



Afghanistan

Quick facts

Number of IDPs	At least 235,000
Percentage of total population	At least 0.8%
Start of current displacement situation	2002
Peak number of IDPs (and year)	1,200,000 (2002)
New displacement in 2008	Over 42,000
Returns in 2008	Undetermined
Causes of displacement	International armed conflict, generalised violence
Human development index	–

Over 235,000 people remained displaced in Afghanistan in 2008. The number of IDPs was as high as 1.2 million in 2002 when the Taliban government fell, and since then most people have returned spontaneously to areas of origin. However during 2008 new internal displacement continued, due to both continuing conflict and the secondary displacement of refugees returning from Pakistan and Iran.

IDPs in 2008 were spread across the country, either gathered in camps, or dispersed in squatter settlements or in cramped conditions with relatives in the fast-growing cities. An estimated 185,000 people displaced prior to and just after the fall of the Taliban were living in camp-like settlements in the south, west and south-east.

It has been impossible to accurately determine the number of people displaced by the conflict between international coalition forces and armed opposition groups since 2006, as there is little access to conflict zones. Since 2006, the conflict has spread and intensified and insurgent groups have sometimes deployed in villages to shield themselves from counter-attack; “rapid-response” air strikes have sometimes destroyed property or forced civilians to flee their homes.

An unknown number of people have also been displaced due to conflict between different tribal or ethnic groups or within a single tribe, over disputed resources or over disagreements which have spread across communities. At least 33,000 people were in 2008 living in secondary displacement after returning from Pakistan and Iran, as they were unable to return to insecure and impoverished areas of origin.

The protection concerns of IDPs should be seen against a context of widespread poverty and insecurity; nonetheless many face particular threats without the support links that other communities have developed and increasingly outside the reach of humanitarian agencies.

The physical security of IDPs and others caught in the continuing combat is at risk, and people may face multiple cycles of displacement. Attacks by all the combatants in violation of international humanitarian law have repeatedly resulted in the killing and injury of civilians and the destruction of their property, and forced people to become displaced and prevented their return. In addition, people displaced by the conflict have reported being targeted by insurgents as collaborators. Many IDPs have struggled to access food,

clean water, essential medicines and basic shelter against the unforgiving climate.

Livelihood opportunities remain out of reach for many of the returnees in secondary displacement in remote areas where they have no transport or family connections; there may be better opportunities in cities where they could integrate to some extent. Those who have returned since 2006 in particular have had low levels of education, skills and assets. Meanwhile, land and property disputes arising from the illegal occupation of houses or land, or their reallocation to other families, have continued to prevent the return of refugees and IDPs.

The prospects of improved situations for IDPs in Afghanistan are still distant, as the conflict must abate before humanitarian and development agencies can help to tackle the problems facing all Afghans. Conditions for those living in protracted or secondary displacement are unlikely to change unless major economic and resources issues are addressed. The government adopted an IDP strategy in 2003 but the effective management of returnee and IDP affairs remained a challenge. Nonetheless, their prospects improved in 2008, as the government adopted a policy to allow protracted IDPs to integrate locally, and a national task force co-chaired by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation commissioned a profiling and analysis of the displacement situation and needs of IDPs.

The UN in 2008 implemented the cluster coordination system. UNHCR helped the national IDP task force carry out the profiling exercise and develop durable solutions for the protracted caseload. Following the profiling the government may develop a new and comprehensive IDP policy, but its success depends on institutional capacity and the resourcing to support all IDPs including those dispersed in cities or elsewhere; so far the government and its UN partners have avoided setting up new camps so as not to encourage people to leave their homes in search of aid.

All UN and many humanitarian agencies aiding IDPs have worked under UNAMA, a primarily political mission. In 2008, OCHA announced a decision to take up the central coordination role. But despite progress in coordinating the response, access to IDPs has remained very difficult, not only because the government does not control the entire territory, but also because humanitarian workers have been targeted by insurgents.