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AFGHANISTAN

Need to minimise new displacement and increase protection for recently displaced in remote areas

The UN and ICRC have recorded that 730,000 people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan due to conflict since 2006, an average of 400 a day. At the end of January 2011, 309,000 people remained internally displaced due to armed conflict, human rights abuses and other generalised violence. This figure was higher than at any time since 2005.

While armed opposition groups have been responsible for the majority of killings, most of the documented mass displacements have occurred as a result of offensives by international forces. Efforts by the International Security Assistance Force in 2010 to limit the impact of fighting on the civilian population have failed to reduce the rate of internal displacement.

The basic needs of recently displaced people across most regions of the country are often unmet, increasing the risk of disease and death. Internally displaced people (IDPs) have also been vulnerable to food insecurity, while insecurity and the absence of basic services in places of displacement have forced many IDPs into protracted secondary displacement in urban areas.

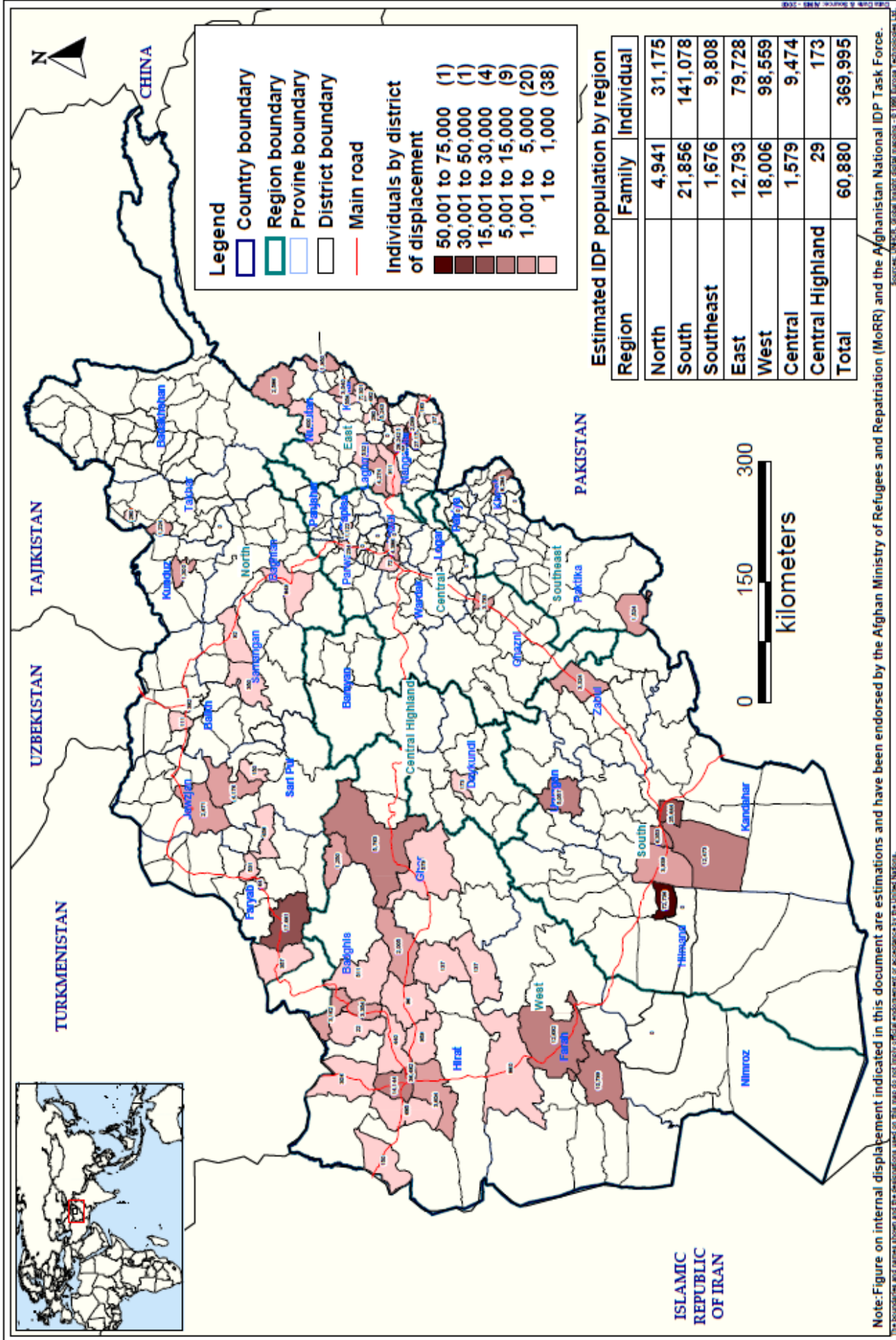
The Afghan government is generally unable or unwilling to assist IDPs. Hundreds of thousands of IDPs have been assisted by international agencies, but assistance outside camps has been short-term and restricted by problems of funding and access.

Recommendations for policy development:

International forces should minimise new displacements caused by their forces on the ground. This can be achieved through the adoption of standard operating procedures that oblige troops to take concrete action to protect civilians and their needs before, during and after military activities, and by the development of monitoring and reporting mechanisms on forced internal displacement.

International governments should ensure independent assessments of damage to IDPs' property and compensate those whose losses result from military operations. They should also take every necessary measure to safeguard the distinction between humanitarian action and political or military agendas necessary for humanitarian organisations to operate efficiently in all rural areas of the country.

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan should give a higher priority to the protection and assistance of IDPs by developing a comprehensive IDP policy which corresponds to international standards, strengthen the coordinating role of the Ministry of Refugees and Returnees and, with the support of international donors, provide the necessary means to match their obligations to protect all IDPs in Afghanistan.



Source: UNHCR

More maps are available at www.internal-displacement.org

Background

The extent of forced displacement in Afghanistan's recent history has been extraordinary: over 40 per cent of the country's 28 million people have been internally displaced at least once in their lifetime, and 17 per cent have been displaced both internally and to other countries (Oxfam, November 2009).

Armed conflict between Afghanistan's Soviet-supported communist government and nationalist and Islamic insurgencies between 1978 and 1988 forced as many as five million people to flee their homes, while another 200,000 were displaced by Mujahideen factions fighting to seize power in 1992 and 1993.

Over the following years, before the Taliban took control of the country, hundreds of thousands of Pakhtun people fled violence caused by Uzbek and Tajik warlords in the north and east. The Taliban's subsequent counter-insurgency war against this "Northern Alliance", fought with the support of Pakhtun communities trying to recapture land, forced a further million people into internal displacement. The northern and central regions were worst affected (Brookings/TLO, 2010, pp.35-40).

In the aftermath of the September 2001 al-Qaeda attacks, armed conflict between the US-backed Northern Alliance and the Taliban and their supporters, as well as ethnic violence overwhelmingly targeting Pakhtun people, displaced hundreds of thousands more (IDMC, March 2011, pp.2-3). After a period of relative calm between 2002 and 2004, during which five million refugees and perhaps a million internally displaced people (IDPs) returned to their homes, displacement increased again.

Causes of internal displacement since 2004

Displacement has been caused by a combination of factors. The impacts of conflict and human rights violations have been compounded by

natural disasters, while the lack of critical services has reduced the resilience of populations.

Armed conflict has been the main cause of displacement in the south, east and west of the country. In the south, some 85,000 displacements were recorded in the context of the military "surge" and operations in Taliban strongholds during 2010 by American armed forces and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) (AFP, 8 February 2011; OCHA May, August and November 2010). In the north, 10,000 people fled following a military offensive launched by ISAF and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in January 2011 (IDP Task Force, March 2011).

Nationwide, some people fled to escape improvised explosive devices (IEDs), attacks and night raids, and others to escape intimidation and harassment by armed groups, including extortion, forced recruitment and the obligation to feed and care for wounded combatants (Afghanistan Protection Cluster, February 2011; Watchlist, June 2010). Others were displaced because they found themselves unable to meet their basic needs after their property, agricultural land or other productive assets had been destroyed (Brookings, 2009, p12).

Most mass displacements documented have been caused by offensives by international forces (IDMC, March 2011, pp.3-13; UNHCR, August 2008, p.32). While US and ISAF forces made successful efforts in 2010 to minimise civilian casualties and loss of life, they have not made equivalent efforts to reduce the scale of forced internal displacement, despite its scale and the demonstrated impact of displacement on support for international forces (ISAF, 1 August 2010; UNAMA, March 2011; ICOS, May 2010; CIVIC, October 2010).

The Brookings Institution and the Tribal Liaison Office have recommended that military planners amend counter-insurgency strategies, guidelines and operating procedures in order to limit the displacement they cause (Brookings/TLO, May 2010:

p15). Displacement caused by the recent use of local militias against armed opposition groups in the north, however, both in areas where the armed opposition groups are a serious threat and where the militias have control, have suggested that pro-government forces have yet to incorporate effective civilian protection strategies into their operations. IDMC reviews of the "Afghanistan war logs" published on the Wikileaks website, and interviews with journalists who had access to the 80,000 reports they included (covering an area and period in which more than half a million people were internally displaced), and the US embassy cables published by Wikileaks, failed to find any reference to displacement in Afghanistan (Guardian, 25 July 2010; IDMC interviews with Guardian journalists, 14 February 2011).

Communal and inter-ethnic disputes over access to land and water have also caused internal displacement. In the central highlands, and mainly within Wardak and Bamyán Provinces, clashes between nomadic Kuchis and Hazara groups over grazing rights caused significant displacements during the summers of 2007, 2008 and 2010 (AAN, 17 May 2010; IRIN, 13 May 2009 and 23 November 2010).

In the north, east and south-east, the attempts of returning IDPs and refugees to reclaim abandoned property have strained customary dispute-resolution mechanisms, particularly if their land had been occupied by local warlords, their own relatives or others, unwilling to accept the returnees' claims (CPAU, March 2009). Between 20 and 30 per cent of returned refugees were forced into secondary internal displacement over the five years to 2010 (UNHCR, August 2008, pp.38-44; IRIN, 4 November 2010).

Human rights abuses perpetrated by the Taliban have also caused large numbers of small-scale displacements, particularly in the south-east, south and central regions. The Taliban have intimidated and killed tribal elders, government officials, civilians working for international forces, teachers,

health care workers, shopkeepers and the staff of Afghan and international NGOs (Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 October 2010). They have also displaced members of minority Shia groups (UNAMA, March 2011; Afghanistan Protection Cluster, February 2011, p.15; Hazaristan Times, 26 September 2010).

Displacement figures

According to the National IDP Task Force co-led by the Ministry of Refugees and Reintegration (MoRR) and UNHCR, 309,000 people were internally displaced by armed conflict, human rights abuses and other general violence at the end of January 2011 (UNHCR statistics, January 2011). This figure was higher than they had recorded at any time since 2005.

The UN and ICRC have recorded some 730,000 new displacements due to conflict since 2006, an average of 400 a day. Of this total, 120,000 people were newly displaced in 2009 and 102,000 in 2010 (UNHCR IDP statistics, March 2010 and January 2011). Some 60 per cent of those displaced since 2009 were from the south, 20 per cent from the west and ten per cent from the north (UNHCR IDP statistics, March 2010 and January 2011).

The true figures could be far higher; for example, the UN and government identified fewer than 300 IDPs in the south-east between June 2009 and December 2010, despite the intense conflict which was ongoing there (OCHA, December 2010, p.1; UNHCR, January 2011). The profiling of internal displacement has been complicated by constraints in accessing conflict areas, the temporary nature of some displacements and difficulties in distinguishing between forced internal displacement and economic migration. This absence of reliable and timely information about displacement in conflict zones has critically impaired the humanitarian response (Afghanistan Protection Cluster, February 2011, p.8).

Patterns of displacement

Internally displaced Afghans represent a cross-section of the general population. Some 49 per cent of IDPs are female and 51 per cent male. Fifty-four per cent are under 18 and fewer than two per cent are older than 60.

In contrast to economic migrants, who often move as individuals, Afghan IDPs have tended to flee as family units. Internally displaced households are made up of an average of 6.1 individuals, slightly fewer than the Afghan average (UNHCR, January 2011). This slightly lower average may be because, in Pakhtun areas, it is common practice for one or two men to stay behind to look after the livestock and property (Brookings/TLO, 2010, p.94). The risk of separating the family is high if the displacement proves protracted, but the strategy helps to protect property and facilitate returns.

Though some people have fled in fear of an unpredictable situation worsening (Brookings/TLO, 2010, p.37), others have fled in reaction to events. IDPs in the south, west and east have often fled their home areas in response to an imminent or suspected threat (IDMC, March 2011, pp.3-14). They have had little time to prepare for the move, to sell assets at market prices or to organise education and livelihoods in their place of refuge.

Displacements are becoming more protracted. IDPs affected by conflict in the south and west have often fled to nearby villages and returned quickly to their homes. That can be impossible, however, when insecurity persists, their houses or sources of livelihoods have been destroyed or when a new group takes control of their home areas.

Continued insecurity in the initial place of refuge combined with the absence of basic services means that many IDPs have been forced into secondary displacement (Afghanistan Protection Cluster, February 2011: p.9). The 50 per cent of

IDPs who have fled within their province (GoA, 2009, p.21) and the equal number who have fled further afield have tended to seek protection and livelihoods in urban areas, where they have often ended up in a state of protracted displacement (OCHA, February, March, August and October 2010; Small Wars Journal, 12 May 2010; Afghanistan Protection Cluster, February 2011).

Avoiding secondary displacement is thus critical to lessening the overall duration of the displacement experience. This can be done by helping recently displaced people cope in their initial place of refuge and providing them the means to either return or rebuild their lives elsewhere.

Protection concerns

Violence and coercion

Insecurity has increasingly affected the civilian population in the west, south and east, and since 2009 in the north as well (UNAMA, March 2011; AIHRC, August 2010).

IDPs have been at greatest risk of physical harm during the initial phase of their displacement, as they try to avoid being caught in the crossfire, flee the scene of a bombing or avoid landmines. In 2010, the UN Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan found that many landmine victims were male returnees or IDPs (Watchlist, June 2010, p.43).

The risk of forced recruitment increases during displacement for children deprived of protective community or family structures. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict highlighted this risk during her 2010 visit to Afghanistan. Some children, most of them boys, were specifically recruited to be sexually exploited, a phenomenon known as *baccha baazi*, or to be used as suicide bombers (SRSG-CAC, 2010, pp.5, 9). Research after military operations in Helmand Province in early 2010 showed that insurgent groups had increased

their recruitment efforts, particularly among IDPs in Lashkar Gah camp (ICOS, May 2010).

The return processes can also be dangerous as IDPs who try to reclaim their property are likely to face conflicts over land and resources. Those who have been in direct association or contact with pro-government forces may be targeted by the insurgency, illustrating the dangers civilians face when military forces are directly involved in humanitarian assistance. IDPs who had received aid and employment opportunities from pro-government forces in Helmand were threatened by the Taliban when they returned, causing their secondary displacement (BBC, 26 October 2010).

IDPs including children who fled from areas controlled by the insurgency have also been suspected by pro-government forces of loyalty to opposition groups. Since 2001, an unknown number of internally displaced children have been arrested by Afghan or international military forces. Some of these children were ill-treated during their detention (SMSG-CAC 2010, p.7).

Deprivation

Media outlets and NGOs have reported that the basic needs of recently-displaced people across most regions of the country have often not been met (IRIN, 2 June 2008 and 26 June 2008; France24, 10 April 2009; OCHA monthly updates 2009-2010).

One result is an increased risk of disease and death. Living conditions are often crowded, and people's immune systems are strained. IDPs were among the groups with least access to basic health services in 2010. Insecurity and the armed groups' attacks on health care facilities prevented IDPs from accessing health care, and sometimes rendered curable conditions fatal (IRIN, 1 February 2011; ICRC, 12 October 2010).

The armed conflict and natural disasters have led to an increase in food insecurity. The situation was

in 2010 particularly severe in displacement-affected provinces, where poor support networks prevented IDPs from entering the labour market, and explosives planted by the insurgency on arable land prevented returning farmers from irrigating their land (FEWS, October 2009; IRIN, 19 October 2010). UNICEF observed in 2010 that displacement had contributed to children's malnutrition in Kandahar Province; it found that some children were remaining malnourished because their parents were too frightened to go out in search of food or unable to earn the money needed to feed them properly (IRIN, 26 May 2010).

The resources and coping capacity of displaced women have often been limited by the custom of *purdah* (seclusion). This custom limits their freedom of movement and consequently their ability to work, to access food and health care services and to participate in public life (IRIN, 9 July 2010; AI, 7 March 2008; Afghanistan Protection Cluster, February 2011, p.4).

Durable solutions

Returns and local integration

Afghan authorities have preferred to support durable solutions in areas of origin, and IDPs (including many who have been forced into secondary displacement in urban areas) have expressed a desire to return rather than rebuild their lives elsewhere (Brookings, 2008, p.126). Around a million IDPs returned to their places of origin before 2008, of whom half had been displaced beyond their home province (GoA, 2009, p.21). The number of assisted returns between 2002 and 2006 surpassed half a million (UNHCR, August 2008, p.29).

An unknown number of IDPs who fled armed conflict and persecution after 2006 have also returned home, and many of them have found their property and livelihoods intact and faced no further threats or insecurity. However, only some of these returns have been assisted or even

verified (UNHCR, August 2008, p.17; IRIN, 26 June 2008; OCHA, December 2009).

Returned refugees and IDPs have also integrated in urban areas. They have accessed the local labour market and schools; they have taken part in local political processes to the same extent as other poor groups, and discrimination against them has not been reported (NRC/Altai Consulting, 2010, p.8; AREU, April 2006).

They have also achieved a degree of sustainability in their lives. Many have been affected by external shocks including inflation, unemployment and also serious illness during the reintegration process, but they have been able to make some progress towards recovery.

However, NRC's assessment showed that even those refugees who had returned as early as 2001 and 2002 still experienced some obstacles to reintegration, as measured by school attendance, quality of shelter, savings and income-generating skills (NRC/Altai Consulting, 2010, pp.8,10).

Obstacles to return

Of more than 309,000 people internally displaced by the conflict at the start of 2011, some 76,000 had spent a decade in displacement (UNHCR, IDP statistics, January 2011). In general, the difficulty of achieving a durable solution has tended to increase with to the duration of displacement, due for example to the gradual weakening of support networks in areas of origin or to other people's acquisition of their property by continuous possession. However, the obstacles facing different internally displaced groups have varied, and the strategies they have adopted have differed significantly from village to village and from family to family.

In many parts of the country, the nature of the conflict has limited IDPs' ability to return quickly to their places of origin if fighting ends (Afghanistan Protection Cluster, February 2011).

IDPs from Marjah and other conflict-affected areas said they were fearful of roadside bombs, landmines around civilian infrastructure, forced recruitment, further battles between armed opposition groups and pro-government forces, and the risk that either side might accuse them of supporting the other (IRIN, 3 May and 16 August 2010; ICOS, 12 May 2010). They reported that they could not return safely as neither the Taliban nor pro-government forces were in full control of their home district (BBC, 26 October 2010, New York Times, 12 February 2010 and 17 March 2010; Independent, 30 June 2010; OCHA, March 2010 and July 2010).

Many displaced families are also unable to return to their villages of origin because they cannot afford to rebuild their damaged properties. Although IDPs and other civilians are entitled to recover their property or receive compensation for their losses, this right has been violated (CIVIC, June 2010). US Special Operations Forces, which operate throughout Afghanistan, do not compensate civilians and regular US troops have only marginally done so. While some countries ISAF countries compensate a small segment of the affected population, German and Italian troops have no policy or designated fund for redress, neither do the Afghan national army (CIVIC, June 2010).

Inter-ethnic tensions (often worsened by the armed conflict) are another important barrier to return and integration. Communities are usually prepared to provide IDPs with initial assistance, but political competition and the strain on local resources, livelihoods and services stand in the way of the local integration of IDPs (OCHA, 3 February 2009).

Competing claims over land are a particularly delicate issue. The longer a displacement lasts, the higher the risk that land will have been redistributed in IDPs' absence. A national risk and vulnerability assessment showed that returns constituted the biggest negative shock for the population in some

rural areas (GoA, 2009, p.135). The recovery of land has been particularly difficult for those without support networks (UNHCR, 19 December 2007).

The absence of infrastructure, job opportunities and other sources of income in IDPs' places of origin is a further obstacle to return. Press reports reveal how IDPs, and particularly unaccompanied displaced women and female-headed households, found themselves living in misery after returning to their places of origin (IRIN, 29 October 2009).

Obstacles to local integration and settlement elsewhere

In situations where return is unfeasible or undesirable, IDPs are faced with two alternatives: to integrate locally in their place of refuge or to settle elsewhere in the country. Neither of these options, however, is easy to achieve. The UN reported in 2009 that given the security, political, and economic climate, progress towards local integration for IDPs living in protracted displacement is likely to be difficult (OCHA, 3 February 2009).

Regardless of the settlement intentions expressed by IDPs, the government has not provided support to local integration or resettlement elsewhere. It has adopted strategies that deny IDPs access to long-term support in their place of refuge. For example, presidential decree 104, which grants some IDPs access to land, stipulates that they must go back to their places of origin or nearby areas in order to be eligible for assistance (NRC, March 2010, p.22).

National and international responses

Framework for IDP response

Government officials have stated that IDPs in Afghanistan are economic migrants drawn to the cities by poverty and the promise of subsidies and services (IRIN, 23 April 2009, 3 May 2010 and

11 August 2010; Washington Post, 22 November 2010). However, it is clear that the consistently high rates of displacement in Afghanistan since 2006 have been intimately linked to the armed conflict and human rights abuses. As such, IDPs are entitled to state protection and assistance.

The government has not yet developed a comprehensive policy or plan to protect the human rights of displaced people (Brookings/NRC, November 2010, pp.12-13). The Afghanistan National Development Strategy does, however, provide a basic framework in which to do so (GoA, 14 January 2008).

The government's protection and assistance for conflict-induced IDPs is coordinated by the MoRR in conjunction with UNHCR through the National IDP Task Force. The Task Force comprises many of the agencies working to protect IDPs; it has developed a strategy based on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement to guide its actions. Its challenges include monitoring and responding to IDPs' assistance and protection needs, facilitating durable solutions according to internationally recognised principles, and strengthening the government's leadership of the IDP response.

The government's response has been limited by its opposition to local integration or resettlement elsewhere and by its reluctance to recognise some groups of conflict-induced IDPs. In adopting policies which deny IDPs access to assistance in their place of refuge, it has failed to protect their rights as set out in the Guiding Principles. At the same time, most analysts agree that the decentralised nature of the Afghan state makes it difficult for the government to assist IDPs in rural remote areas of the country, let alone facilitate durable solutions for them (Brookings, February 2009, p.18).

Restrictions on humanitarian access

The space for humanitarian action in Afghanistan is severely restricted; large parts of the country

are inaccessible to most humanitarian agencies. The primary barriers have been attacks by armed opposition groups on international and national humanitarian, health care and educational providers, in contravention of international humanitarian law (Afghanistan Protection Cluster, February 2011, p.10). But actions by pro-government forces, such as the assault by officials of the Afghan National Police on humanitarian workers in Faryab Province in February 2011, have also limited access (IDP Task Force, March 2011).

US and ISAF's direct delivery of relief services and their use of private companies to deliver assistance to win the "hearts and minds" of people is in breach of the Oslo Guidelines, which require military actors to only engage in relief activities as a last resort and request from an appropriate civilian authority. The UN's integration of political and humanitarian activities has also reportedly made humanitarian access more difficult (Tufts, May 2010). The lack of clear distinction between humanitarian activities and political or military agendas has forced UN agencies and many NGOs to withdraw from the conflict areas where assistance is most needed, and to operate only through local partners at the expense of effective delivery of services and monitoring of outcomes. Meanwhile, independent NGOs and ICRC have gained some acceptance from insurgents since late 2009 (ANSO, January 2011).

International assistance and protection

Despite these and funding limitations, international agencies have provided short-term assistance to hundreds of thousands of people in need (OCHA, December 2010: p2).

The UNHCR-led Afghanistan Protection Cluster improved agency coordination and data collection on IDPs and ensured the distribution of non-food items including blankets, plastic tarpaulins, jerry cans, tents and winter clothes to around 60,000 families. More than 22,000 families, among them IDPs who also received food support,

received transitional shelters. Some 1,100 minefields were cleared and 18,000 teachers attended mine-awareness programmes (OCHA, 2011, pp.9-13,18).

Health care workers investigated and to a large extent controlled cholera outbreaks, and gave hygiene education to 1.3 million households. The number of newly-trained health care workers also increased. Some 10,000 wells were chlorinated, while 240,000 children and 150,000 pregnant or lactating women received micronutrients (OCHA, 2011, p.17). IDPs were among the beneficiaries.

ICRC, including its network of Afghan Red Crescent Society volunteers, has a large operation in Afghanistan, distanced from the UN's integrated approach or the cluster mechanism. It provided more than 580,000 conflict-afflicted people with food in 2009, 70 per cent of them women or children. It provided 83,000 IDPs with essential household items and supported tens of thousands more through micro-economic projects. Six ICRC-run physical rehabilitation centres treated 70,800 disabled people (ICRC, January 2010).

Note: This is a summary of IDMC's internal displacement profile on Afghanistan. The full profile is available online [here](#).

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About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people.

In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org.

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