting far from the main road, while an informal settlement called Lower Sheikh Mesri sits a bit closer to the road. There are 3,500 families in the camp currently, but the population continues to grow daily.

Approximately 70 per cent of Sheikh Mesri Township residents are returnees, while recently displaced families make up the remaining 30 per cent. The residents of the Township have fared better than those in the neighbouring schemes, but the interviews and survey conducted revealed ongoing struggles with poverty, land tenure, and housing.

Salahuddin and his family settled in Sheikh Mesri Township after returning to Afghanistan from Peshawar, where they lived for multiple years during the Taliban era. As refugees in Pakistan, life was complicated and challenging for him and his family. Their access to education and other essential services was restricted, and human rights violated. Af-

ter the collapse of the Taliban, they decided to return to Afghanistan, hoping that job opportunities would be better and that the indignities they faced in Peshawar would no longer be an issue in their own country. Salahuddin and his family returned to Afghanistan with 50 other families. Upon return, they registered with the UNHCR and received a small amount of financial support. The group later settled in Shaikh Mesri Camp.

Unlike Salahuddin, Jaffar and his family arrived recently at the camp after being displaced from Shinwar district in Nangarhar province. The ongoing fighting between the Taliban and the IS-K and regular air-strikes by the Afghan military caused them to flee their home in the Achin Village of Shinwar. Before leaving, he described the situation, stating that "there were many reasons that made us leave our home. The battles were so bad that we were not even able to work on our farms. The war between the IS-K and the Afghan military was ongoing, and the victims were innocent civilians. Our child over the age of 18 was threatened by opposition forces and told to join them to fight against the Afghan government, or they would be killed. When we left Achin, the violent clashes didn't even allow us to take any of our possession from the house. We fled with the clothes we were wearing. When we came to this camp, we borrowed some house tools from our relatives and neighbours."

When Salahuddin first arrived, the camp lacked even necessary facilities. Soon afterwards, the UNHCR and several INGOs began implementing basic hygiene, water, sanitation, and shelter programmes in the camp and provided support for the construction of schools and a primary health clinic. The township's proximity to the urban provincial capital and the early investment in construction, schools, and shelter has made it more popular than other LAS sites in the province.

The initial investment in Sheikh Mesri Township has slowed over the years. The resurfacing of the main access road has improved transport links to the city, but the lack of nearby jobs remains a challenge for many residents who cannot afford to travel daily to

Jalalabad city for uncertain work opportunities. Additionally, certain constructed facilities have been put under pressure due to the growing population and lack of support from the government.

Salahuddin explained, "though there are quite a few basic health clinics and schools, they are of a poor standard, and the lack of drinking water is another problem in the camp." He went on to state that "the reason why donors are not interested enough in assisting the IDPs is that the Afghan government does not formally recognise the camp, and donors think that someday the Afghan government will ask the IDPs and returnees to evacuate the land." Moreover, High levels of unemployment and poverty have meant that even though plots are available in the camp for purchase under the national scheme, many families cannot save enough money to buy land. Currently, only around 20 per cent of the potential family land plots are occupied at Sheikh Mesri Camp.

Conversely, Jaffar, another IDP, was able to purchase a plot of land, but he and his family have been unable to build adequate housing for themselves. Jaffar added that "since we have been here, we have had lots of problems. When we first arrived, we were three families living in one room. I was able to sell the two cars we drove here with from Achin to an Arab man who lives in the host community. I bought a lot of land with that money, but we had no money to build a shelter. We ended up using transitional shelter (tents) for a while. Eventually, we

worked and collected some money. We were able to use that money to build two rooms. Now all three families live in those two rooms." Clean water and proper sanitation are unavailable on the plot of land where their house stands.

The possibility of moving or expanding the house to accommodate Jaffar's extended family members better is unlikely, however, as few members in the household have been able to find regular employment and are forced to depend mostly on daily wage labour.

While Salahuddin and his family owned a plot of land and have been living in Sheikh Mesri Township for several years, their status is still precarious. He expressed his concerns saying that "Sheikh Mesri camp is the property of the Afghan government and we are not yet sure if we would be allowed to live here in the long run."

The recent government policies have committed to formalizing settlements like SMT, but the policy's implementation even in a province like Nangarhar where there is a provincial plan in place has been inconsistent. Moreover, knowledge of the commitments to ensure land rights for displaced Afghans laid out in the new IDP policy is uneven among government officials, particularly at the sub-national level and within the communities themselves. This lack of awareness has left displaced families in vulnerable situations where they are unsure of their rights and unable to plan for their future.

5.4 Conflict Resolution

Both displaced, and host community participants preferred to utilise informal rather than formal justice mechanisms to resolve conflicts. Throughout the interviews, participants expressed a general distrust of the formal justice system and complained about corruption and long waiting periods and trial processes. As a result, community justice mechanisms were considered more reliable and more likely to mediate fairly between disputing parties. In Herat

Province, serious crimes such as murder were processed through the formal court system, but conflicts between people in the community, even when involving criminal activity, were mediated by the *Arbab*, elders, or the *Shura*. After a decision was made by the informal actors solving the case, they would then inform the formal justice actors. The preference for informal justice actors was consistent across all three provinces and target groups, including the youth and women.

5.5 Collective Community Works

Rather than pervasive inter-community conflict, evidence from all three provinces pointed to the existence of efforts to enhance collective community resilience. Local communities helped displaced families despite the scarcity of resources, strained public services, and ethnic divisions. This shift, noted at different levels across all three provinces, is partly attributed to a growing acceptance by host communities that internal displacement is a common occurrence. Displaced families suffer due to the shared experiences of violence, insecurity, and poverty affecting Afghan families worldwide. Therefore, the host communities should assist IDPs and returnees

5.6 Trust and Social Cohesion

Distrust is often a product of displacement in Afghanistan where social cohesion and trust are regularly tested, given the high levels of insecurity. Displaced families and individuals enter into new and sometimes unknown territories after experiencing violence or disaster, losing their homes, and sometimes surviving perilous journeys.

“Yes, we trust the majority of families because they are good people, they do not create problems, but there are a limited number of families who are not trustworthy, especially those families where one or two family members are addicted and commit illegal acts.” - *Host Community Interview, Herat*

In Afghanistan, local communities often rely on traditional or community-based systems to maintain their security. Outsiders are considered a potential threat to the control and certainty that these informal actors can provide to their communities. New dynamics that require careful negotiation are created as areas become home to a mix of returnees, IDPs, and local villagers. Therefore, friction among displaced families and displaced and host communities is unsurprising.

During the interviews, the IDPs were asked if they trusted their neighbours and, if yes, to provide examples. In response, around 95 per cent said they trusted their neighbours and felt that they had been received well by their host communities. Among host communities, levels of trust were slightly lower at 25 per cent. Nevertheless, less than 2 per cent of host community participants said that no family

when possible. As such, there was evidence across the three provinces that displaced families received support for daily basic needs from other displaced families and host community members. Without negating the existence of inter-community conflict, the study found that the local community cultural norms, often constructed in policy documents and reports as driving ethnic divisions and violence, are, in fact, the impetus for a crucial and growing source of informal humanitarian assistance to displaced families, and efforts to strengthen overall community resilience to violence and uncertainty.

members had social interactions with displaced people.

“When we were first accommodated in the camp, some families from the community were unhappy and didn’t allow us to live in the camp, but the people are supportive now.” - *IDP resident, Interview, Nangarhar*

However, a more nuanced picture emerged during the interviews and focus group discussions where trust and cohesion levels differed across the three provinces. In Nangarhar and Herat, distrust between groups was more common, whereas, in Takhar, communities seemed to have built social cohesion despite the changing demographics.

Nangarhar has received the second-highest number of returnees in Afghanistan after Kabul Province. The lack of security in the province due to tribal and armed conflicts between the government forces, the Taliban, and IS-K regularly leads to new displacements. Of the three provinces covered in this report, Nangarhar had the most conflict between and within communities. Displaced families in Sheikh Mesri Camp said while they had been able to establish good relations with their neighbours in the township, the first months after displacement were challenging as families were chased out of the camp or had neighbours that refused to speak to them.

After this adjustment period passed, however, they were able to form strong friendships with their

neighbours. Moreover, conflicts between the camp's displaced residents and the nearby local communities were not uncommon either. According to the camps' residents, however, verbal disputes were frequent but were usually resolved by the families involved. On the other hand, physical altercations between the host community and IDPs were less common. Some study participants shared examples of fights or assaults, resulting in serious injury where perpetrators were tried, convicted, and imprisoned.

Host residents from Behsud and Surkhrod districts in Nangarhar Province expressed empathy and caution towards their IDP neighbours. The host communities understood that IDPs were displaced due to Afghanistan's ongoing conflict. At the same time, however, host community members displayed caution towards newly displaced families and initially often kept a close watch on their activities. However, residents stressed that while some IDP individuals and families could cause problems in the community, this was not reflective of all IDPs as they came from different areas and had different habits. Families that caused problems were asked to leave the community. However, over time, as the IDPs and host communities interacted more, their trust increased too.

"The local people welcomed us, and we are happy from them, and I trust my neighbors. Though yes, sometimes we have a conflict with the neighbors. For example, I worked for one person in the local community, and he did not pay me my daily wage. When I asked him to pay my wages, he refused to for some time, but later on, he paid me, and we resolved the conflict." – IDP, Interview, Takhar

Occasionally, even in cases where host community members expressed negative or suspicious IDPs' views, they still assisted displaced families needing

food, clothing, or money. However, displaced people from other provinces, particularly Kunar Province, which borders Nangarhar to the north, were an exception. IDPs from Kunar were regarded as problematic and even dangerous. Residents commented that many of the out-of-province IDPs came from rural villages and had different cultural norms than those practised by Nangarhar's locals, such as girls going to schools after a certain age. This had caused disputes between families. IDPs' arrival was also linked to increased crimes, including murders, abductions, robberies, land conflicts, and armed attacks by anti-government groups.

Alternatively, in Takhar, efforts to create social cohesion between displaced and host residents were widespread. Across the survey, interviews, and focus groups, only three host community members in Takhar Province said displaced people were a source of increased insecurity in the area. IDPs also widely commented that they felt accepted by the local community and had developed good relations with their neighbours. In the two instances where conflicts were reported, they were related to money, attempts explicitly at rent extortion, and failure to pay wages. Host community residents also acknowledged that IDPs in the area faced the mentioned types of problems. Several participants had assisted displaced families who were thrown out of their housing because they could not pay rent. They helped them locate alternative or shared accommodation. Generally, however, both the displaced and host participants confirmed that the communities worked together to try and maintain peace and help one another when possible.

It would be inaccurate, nor is it the intention here, to imply that the communities where the research was conducted were conflict-free and cohesive. Instead, the key finding here is that given the context of conflict and communities' experiences, both host and displaced; it is the level of trust, an extension of empathy, and efforts to create cohesion that were striking.

6 Displaced Women and Community Life

The interviews and focus groups with female IDPs and returnees closely mirrored the overall findings of the report. Two issues were highlighted in the

discussions: the existence of persistent food insecurity and the role of community-based support networks.

6.1 Food Insecurity and Environmental Hazards

The most cited challenge by displaced women surveyed in the study was food insecurity. In total, 80 per cent of the female focus group participants struggled to provide their families with regular meals. Numerous areas of Afghanistan, including Takhar, are prone to drought, which leads to a lack of food for the local communities (IFRC, 2018). However, none of the IDP women had resettled in areas where drought or food scarcity was prevalent. The food insecurity faced by women and families was due to two factors: chronic poverty and environmental hazards and pollution.

Chronic poverty was particularly acute among some of the women from Damaan IDP Camp in Nangarhar Province. Households headed by females, or households where no one could work due to age or disability, were among the most vulnerable. One participant whose husband could not work due to his disability said she begged on the streets for money for food. A widow, with several young children, depended on her eldest son's income from shoe polishing to support the family. Two participants said that even when they were able to buy food, it was often not sufficient to feed all family members. In both cases, the women tended to go hungry to allow their elders or children to eat. Though common among women to sacrifice their meals, unfortunately, doing so contributes to poor health outcomes for women who are also tasked with the family's main caregiving roles.

The low quality of affordable food was another concern heavily linked to pollution and environmental hazards. IDP Women in all three provinces commented that their families regularly suffered from ill-health due to the low-quality of foodstuff, which could lead to food poisoning. In Nangarhar, women in displaced communities attempted to stretch small quantities of food by adding unhealthy water. Meanwhile, in Takhar and Herat Provinces, cooking methods and food storage practices had detrimental health effects on the women and their families. The emissions released from materials utilized

to make cooking fires, such as plastic bottles and containers, old wires, and cotton, often contaminated the food, led to various illnesses, and had damaging environmental impacts. Due to the lack of electricity in IDP communities in Herat, refrigerated food is often spoiled. Additionally, because many of the women and their families' poor economic situation, spoiled food was still consumed, often resulting in food poisoning. Many of the women in the focus groups were forced to choose between severe illness or persistent hunger. They often chose the former, hoping some nutritious value would be reaped from the food, and any food-related sickness would be manageable or short-lived.

"It happens many times that food insecurity affected my children, because we cook the food with fire using plastic and wires and that is poisoning the food and causing diseases." – IDP Returnee, Focus Group, Takhar

It should be noted that food insecurity did not affect all the women in the study. Even among displaced female focus group participants from the same area, there were significant differences in their families' socio-economic status. For instance, two of the women in the Damaan IDP Camp focus group – one whose father was employed in Jalalabad City and another who had been able to send her son to study in Europe – were not burdened with food insecurity.

As mentioned above, the constant displacement of people over four decades in Afghanistan has produced diverse IDP settlements in terms of socio-economic status, tribal affiliations, family norms, and composition. As a result, the obstacles facing women and the coping mechanisms they can draw upon also differ. This is a constant and crucial theme throughout the report in all provinces and one which can complicate the design and delivery of assistance programmes.

6.2 Women, Conflict and Community-Based Support Networks

There was little evidence of disputes among women within the displaced communities, or between the host communities and the displaced population. In all three provinces, there were only two communicated reports of family disputes, both of which were resolved with assistance from the community elders. This finding was in-line with the feedback from the interviews and discussions held with other community members. Conversely, strong cohesion and support networks were in place among displaced and host community women in all three provinces.

“When we were displaced to here, we didn’t even have clothes to wear, and women from the community helped us and provided us with clothes to wear” - IDP, Focus Group, Nangarhar

Across all three provinces, community-based support networks were in place among women, which have facilitated the integration of families, women’s participation in community life, and children’s emotional well-being. In multiple cases, the host community’s women had formed groups or made individual efforts to assist displaced women with clothing and other basic needs.

In Nangarhar Province, the displaced women were also integrated into the community governance structures, such as the local women’s shura, and were invited to participate in INGO programmes for women in the area. Additionally, the integration of displaced children into communities was significant. Female focus group participants commented that their children were well-received by the host communities, made friends effortlessly, had formed playgroups, and did not face any exclusion and discrimination because of their IDP or returnee status.

The community-based groups provided essential relief and support to women and children and created a safe space to communicate emotions and share experiences. These informal networks were vital in assisting female participants in navigating the challenges and mental stress they faced due to displacement, insecurity, and the loss of a sense of community from their original homes.

Health care has been one of the primary investment areas by international donors in Afghanistan and a

priority for the Afghan government. However, it is crucial to note that these investments focus more heavily on physical health and less on mental health. This difference in investments is prevalent despite a growing and significant need for mental health services and professional staff. Recent figures suggest that over 60 per cent of the population experience mental stress (World Bank Blogs, 2019). Nationally, there is approximately one psychiatrist for every 435,000 people, one psychologist for every 333,000 people (Charlson, and others, 2019), and only 200 beds available in public mental health facilities.

The prevalence of mental illness is higher among Afghan women than men and can contribute to poor maternal healthcare, slow child development, and malnutrition (Sayed, 2011). Gendered social restrictions and taboos hinder Afghan women’s access to mental health services (Ibid.). More importantly, displaced women and girls are among the most vulnerable populations for emotional trauma. Therefore, IDP women are at risk of mental stress due to the instability inherent in situations of forced migration and the increased isolation and limitations on movement due to insecurity or gender norms in their new settlements.

As a result of the significant gaps existing in mental health service provision in the national health care system, and limitations around social and gender norms, community-based groups are often the only available support system for women and children. It is crucial to note that few reports, policy documents (P. de Berry and others, 2018), and programming on forced displacement in Afghanistan consider the essential role that everyday community-based efforts play in psycho-social health and well-being (UNESCO, 2019). These groups build social cohesion, extend friendship, and provide hospitality among women and children.

Community-based groups cannot replace the large-scale facility-based services required to address the overwhelming mental health challenges that displaced women and children struggle within Afghanistan due to their experiences with decades of conflict, displacement, and poverty. As evidenced throughout the three provinces surveyed for this study, local networks and social groups play a significant role in providing psycho-social support to

displaced women and children and building community resilience. Therefore, investment in longer-term mental health facility-based services and professional training in Afghanistan is central. It is imperative that immediate engagement with and support from donors to informal support networks be prioritized, which can substantially impact displaced women and children's psycho-social well-being.

These investments and engagements can support women's groups in the host community who provide help despite being faced with a lack of resources themselves.



Literacy course for IDP girls, Isaac Suleiman village, Area 13, Herat, October 2019
Photo © FES / Jamshid Ismail

7 Displaced Youth and Aspirations

On a global scale and over the last two decades, there has been an increased focus on youth's role in social and armed conflict and violence. Although globally, youth represent a critical mass in urban, post-conflict, and displacement-affected situations, they are often invisible as a distinct category or social group (Rivas, 2015). With 63 per cent of the population—27.5 million people—under 25 years of age, Afghanistan has one of the world's youngest populations (UNFPA, 2018). Analysis of Afghan youth experiences with migration, displacement, and conflict are often focused on young refugees or asylum seekers, while a smaller body of research and reports discuss returnee youth in urban settings (Bose and Schmeidl, 2016). Therefore, it was crucial in this study to give weight to IDP youth's experiences, who, despite their high numbers, are rarely given priority in development programmes and discussions (Rogan, 2016).

7.1 Youth Conflicts

Conflict among IDP and host community youth was a regular occurrence in all three provinces. Five youth participants in Nangarhar and Herat, most non-youth focus group participants, and interviewees in each province spoke of either witnessing or hearing about instances of direct violence occurring between displaced and host community youth in their areas. The majority of young men and women interviewed, however, were not directly involved in a conflict. Only two young interviewees recalled being involved in disputes themselves, and only a small number of young people identified youth conflict as a significant problem in the area. Ultimately, while the clashes between displaced and host community youth were acknowledged as being commonplace, it was unclear if the prevalence or severity of these conflicts was higher or lower than the rate of conflict among youth from within the same community or adults in either case.

The nature of the disputes varied but often included direct physical violence. Incidents ranged from murder, assault, stabbings, fistfights, intimidation, harassment, and verbal arguments. While the arguments and intimidation could be tied to one's social status, the murder, assault, stabbings, and fistfights were personal and sporadic, not necessarily part of systematic targeting. The main reasons for conflict

A closer look at the experiences of displaced and host young people in the three provinces surveyed for this study reveals a complex picture with varied experiences of education, violence, family obligation, and voluntary commitments often running alongside high levels of economic vulnerability. In the six focus groups carried out with the youth during the research, four issues received significant attention: including conflicts among the youth, the transition between education and employment, migration, and their uncertain futures.

"Yes, sometimes conflicts between youth occur though I didn't see this myself. I think a big part of the reason this happens is unemployment. For example, if one worker will be needed in the market and 50 workers will run after it, then the youth will be engaged in some kind of conflict and controversy." – *Host Community, Focus Group, Herat*

between the youth were unemployment, poverty, cultural differences, and honour assaults. High rates of unemployment led to disputes over jobs, worker exploitation, and conflicts over money. Youth coming from rural areas struggled to get used to urban cultural, social, and gender norms.

"Sometimes youth in the community tease girls and as a result youth of the community and IDPs get engaged in conflicts." – *Host Community, Interview, Herat*

For example, young women interviewed from Herat and Nangarhar commented that IDP youth sometimes ridiculed or harassed young girls in the area, leading to family disputes. In Nangarhar, participants confirmed that these types of disputes could escalate very quickly

7.2 Education and Employment

Over the last twenty years, the international community has contributed heavily to Afghanistan's education sector and specifically to the school's construction. The quality of education, however, has been contested by the aid community and local population. Nonetheless, the result of this investment was reflected in the interviews with the IDP youth. Regardless of gender, most IDP youth participating in the survey across the three provinces were either in school or had completed their schooling after displacement. In Takhar, all internally displaced youth had access to education. The situation was similar in Nangarhar, and some youth were pursuing higher education degrees at local universities. The exception was Maslakh Camp in Herat Province, where focus group participants agreed that access to education was uneven across the IDP youth. While some youth were in school, several cited that poverty and insecurity were significant obstacles to continuing their education. Regardless of these challenges, education remained a priority for both the youth and their families in Herat, and low-income families made an effort to send at least one child to school if they could afford to do so.

"Education opportunities for youth are favorable, but with low and poor quality. But employment opportunities for youth are minimal, and most of the educated young guys have survival jobs in the market, and some who cannot even find survival jobs are leaving from Iran and Turkey to find work. Years ago, employment opportunities with INGO were good, but nowadays most NGOs discontinued their business" – IDP, Focus Group, Takhar

Comparatively, the quality of education varied within the provinces. In both Nangarhar and Herat, youth shared that certain schools in the area struggled to provide quality education due to a substandard curriculum and lack of books and stationery, which continued to be in short supply despite repeated requests to the government for assistance. However, in Sheikh Mesri Camp of Nangarhar Province, there were more options for education than Herat. While some schools were ill-equipped to accommodate the high numbers of students, others provided satisfactory classes. In Takhar Province, the situation was quite different because the quality of

educational services existing in the provincial capital, Taloqan, were often better than those offered in the rural areas where the displaced youth originated. Therefore, displacement in Takhar increased the educational possibilities available to IDP youth.

The most common obstacle facing the youth was access to work. The gap between education and employment was a great source of frustration for IDP youth. While most young IDPs could access schooling, there were fewer employment opportunities available to them after completing their studies. Whereas the value placed on education remained high, there was a disconnect between education, livelihoods, and life chances because finding employment was not closely connected to the level of education one received. Moreover, most IDP youths were unemployed or underemployed, regardless of their level of education. If they were able to secure employment, this often involved survivalist jobs in local markets. IDP youth are unlike refugees whose status can preclude them from working in the host country's formal economy. Young people who are internally displaced can work, but securing employment was a significant obstacle for many youths in the study. The lack of job prospects was not only a challenge for the youth but also raised as an issue by those in the host community; however, the situation was exacerbated for the IDP youth.

Correspondingly, the IDP youth were forced to adapt to more precarious socioeconomic environments. However, they lacked the social capital that might enable them to find work through established networks and contacts. The inability to secure employment increased their vulnerability, left them open to exploitation, and negatively impacted their ability to either settle or return home. All three provinces lacked the training programmes and employment initiatives essential in a post-conflict environment to help youth strengthen their economic prospects and rebuild their lives. Frustration within the focus groups was evident as the difficulty in transitioning from education to employment also meant that the youth struggled to envision a future for themselves and could not take steps to realize their aspirations.

7.3 Migrating Out of Poverty

A common strategy adopted by the youth to increase income and social mobility was migration. None of the youth interviewed in the study had plans to move to another country. However, several participants in the other IDP focus groups had sent one and sometimes multiple sons or brothers abroad for work. For example, in the Safi district of Takhar Province, all five members of a focus group had sent at least one young man from their family to Iran within the last twelve months. The employment opportunities were perceived to be better in Iran than Afghanistan; nevertheless, few group members received remittances from their relatives. Others who had not received remittances stated that their family members abroad were either poorly paid, in debt to traffickers, unable to find employment, or had lost contact with the family.

7.4 Hope for a More Certain Future

Whether or not young people are involved in a war as armed fighters, they carry the emotional and psychological scars of conflict throughout their lives, further exacerbated by displacement, trauma, the lack of quality education, and unemployment. Therefore, while both the IDP and host community youth were identified as casual perpetrators of violence, these young men and women were also victims of violence.⁶

"I was living in the Nooragal district. Taliban, as well as Daesh, forced me multiple times to join them. They forced many other youths into doing the same – to fight against the government. Therefore, my family decided to leave our home, and we were displaced to Sheikh Mesri Camp" – IDP, Focus Group, Nangarhar

Few of the youth participants said they were traumatized by their experiences, but they often spoke of traumatic experiences such as losing family members, family separation, seeing dead bodies brought to their neighbours' homes, receiving night letters,⁷ or being harassed by armed group members. In Nangarhar, several youths from Pacheragaam and

"We were living in Pacheragaam and my father was working with the Afghan Army. The Taliban warned him many times to either quit or be killed. Therefore, we left our home and came to Jalababad City" – IDP, Focus Group, Nangarhar

Migration to another country was still a viable coping mechanism to counter unemployment and poverty, but IDPs were unaware of the risks of migration and the difficulty of settling in another country. The limited opportunities available to them, however, left some families feeling they had few options.

Noorgal districts discussed the pressure young people in their villages faced to join the Taliban or IS-K. On three different occasions, the threats led the youth and their families to flee their villages, which meant leaving their land and livelihoods behind.

"Yes, sometimes conflicts occur between youths from the community and IDPs, but they are solved by elders and Arabs in the community" – Host Community, Interview, Herat

Despite growing concerns over the youth's role in society, and particularly as potential recruits for armed groups, formal institutions tend to pay inadequate attention to youth development and empowerment. Displaced youth seemed to be sceptical of getting involved with formal politics and expressed feelings of voicelessness, injustice, and exclusion from local, national, and regional political and economic processes. However, youth at the local level had organized themselves into civil society associations and work together with informal justice institutions in their communities. In Nangarhar Province, the IDP youth in the Sheikh Mesri Camp and host community youth in Behsud district had cre-

⁶ According to recent UN reporting, this is a global trend that for youth living in low-income settings, there is a 1 in 50 chance that they will be killed before they reach their 31st birthday.

⁷ Night Letters are written threats.

ated youth associations carrying out public awareness campaigns and participated in conflict resolution forums led by elders in their community. Ultimately, youth participants demonstrated an overwhelming commitment to move forward personally and as a nation to transition into adulthood.

Unfortunately, the desire and enthusiasm for a peaceful Afghanistan and a certain future among the young people is tempered by the ongoing experiences of forced displacement, legacies of war, and fear of inheriting a future rife with conflict.



Children at the Samarkhil Village School, Nangarhar, September 2019

Photo © FES / Jamshid Ismail

8 Conclusion and Recommendations for all Stakeholders

Afghanistan confronts one of the world's most protracted and complex population displacement challenges. Millions of Afghans have returned from neighbouring countries since 2002, and growing numbers of Afghan people are internally displaced. Amidst deepening insecurity and economic fragility, protracted displacement strains public services and intensifies competition for scarce economic opportunities affecting not only displaced people but all Afghans. This report has shed light on the experiences, decisions, and living conditions of displaced Afghans and host communities in Herat, Nangarhar, and Takhar.

Moving Beyond Coordination Obstacles and Complexity

- Reflect and invest more seriously in the lessons learned from the past. The complexity of the problem can no longer be a rationale for the failures of delivery and assistance. Migration and displacement in Afghanistan are complex, and this is the reality of displacement in protracted conflict everywhere. Both national and international actors in Afghanistan have continued to debate the same obstacles to providing practical humanitarian assistance for the displaced populations over the past ten years. Agencies have to diversify their programming and make them locally relevant to respond to local needs. There must be a recognition that standardized approaches are not sufficient and innovation in both theory and practice is necessary.

Improve Coordination

- Strengthen Afghan-international partnerships using a vision that centres equality among partners. Common standards and better cooperation and coordination are within reach and will go a long way in providing the evidence base required for policy work, development planning, and humanitarian operations. Significant advances have been made, including incorporating innovative technol-

ogies, but partnerships at the national and international levels and government agencies' capacity to record displacement data must be strengthened.

- Align datasets and data collection systems using complementary definitions, standards, and methods.

Invest in Innovation and Prioritise Skill Transfer

- Introduce variety and innovation in data collection to gain a better and more accurate understanding of the complexity of people's experiences, movements, and trajectories. Data must be gathered regularly over extended periods across borders.
- Address the data, analysis, and capacity gaps that hinder the development of informed and effective responses to displacement and implementation of a systematic approach. The appropriate tools for detailed needs assessments, risk analyses, investment planning, and progress monitoring already exist.⁸ Therefore, a contextually specific combination of these new tools can help international agencies and Afghan officials develop sustainable approaches to displacement.
- Investment in skills development of national and local authorities through training, financial, and technical support is also crucial and can enable them to incorporate new tools, including tracking systems and needs assessment technology, into national planning and response activities.

Engage with Local Resilience

- Build upon and engage with the resilience that is emerging in both the host and displaced communities. A shift in focus from what international agencies can do for communities to strengthen the capacity within local communities should be pursued. This approach could involve creating local focal points for the production of humanitarian products, which would significantly decrease sourcing materials' costs. Doing so can also create employment for skilled and unskilled community

⁸ Several innovations and tools have been documented in the Global Humanitarian Review 2020.

members and facilitate rapid response times. Similar programmes have been implemented in other conflict zones in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan African countries.

- Create inclusive community-led processes for programme design and policy development. Displaced and host communities should be included in the processes that decide policy and programming objectives and desired outcomes and assessments. The voices of affected populations should not be an afterthought because they are integral to developing a collective targeted response to Afghanistan's displacement.
- Rethink the humanitarian-development nexus and its practical applications in programming and policy development based on community perspectives and realities. The response to displacement needs to move beyond short-term humanitarian assistance to address the medium and long-term needs of displaced populations both in areas of arrival and origin.

Strengthen Accountability Measures

- Enhance NGO accountability to local communities through the creation of community-based evaluation and participatory post-assistance forums. Displaced communities are amongst the most vulnerable populations in Afghanistan. There is little that exists to hold national and international aid workers and policymakers accountable. Accountability tends to flow upwards to donors or political actors. Donors can, however, use their influence to pressure aid organizations to have greater accountability to local communities.

Invest in Community-Based Mental Health Services

- Support psycho-social health initiatives at the community level. The widespread impact of mental health challenges in local communities, particularly displaced populations, needs to be fully acknowledged and prioritized in humanitarian assistance programming. Continued support aimed at facility-based services is necessary. However, greater investment in community-based services will provide accessible and immediate support to local communities.
- Increase support for women's and youth networks to strengthen community cohesion and address mental health needs.
- Invest in young displaced persons by providing vocational training and skills development programmes for youth that can provide career opportunities not limited to daily wage labour or cash for work.

Invest in Understanding the Youth's Needs

- Conduct further research into the lives and priorities of the Afghan youth, which will provide a better understanding of how relations between the public officials (national and international) and a massive population of young, marginalized, and alienated Afghans directly impact the governance, security, and development prospects of Afghanistan. Understanding the youth's needs will provide policymakers and other stakeholders with clues enabling them to better support millions of young Afghans affected by the lack of security, displacement, and violence.

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Annexes

Annex I. Provincial Household Survey

The below chart represents the results of the selected questions from 89 household surveys conducted in Herat, Nangarhar, and Takhar Provinces.

A. Experience of Displacement

Topic	IDPs and Returnees
Displacement drivers	Insecurity - 60 per cent Food insecurity - 20% Ethnic tensions – 10% Abuse/harassment – 10% Natural disasters- 7% Unemployment – 3%
Time spent in settlements	>6 months – 25% 6 – 1 year – 3% 1 – 2 years - 12% 2 – 3 years – 10% 4 – 5 years – 25%
Secondary displacements	20% of participants were displaced multiple times: 10% - 2 times 8% - 3 times 2% - 4 times
Likelihood of return/future movement	1. Stay in this location - 54% 2. Go back to the community of origin - 36% 3. Go abroad alone - 1.5 % 4. Go abroad with family –1.5 % 5. Undecided - 1%

B. Concerns and Coping Strategies

Question/Topic	IDP/Returnee	Host Community
What are the three greatest problems facing your household currently?	Under-employment – 24% Access to food – 14% Access to land – 14% Lack of savings – 11% Insecurity – 9% Access to electricity – 9% Lack of marketable skills – 3% Lack of social network – 3% Access to health services – 6% Lack of identity papers – 2% Lack of land title – 2% Sanitation facilities – 1% No education certificate – 1%	Under-employment – 31% Lack of savings – 11% Insecurity – 8% Access to health services – 8% Access to food – 7% Corruption – 6% Lack of marketable skills – 3% No identity papers – 3% Access to electricity – 3% Lack of land title – 2% Access to land – 2% <i>Social discrimination</i> – 2 % No education certificate – 1%

	Corruption – 1%	
How do you cope with these problems?	Take Loans – 29% Reducing food intake– 23% Decreased spending -12% ^[11] _[SEP] Selling household items -12% Purchasing food on credit from traders - 6% Selling livestock - 6% Family member migrating abroad -6% Receiving help from other people in the community -2% Family member migrating within Afghanistan -2% Sending minors to work – 2% Assistance from government -1%	Take loans – 27% Reducing food intake – 19% Decreased spending – 18% ^[11] _[SEP] Family member migrating abroad - 10% Selling livestock -7% Purchasing food on credit from traders – 4 % Receiving help from other people in the community - 1% Selling household items ^[11] _[SEP] - 4% Working on relief programmes with government/NGOs/UN – 3% Sending minors to work – 3% Assistance from NGO/UN - 3% Family member migrating within Afghanistan – 1%

C. Community Relations

Question	IDP/Returnee	Host Community
Is where you currently reside welcoming to the IDPs/Returnees?	Yes – 98% No – 2%	Yes – 77% No – 23%
What type of impact have the IDPs/Returnees had on the community?	n/a	Pressure on education or health services – 24% Jobs taken from Host communities – 21% Increased insecurity – 14% Increased crime – 14% Land occupied by IDPs/Returnees– 9% Increased trade – 5% Developed businesses 5% Increased number of education professionals– 4% No Impact – 4%
Have you or your family members personally experienced a dispute or conflict with a community member(s) /IDPs/Returnees?	No- 98% Yes – 2%	No– 73% Yes– 27%
What type of dispute or conflict was this?	1 conflict recorded: Verbal dispute	7 conflicts recorded: Verbal dispute – 3 Physical fight – 2 Harassment – 2 Legal/Property – 2

What was the cause of the dispute or conflict?	1 conflict recorded: Involved both intimidation and vandalism	7 conflicts recorded: Resources/Services - 2 Land dispute – 2 Discrimination - 1 Criminal activity – 1 Honour – 1
Was the dispute resolved?	Yes - 1	Yes – 6 Ongoing – 1
What were resources helpful in assisting with the dispute resolution?	No responses given	Formal court - 1 Huquq Department - 1 Shura or Jirga - 7 Neighbours - 4 Family members – 3 Mosque/Imam – 3

Annex II. Glossary

Notation	Description
Afghanis	Afghanistan's unit of currency.
Arbab	An elected elder in the community. A term usually used in Western regions of Afghanistan among Dari speakers.
Asylum-seekers	Individuals who have moved across international borders and sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined" (2017, 56). Asylum seekers are individuals who seek protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention.
Conflict-Induced Displacement	A form of displacement that occurs when people are forced to flee their homes as a result of armed conflict including civil war, generalized violence, and persecution on the grounds of nationality, race, religion, political opinion, or social group.
Development-Induced Displacement	A form of displacement that occurs when people are compelled to move as a result of policies and projects implemented to advance 'development' efforts. Examples of this include large-scale infrastructure projects such as dams, roads, ports, airports; urban clearance initiatives; mining and deforestation; and the introduction of conservation parks/reserves and biosphere projects.
Disaster-induced Displacement	The displacement of people as a result of "a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses or impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources." (UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2009).
Forced Migration	A migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion. While not an international legal concept, this term has been used to describe the movements of refugees, victims of trafficking, and displaced persons including those displaced by disasters or development projects (IOM Glossary on Migration, 2019).

Internally displaced persons (IDPs)	Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural and human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border (<u>Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2.</u>).
Imam	A worship leader of a mosque
Malik	An elected village elder who often adjudicates over disputes and normally maintains strong social networks and government ties. This term is widely used in Pashto-speaking areas.
Mullah	A religious leader. This term is used synonymously with <i>Imam</i> .
Mixed Movement or Migration Flows	A movement in which several people travel together, generally in an irregular manner, using the same routes and means of transport, but for different reasons. People travelling as part of mixed movements have varying needs and profiles and may include asylum seekers, refugees, trafficked persons, unaccompanied/separated children, and migrants in an irregular situation. (<u>IOM Glossary on Migration, 2019</u>).
Police Mardomi	A locally armed police force, often recruited as part of the Afghan Local Police (ALP), a programme started in 2009 and funded mainly by the USAID.
Refugees	Persons who flee their country as a result of “well-founded fear” of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, and who are outside of their country of nationality or permanent residence and due to this fear are unable or unwilling to return to their home country (1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees). Those recognised as refugees have a clear international legal status and are afforded the protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
Refugee-like Situations	These include “groups of persons who are outside their country or territory of origin and who face protection risks similar to those of refugees, but for whom refugee status has, for practical or other reasons, not been ascertained” (<u>UNHCR, 2013</u>).
Resettlement	transfer of refugees from the country in which they have sought protection to another State that has agreed to admit them — as refugees — with permanent residence status.” (<u>IOM Glossary on Migration, 2019</u>).
Shura	A consultative council or assembly

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