

Afghanistan



Quick facts

Number of IDPs	At least 352,000
Percentage of total population	At least 1.2%
Start of current displacement situation	2001
Peak number of IDPs (Year)	1,200,000 (2002)
New displacement	About 102,000
Causes of displacement	Armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations
Human development index	155



At least 352,000 people were internally displaced in Afghanistan in December 2010. This figure included people who had been displaced before 2003 and were unable to return home or integrate locally, but not IDPs scattered in rural locations and around cities whose status could not be verified. Since 2006, when the armed conflict intensified, the UN and ICRC have registered some 730,000 people as internally displaced by the conflict, including over 100,000 people newly displaced in 2010.

Armed conflict between NATO-led pro-government forces and Taliban-led insurgent groups in the south, south-east and west has been the principal cause of displacement, with most IDPs fleeing attacks or combat initiated by pro-government forces. Armed conflict, human rights abuses and land and water disputes have also caused significant displacement in other regions left vulnerable by natural disasters, poverty and lack of livelihoods.

Overall, 60 per cent of recently registered IDPs are children; men and women have been displaced in similar numbers, while fewer than two per cent are older people. Many have moved towards the larger cities where they stay with relatives – Afghans' most important support network – or live in makeshift settlements. Wealthier people tended to seek protection further from their homes, while the most vulnerable, and widows in particular, have often lacked the resources to flee at all.

Roadside bombs, suicide attacks and sporadic clashes took a heavy toll on civilians in provinces affected by displacement in 2010. In February, air strikes by pro-government forces in Uruzgan Province killed at least 32 IDPs after they were mistaken for militants. Most landmine victims were returnees or IDPs, according to the UN Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan, and most civilian casualties were people trying to escape battle areas. Male IDPs were at particular risk of forced recruitment. Internally displaced children were also at risk of sexual violence by members of armed groups.

IDPs were particularly vulnerable to food insecurity because they often lacked support networks, or had lost their traditional livelihoods and lacked the skills they needed in new areas. According to Save the Children, 39 per cent of Afghan children were malnourished and 78 per cent had no access to safe water. The situation was worse in provinces affected by displacement, and with insecurity impeding delivery of assistance to IDPs, there were reports of IDPs in urgent need of food and shelter remaining unassisted.

At least 3,500 schools have been built across the country since 2002 and over six million students are enrolled, but the Ministry of Education estimates that in 2010 about five million children had no access to education. This right is particularly threatened in areas affected by displacement, where schools and teachers have been targeted. Up to 80 per cent of schools have been closed in some provinces, with girls' schools particularly affected.

People recently displaced by the conflict have found it difficult to return home after fighting has ended. In Helmand and Kandahar Provinces in 2010, continuing disputes over arable land slowed return movements, while illegal occupation of land heightened ethnic tensions in the central highlands and the north. Returning IDPs and refugees whose land had been occupied or reallocated in their absence were at particular risk of secondary displacement, with their claims over land often complicated by their lack of documentation.

People displaced by conflict have the right to have their houses rebuilt or to receive compensation for damage, but a 2010 investigation by the Campaign For Innocent Victims In Conflict showed that, in the vast majority of cases, pro-government forces had not paid compensation after damaging or destroying property.

In 2005, a national policy was endorsed which emphasised the promotion of durable solutions through voluntary return and local integration in accordance with the Guiding Principles. The policy affirmed the lead role of the Afghan government; however, in 2010, the government and its international partners showed insufficient capacity and will to address the displacement crisis. Coordinated by the UNHCR and the Ministry of Refugees and Reintegration through the IDP Task Force, humanitarian agencies working to protect IDPs assisted thousands of people with food, non-food items, basic health services and clean water but did not receive enough backing to provide support to all those in need.

The Afghan government, the UN and their partners have worked together to facilitate durable solutions for IDPs since 2003, with a focus on resolving the obstacles to return. More than 500,000 people have been helped to return. There have also been successful efforts to support local integration in the south and east, but even IDPs who have integrated economically have remained excluded from political processes.