



Afghanistan



Quick facts

Number of IDPs	At least 297,000
Percentage of total population	At least 1.1%
Start of current displacement situation	2001
Peak number of IDPs (Year)	1,200,000 (2002)
New displacement	Undetermined
Causes of displacement	Internal armed conflict
Human development index	181

Internal displacement increased in 2009 following the intensification of armed conflict in many parts of Afghanistan. 6,000 or more civilians were killed or injured in 2009, the highest number of casualties recorded since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. UN estimates suggest that 297,000 people were internally displaced at the end of 2009. Of these, 199,000 had been displaced since 2003.

While the lack of access to conflict zones made it impossible to verify the exact numbers, conflict between armed opposition groups and pro-government forces in the south, south-east and east of the country remained the primary source of displacement in 2009. Lack of livelihoods opportunities coupled with general insecurity often resulted in further displacement for returning refugees. Local conflicts over access to pasture and arable land further contributed to new displacements.

Some civilians who had been forced to flee were able to return after fighting around their home areas had ended, but many people in 2009 had been displaced for several years. Out of the 135,000 IDPs who had been displaced before 2002 and who lived in camp-like settlements in the south, the west and the south-east, only 7,000 were able to return to their places of origin within a planned and supported process. Others, such as Pashtun IDPs who had returned to provinces in the north, found that the discrimination which had contributed to their displacement in the first place continued to prevent their reintegration into their home communities.

Security and logistical constraints continued to hinder national authorities and international humanitarian agencies seeking to distribute emergency assistance to IDPs displaced by the armed conflict. Many IDPs mainly relied on their savings, informal day labour or the support of extended social networks for their survival; many, after an initial period of displacement near their home areas, chose to search for new livelihood opportunities in urban areas, a decision shared by many economic migrants. An unknown number had by 2009 ended up in slums in and around Kabul, despite the lack of infrastructure and services there.

IDP protection concerns should be seen against a national context of widespread poverty and insecurity. Nonetheless, IDPs faced particular threats in 2009, as they were reportedly targeted by armed groups suspecting them of collaboration with the enemy. Others were evicted from the places in which

they had sought temporary shelter. While many Afghans have experienced the destruction of their property, lack of access to basic services and to livelihood opportunities have disproportionately affected IDPs, particularly women and children.

Militants continued to target girls' schools and dissuaded female staff from returning to their work, thereby increasing their poverty. The influential cultural norms of seclusion were strictly imposed for displaced women and girls in unfamiliar environments and impeded their access to aid delivered by conventional means, particularly health care services and sanitation.

Internally displaced men were often required to provide for increased numbers of dependents in impoverished circumstances, but displaced women also found themselves filling new roles as family providers. Female-headed households, widows, orphaned and separated children had the greatest difficulty in accessing relief supplies and services.

Insecurity, landlessness, a lack of shelter, and an absence of livelihood opportunities or basic services deterred many IDPs from returning to rural areas. Some would be able to return if the conflict were to end, while others would still be barred by disputes with those who have occupied their property in their absence. However, the economic recession affecting many parts of the country increased pressure on host communities and, in the absence of targeted support, made it harder for IDPs to resettle elsewhere or integrate locally.

In 2009, international assistance constituted around 90 per cent of public expenditure in Afghanistan. While UNHCR and the Government of Afghanistan have sponsored a national IDP policy which promotes durable solutions through voluntary return and local integration, relief and development assistance has continued to be seen as a means to achieve counter-insurgency objectives.

Many donor countries in 2009 continued to fund reconstruction projects in areas where their national troops were deployed; these were coordinated by civilian-military Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), a concept developed in 2001. Aid delivered through civil-military structures in Afghanistan has in certain cases contributed to the spread of corruption and the intensification of local conflicts. Moreover, it has blurred the distinction between military and humanitarian actors, thus undermining the perceived neutrality and impartiality of humanitarians, increasing security risks for aid workers, and