

# POPULATION MOVEMENT BULLETIN

The *Population Movement Bulletin*, published by the UN in Afghanistan, highlights issues of population movement as it relates to Afghanistan and is designed to consolidate the large amount of media coverage and many statistics into one place. The *Bulletin* includes trends in internal displacement, population movement to and from neighbouring countries and Europe, and policy developments and programme responses, drawing upon public sources as well as information gathered by the agencies, funds and programmes of the UN system, particularly those working on issues related to population movement – nationally and internationally – and the challenges faced by these groups of people.

## Commentary

October 2016 saw the largest movement of returnees and internally displaced people (IDP) in Afghanistan in recent years. The graph shows the composition of this population movement, as well as the terrific spike compared to the earlier part of the year – this coming at a time when returns have traditionally fallen away as Winter approaches. Forecasts point to 1.6 million Afghans on the move by the end of the year. With the onset of Winter, it will be doubly important to identify the most vulnerable of this group – whether internally displaced people or returnees – to be able to assist those most in need.

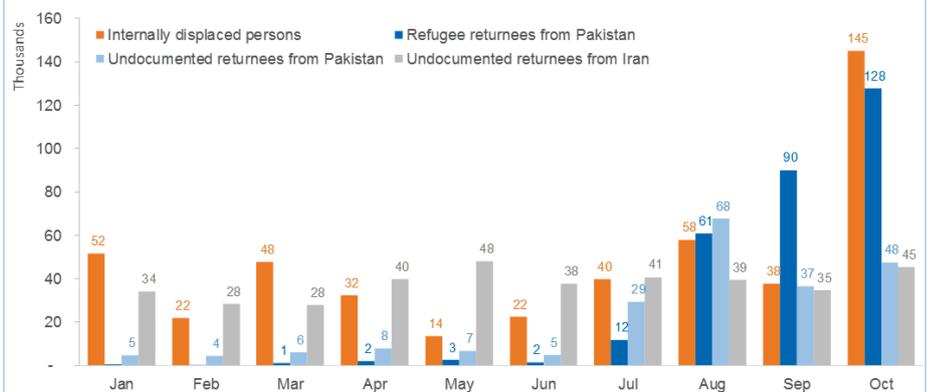
After his recent visit to Afghanistan, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs highlighted a further challenge: many of those displaced, or returning to Afghanistan without having been registered as refugees elsewhere, do not have the necessary papers to access services or justice, including education for their children. Noted elsewhere in this Bulletin, with 56% of the displaced population being children, it is effectively creating a generation deprived of education.

Against this challenging background, it is

important to note that the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, held in early October, recognized that population movement is a structural development issue. The Conference called for a coordinated donor response to the long-term issue of internal displacement and

returns; hopefully, the momentum generated at the Brussels Conference will enable those people on the move – whether IDPs or returnees – to integrate and contribute to meeting Afghanistan's wider development challenges.

Monthly trends of internally displaced persons, undocumented Afghan returnees and Afghan refugee returnees (Jan – Oct 2016)



Source: OCHA (internally displaced persons), IOM (undocumented returnees), UNHCR (refugee returnees), 5 Nov 2016.

## Latest News Headlines

### U.N. food agency appeals for \$152 million in aid for Afghan refugees

**November 13** - The United Nations on Sunday appealed for \$152 million to provide shelter, sanitation and food for a huge influx of refugees returning to Afghanistan from Pakistan. Pakistan has stepped up the pressure for its 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees to return home, citing security concerns. More at Reuters <http://reut.rs/2fw81d8>

### Afghanistan may have to accommodate 1.5 million refugees in 2016

**November 10** - Afghanistan will reportedly take in more than 1.5 million Afghan refugees by the end of the year, challenging the government at a time when Kabul is already struggling against resurgent Taliban militants and an emerging Islamic State group (IS). More at VOA <http://bit.ly/2g1tPRE>

### Doors slam shut for Afghan refugees

**November 10** - Pakistan is turning them back. Thousands who spent their life savings on a bid to resettle in Europe are being told it's time to head home. Inside Afghanistan, tens of thousands have become internally displaced in recent months as fighting between the Taliban and government security forces rages in several provinces. The refugee crisis could reach unprecedented num-

bers, with as many as 1.5 million returning home, many involuntarily, by the end of the year, according to humanitarian organizations.

More at NY Times <http://nyti.ms/2fnvrkM>

### Why Germany and other EU countries can now deport tens of thousands of Afghan

**November 10** - Hofmannstrasse 69, in the German city of Munich, looks like most other office complexes. Once the headquarters of the German engineering giant Siemens, the rectangular, white building is now home to 680 migrants waiting for the German government to decide their future. More at Newsweek <http://bit.ly/2f5IO8R>

### Will the UN become complicit in Pakistan's illegal return of Afghan refugees?

**November 10** - The UN's refugee agency may become complicit in a violation of international law if it restarts a programme in March that assists Pakistan in forcing Afghan refugees over the border into their war-torn homeland. UNHCR says its repatriation programme, which included cash grants for returnees, has been put on pause from 1 November until 1 March. Pakistan has set a deadline of the end of March for all Afghan refugees to leave the country. More at IRIN <http://bit.ly/2eUs5Yn>

### Afghanistan itself is now taking in the most Afghan migrants

**November 4** - There is one country in the world that is now taking in more Afghan migrants than all the countries in Europe and South Asia put together this year. That would be Afghanistan itself. By the end of the year, aid officials here expect some 1.5 million migrants to return to Afghanistan — many of them forcibly, and including some officially registered as refugees. More at NY Times <http://nyti.ms/2fpKICs>

### Afghanistan underlines safety of refugees

**November 3** - Thousands of innocent victims of war have become refugees, Afghanistan has said, asking the global fraternity to ensure the looming humanitarian crisis is mitigated. "History will not judge us kindly if we fail to take action to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable amongst us," Afghanistan's permanent representative to the UN General Assembly said on Wednesday. More at Pajhwok <http://bit.ly/2f5HAdr>

Relief Web provides the latest humanitarian and development information on Afghanistan. <http://reliefweb.int/country/afg>



## Population Movements

### Undocumented Afghan Returnees

**Return from Pakistan:** From 29 October – 5 November 2016, a total of **10,884** undocumented Afghans spontaneously returned or were deported from Pakistan through Nangarhar and Kandahar Province's Torkham and Spin Boldak border crossing points according to the Border Monitoring Team of the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR). **10,844** were spontaneous returnees in family groups and **40** were deported individuals only from Torkham. This brings the total number of Afghan undocumented returnees from Pakistan to **221,882** in 2016. The total this week represents an **18.6%** increase from last week, however the spontaneous return of the families increased by **24%** whereas deportation decreased by **91%**. During the reporting period, IOM assisted **3,718 (37%) of all** undocumented Afghans returnees through the Torkham crossing with post-arrival humanitarian assistance including meals and accommodation at the IOM Transit Center, NFIs for families, special assistance to Persons with Specific Needs (PSNs), a one-month food ration from WFP and family and hygiene kits from UNICEF and dignity kits from UNFPA.

**Return from Iran:** During the same period a total of 9,589 undocumented Afghans spontaneously returned or were deported from Iran through Herat and Nimroz Province's Islam Qala and Milak border crossing points according to the Border Monitoring Team of the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR). This represents a **15% decrease** in the return from Iran in comparison with last week. Out of the total returnees 197 (4%) were spontaneous families and 5,279 (96%) were individuals. Similarly out of the total deportees 331 (8%) were in families whereas 3,782 (92%) were individuals. This brings the total of undocumented returnees in 2016 to **381,212** from Iran.

IOM provided post-arrival humanitarian assistance to 336 (3.5%) undocumented Afghans through Islam Qala and Milak border crossing points at the IOM transit centers in Herat and Nimroz Provinces. As per the continued observation of the Border Monitoring Team of the DoRR, about 10% of the Undocumented Afghans returning spontaneously or forcefully from Iran are in need of humanitarian assistance, however, because of limited funding IOM was not able to reach this total.



Afghan returnees queuing to be registered at the Torkham border crossing on 5 November 2016. Photo: IOM

#### Number of Undocumented Returnees in 2016 (Torkham, Spin Boldak, Islam Qala and Milak Border Crossing Points)

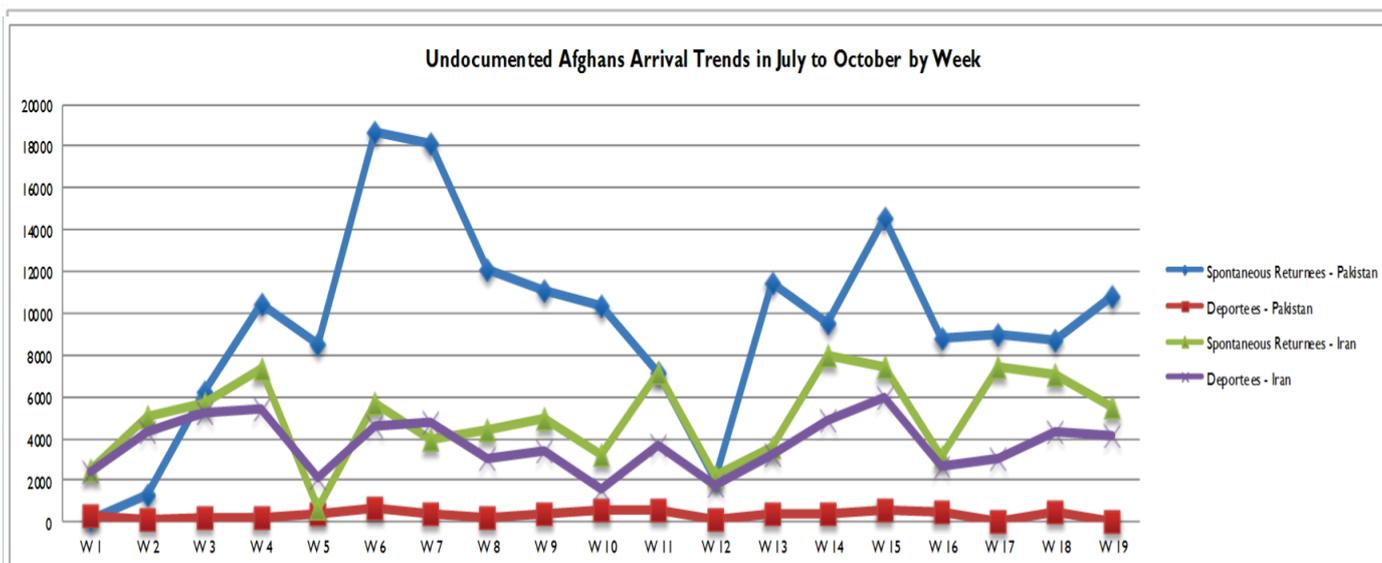
Date	Spontaneous Returnees				Deportees				Total Pakistan	Total Iran	Grand Total
	Torkham	Spin Boldak	Herat	Nimroz	Torkham	Spin Boldak	Herat	Nimroz			
16-Jan	676	1,090	13,982	3,695	1,448	1,390	9,892	6,619	4,604	34,188	38,792
16-Feb	930	886	11,655	2,728	1,172	1,401	7,566	6,353	4,389	28,302	32,691
16-Mar	1,784	1,902	11,217	3,239	1,613	736	7,503	5,869	6,035	27,828	33,863
16-Apr	3,901	678	17,158	3,945	2,262	1,148	12,117	6,506	7,989	39,726	47,715
16-May	3,605	1,377	23,230	4,882	1,121	669	12,699	7,130	6,772	47,941	54,713
16-Jun	1,803	1,446	17,679	2,713	1,033	631	12,525	4,870	4,913	37,787	42,700
16-Jul	26,724	1,139	18,980	2,246	1,133	339	14,549	4,951	29,335	40,726	70,061
16-Aug	64,284	1,517	19,278	2,910	1,392	524	11,077	6,166	67,717	39,431	107,148
16-Sep	31,521	3,173	19,105	1,863	823	1,086	8,742	4,843	36,603	34,553	71,156
16-Oct	40,095	5903	24,462	3185	237	1335	10,933	6,741	47,570	45,321	92,891
Nov 1 - 5	5,485	445	2,610	367	13	12	1,749	683	5,955	5,409	11,364
<b>Total</b>	<b>180,808</b>	<b>19,556</b>	<b>179,356</b>	<b>31,773</b>	<b>12,247</b>	<b>9,271</b>	<b>109,352</b>	<b>60,731</b>	<b>221,882</b>	<b>381,212</b>	<b>603,094</b>

**Return Projection to 31 December 2016:** The projection below changes based on the weekly trends of return from Pakistan. Based on the trends of 29 October to 5 November the projection for the remainder of 2016 to 31 December is at 97,636 individuals.

Month	Return Projections to 31 December 2016 from Pakistan				
	Returns	Daily Average	Projection for November	Projection for Nov - Dec 16	IOM Assistance under Flash Appeal
August	67,717	1,627	48,818	97,636	60,000
September	36,603				
October	47,570				
November 1-5	5,955				

**Updates from Humanitarian Partners:** The below table highlights the commitment of humanitarian agencies at the Torkham border cross-

Organization	Type of Assistance	Total Family	Beneficiaries Assisted	Male	Female	Boys	Girls
WFP	Food Rations	637	4,124	635	705	1,377	1,407
WHO	Medical Service	65	164	50	92	16	6
UNICEF	Family and hygiene kits	277	1,850	303	325	564	658
UNICEF	Hygiene Training for Returnee Families	427	2,895	303	325	564	658

**Undocumented Afghan Returnees | Weekly Update | 5 November 2016**

**IOM Assisted Undocumented Afghans at Torkham, Islam Qala and Milak Border Crossing Points**

Date	Spontaneous Returnees				Deportees				Total Pakistan	Total Iran	Grand Total
	Torkham	Spin Boldak	Herat	Nimroz	Torkham	Spin Boldak	Herat	Nimroz			
16-Jan	527	0	55	64	249	0	1,053	789	776	1,961	2,737
16-Feb	755	0	56	104	185	0	1,118	882	940	2,160	3,100
16-Mar	1,368	0	42	85	233	0	570	526	1601	1,223	2,824
16-Apr	2,724	0	90	126	316	0	1,185	495	3040	1,896	4,936
16-May	2,218	0	101	164	125	0	1,209	744	2343	2,218	4,561
16-Jun	1,033	0	153	117	89	0	1,070	349	1122	1,689	2,811
16-Jul	3,446	0	100	114	169	0	1,102	567	3615	1,883	5,498
16-Aug	9,668	0	84	62	221	0	819	810	9889	1,775	11,664
16-Sep	9,649	0	78	5	54	0	507	244	9703	834	10,537
16-Oct	14,431	0	135	113	24	0	694	642	14455	1,584	16,039
Nov 1 - 5	2,259	0	3	14	0	0	96	71	2259	184	2,443
<b>Total</b>	<b>44,384</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>888</b>	<b>943</b>	<b>1,665</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9,264</b>	<b>5,946</b>	<b>46,049</b>	<b>17,041</b>	<b>63,090</b>

**Persons With Specific Needs (PSNs)**

Beneficiaries assisted from Iran and Pakistan are selected based on the following PSN criteria applied at all border crossing points. The table below shows the number of beneficiaries per PSN criteria from both Iran and Pakistan.

PSNs Assisted 29 Oct - 5 Nov, 2016	Persons						
	From Iran			From Pakistan			Total
	Islam Qala	Milak	Sub-Total	Torkham	Spin Boldak	Sub-Total	
Poor Family (PF)	67	75	142	13,354	0	13,354	13,496
Unaccompanied Migrant Children	342	49	391	0	0	0	391
Single Parents Family (SP)	0	13	13	3336	0	3,336	3,349
Special Cases (SC)	0	73	73	20	0	20	93
Medical Case (MC)	66	40	106	0	0	0	106
Physically Disabled (PD)	7	4	11	0	0	0	11
Unaccompanied Elderly (UE)	12	12	24	0	0	0	24
Drug Addicted (DA)	8	0	8	0	0	0	8
Single Female (SF)	4	0	4	0	0	0	4
Mentally Ill (MI)	0	2	2	0	0	0	2
Chronically ill (CI)	0	4	4	0	0	0	4
<b>A: Total PSNs</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>778</b>	<b>16,710</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>16,710</b>	<b>17,488</b>
<b>B: Deported Families</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>567</b>	<b>815</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>819</b>
<b>Total (A&amp;B)</b>	<b>754</b>	<b>618</b>	<b>1372</b>	<b>16,714</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>16,714</b>	<b>18,086</b>

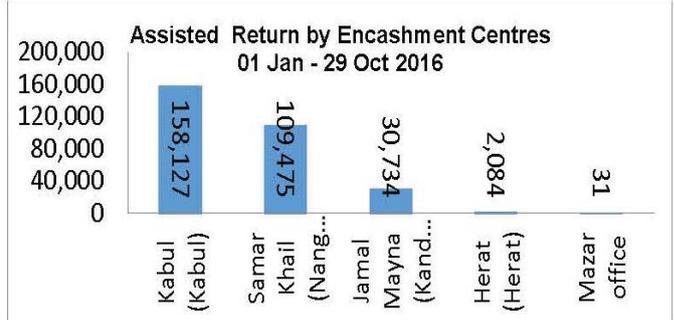
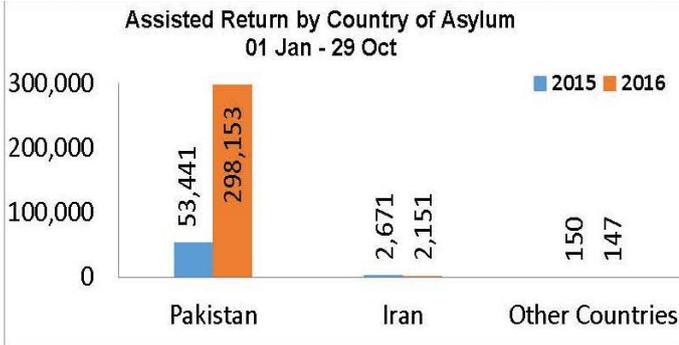
# Repatriation of Registered Afghan Refugees

Assisted Return by year from 01- Jan to 29 October 2016

Country of Asylum	Year		Increase /Decrease compare to 2015 (%)	
	2015	2016		
<b>Pakistan</b>	53,441	298,153	244,712	458%
<b>Iran</b>	2,671	2,151	-520	-19%
<b>Other Countries</b>	150	147	-3	-2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>56,262</b>	<b>300,451</b>	<b>244,189</b>	<b>434%</b>

Assisted Return by Encashment centres

Encashment Centres/Location	Individuals	Individuals %
Kabul (Kabul)	158,127	52.6%
Samar Khail (Nangarhar)	109,475	36.4%
Jamal Mayna (Kandahar)	30,734	10.2%
Herat (Herat)	2,084	0.7%
Mazar office	31	0.0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>300,451</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



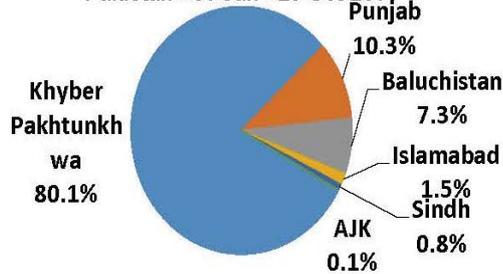
Assisted Return by top 5 Provinces of Asylum - Pakistan

Province	Individuals	Individuals %
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	238,688	80.1%
Punjab	30,662	10.3%
Baluchistan	21,778	7.3%
Islamabad	4,404	1.5%
Sindh	2,269	0.8%
AJK	352	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>298,153</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

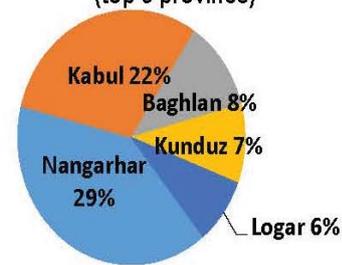
Assisted Return by Province Destination (top 5 provinces)

Province	Individuals	Individuals %
Nangarhar	88,142	29%
Kabul	67,343	22%
Baghlan	25,347	8%
Kunduz	22,142	7%
Logar	18,502	6%
Other Provinces	78,975	26%
<b>Total</b>	<b>300,451</b>	<b>100%</b>

Afghan assisted return by Province of asylum - Pakistan - 01 Jan - 29 Oct 2016



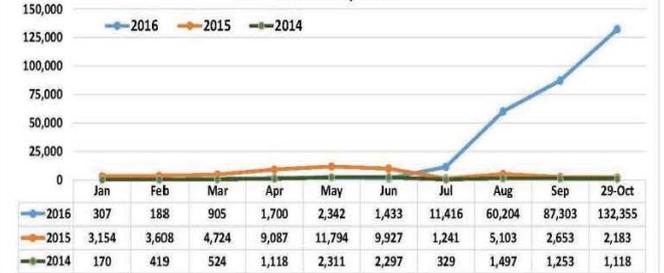
Afghan assisted return by province of destination (top 5 province)



Weekly return trend from Pakistan - 01 Jan - 29 Oct



Assisted Return from Pakistan - 2014-2016 Jan - Oct Monthly Trend



Between 26 June and 29 October, 294,293 people returned. This chart compares recent weekly trends between 2015 and 2016.

**Policy Development**

**The World Bank and UNHCR collaborate on Policy Brief: “Fragility and Population Movement in Afghanistan”**

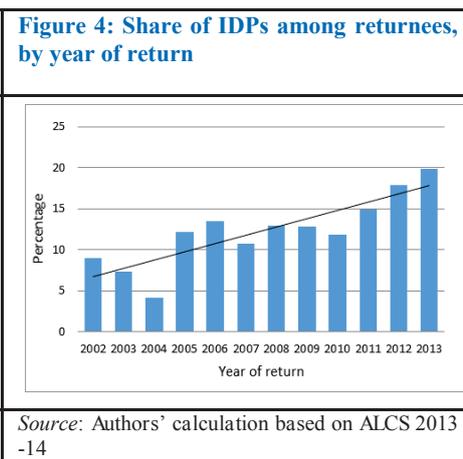
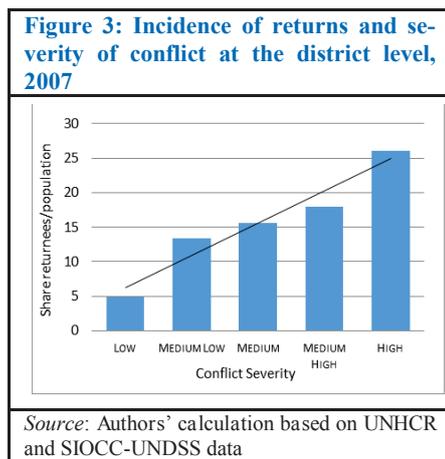
In advance of the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, The World Bank and UNHCR undertook a joint research study to better understand the nexus between conflict, population mobility and displacement, and economic fragility in Afghanistan, a country with a long history of internal displacement and population outflows. With over a million people either forcibly displaced or returning from countries of asylum in adverse conditions, the imperative of managing and protecting displaced populations is clear. Compounding

tion both within and outside Afghanistan. While migrants might choose where to go depending on available opportunities, leaving is more of a necessity, rather than a choice. With rampant unemployment and escalating conflict, security and economic motives are two sides of the same coin. Can these flows be contained or reversed? The past history of displacement and returns to Afghanistan indicates the potential destabilizing effects of increasing population pressure on limited resources.

ferred to targeting categories, not to create perceptions of unequal treatment that may exacerbate social fragmentation. Such an approach might be particularly important as the government and international community move towards a development approach in the management of displacement issues. As the fiscal space for social spending shrinks, consolidation of interventions should contribute to the development of a nationwide safety net system aimed at helping households cope with risk and, possibly, at reducing some of the causes of displacement.

Third, particular attention should be devoted to minimizing any possible negative impact of displacement on human capital investments for future generations. Evidence suggests that the lack of human capital is the main determinant of the risk of poverty and that households are likely to respond to negative shocks by pulling children out of school. While a comprehensive safety net system could help in mitigating such negative consequences, bureaucratic barriers such as residency status and transferability of school records could negatively impact displaced or, more generally, mobile populations. Moreover, given the prevalence of mobility and displacement in Afghanistan, greater focus should be devoted to investing in functional literacy and skills-development programs that display greater portability and provide displaced individuals with greater access to economic opportunities, wherever they may wind up.

Lastly, evidence suggests that migrants will likely continue to converge towards Afghanistan’s urban centres as they seek better security, jobs, and services. Urbanization trends require immediate intervention by local authorities to increase shelter capacity and access to services. National and provincial authorities should further recognize that, in the medium and long term, local integration in urban and semi-urban areas is inevitable and requires adequate planning to maximize the returns from urban agglomeration, for example, by investing in connectivity and accessibility, while ensuring access to basic services and a minim standard of living. The full report can be found at: <http://bit.ly/2fOKcOt>



this challenge is the lack of viable social safety nets within Afghanistan and a severe economic crisis, which has pushed an additional 1.3 million Afghans into poverty and triggered a three-fold increase in unemployment between 2012 and 2014. Can Afghanistan manage the ongoing displacement challenge? Can the country absorb and successfully reintegrate displaced populations under the current security and economic circumstances? What priorities should the government and the international community address? In a joint effort to provide answers to these questions, the World Bank and UNHCR looked back over Afghanistan’s long history of conflict and displacement, as well as the main structural challenges that shape its future.

**Main Messages and Recommendations:**

The current security and economic crisis is taking place in a context already complicated by an explosive mix of population growth, excess labor supply, widespread poverty, poor governance and a lack of government capacity and financial resources to respond to the needs of its citizens. While Afghans have traditionally relied on migration to navigate times of distress, their options are shrinking at a time when needed the most; Iran is slowly recovering from an economic crisis, Pakistan is imposing strict border controls, and Europe is struggling with a political backlash resulting from the large mixed-migratory flows from Syria, Afghanistan, and sub-Saharan Africa.

The available evidence suggests that ‘push factors’ are the primary motivators for migra-

Given the increase in secondary displacement among more recent waves of returnees, local absorption capacity appears fully overtaxed. Additional returns from Pakistan, Iran, or Europe are likely to result in further secondary displacement, unemployment, and instability. In such a context, the international community should increase its advocacy to ensure voluntary, safe, dignified, and phased returns as further population shocks could undermine civilian and military aid efforts and further escalate conflict. Peace and stability in Afghanistan are not only a prerequisite for its development but also a global public good. If no country or institution alone has the capacity to help Afghanistan manage its displacement issues, the international community as a whole should mobilize resources to assist those countries such as Pakistan and Iran who have shared the burden for decades, conditioned on continued willingness to host refugee populations. Similarly, the international community as a whole should support the development of legal channels for temporary economic migration and more effective management of asylum requests which could help Afghanistan overcome its current crisis and ease its structural challenges.

Second, Evidence suggests that factors affecting poverty risks among mobile households are the same as the one observed in the general population. As Afghanistan’s context is characterized by widespread poverty and the degree of destitution among mobile households is not dissimilar from the rest of the population, targeting needs should be pre-

The new issue of Migration Policy Practice is a special edition on recent and ongoing trends on Afghan displacement. This special issue examines some of the key underlying Afghan displacement factors; current displacement data holdings; movements to Central Asia; Afghan integration in neighbouring Iran; decision-making in transit, return and reintegration to Afghanistan; and identity and sense of belonging of Afghan settlers. For more details refer to the study at: <http://bit.ly/2ewo7GC>

## Programmatic Responses

### UN sees first-hand, child returnees' challenges in Jalalabad

After such a difficult journey and transition from one country to another, no child should be deprived of their right to health, education and protection because they do not have the necessary documentation", said UNICEF representative following a recent visit to the Torkham border, the IOM transit centre and the Jalalabad UNHCR encashment point with UNHCR, IOM, UNOCHA and WFP, to see first-hand the challenges faced by children and their families returning from Pakistan.

At the border, where trucks arrive daily loaded with Afghan families and their possessions, heads of household who used to disembark alone to register, are now encouraged to take their families with them so that all children under the age of 10 can receive UN-supported vaccines to prevent them contracting polio and measles. Children also receive nutrition screening, deworming tablets and vitamin A supplementation. Those identified with severe acute malnutrition and moderate acute malnutrition are referred for treatment. Mothers are counselled on appropriate infant and young child feeding practices and families receive bed nets to protect them against malaria. Since early July 2016 the UN and polio eradication initiative (PEI) partners have vaccinated almost 47,000 returnee children at these border crossings. Other UN-supported services include water and sanitation facilities, and child-

friendly spaces which provide uprooted children with psychosocial support.

Returnees at the border face many challenges if they lack accepted travel documents (many hold refugee cards not passports) or



UNICEF Representative during her visit to Torkham. Photo: UNICEF.

Ministry of Refugee and Repatriation (MoRR) referral cards that would enable them to receive in-kind assistance. Of undocumented returnees, only 15 per cent (who fall within 11 categories of vulnerable persons) are eligible for assistance at the IOM transit centre, 2 km from the border. Some 85 per cent of undocumented returnees do not pass through the transit centre and do not get any form of assistance.

Many returnee children who used to go to school in Pakistan have found themselves having to go through complicated procedures in order to obtain permits to register at local schools. During the visit, the UN raised this issue with the Provincial Governor of Jala-

bad with a view to ensuring that bureaucratic processes do not prevent Afghan returnee children from going school. Further UN advocacy resulted in the Ministry of Education issuing a directive to all Provincial and District Education Offices that all returnee children should be enrolled in school, with or without documentation, and given a grace period of at least three months for documentation issues to be resolved. The Ministry also reiterated its support to enroll all children into formal schools or newly-established community-based schools. An academic committee has been established to develop a reintegration policy for children without documentation, and an education-specific assessment will be conducted in priority districts to obtain infor-

mation on the needs of formal schools to accommodate additional pupils. Thirty community-based schools have now been established for 1,000 returnee children and 30 teachers are in the process of being recruited from the returnee community. The UN has provided almost 12,000 children with quality education materials and just over 4,000 children are now studying in temporary learning spaces and existing community-based schools. Communication materials developed for use at border crossings will inform returnee families about the various forms of education available and explain entry requirements so that school enrolment for children is made easy and accessible.

### Chief Executive briefs UNHCR's Executive Board, chairs high-level Quadripartite in Geneva

At the invitation of High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, the Chief Executive of Afghanistan, Dr. Abdullah Ab-



Chief Executive Abdullah and High Commissioner Grandi, at a high-level side event. Photo: UNHCR.

dullah, briefed the UNHCR Executive Committee members on 06 October on the outcome of the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan. At a High-Level Side Event, Dr. Abdullah expressed gratitude for the international community's continued faith in Afghanistan's progress and larger than expected pledges of financial support. Stressing the Government's ongoing commitment to reform the institutions of state and governance in Af-

ghanistan, the CEO drew attention to the aims of the five-year Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. Drawing distinctions from previous development strategies, the CEO stressed the Government's commitment to integrate the needs of returnees and IDPs within the 12 National Priority Programmes. "Returning refugees and IDPs are counting on us to find solutions to their immediate needs for land and shelter, employment, and access to basic services" he stated, noting that four of the National Priority Programmes had been presented in Brussels.

The following day, Dr. Abdullah and the High Commissioner co-chaired a High-Level Quadripartite Meeting of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and UNHCR. In his opening remarks, the Chief Executive referred to the overwhelming numbers of Afghans on the move, either forcibly displaced by fighting within Afghanistan or having made the decision to return in haste, noting that "the sheer scale of expected population flows carries with it the potential to overburden existing social services, exacerbate competition for scarce resources, and disrupt the Government's plans, presented this week in Brussels, to develop the country on a more stable, equitable footing." Referring in particular to con-

cerns regarding the current return of Afghans from Pakistan, the Chief Executive appealed to all parties to take all possible measures to



Participants of the high-level side event in Geneva. Photo: UNHCR.

adhere to the letter and spirit of respective Tripartite Agreements on the Repatriation of Afghan Refugees. "For any return to be sustainable" he stated, "repatriation must be voluntary, well-informed, and carried out in conditions of safety and dignity." In Afghanistan's current context, he also stressed that return must be gradual, and at a pace at which the Government could facilitate viable durable solutions.

## Programmatic Responses

### Afghanistan: Deteriorating displacement crisis requires urgent attention and increased resources

A United Nations expert on internally displaced persons (IDPs), Chaloka Beyani, during his visit, called on the Government of Afghanistan to intensify its efforts to meet the needs of hundreds of thousands of IDPs as a deteriorating security situation leads to dire warnings of massive new displacement.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons expressed grave concern over escalating conflict and IDP figures. In the first ten months of 2016, according to UN agencies, over 323,000 Afghans were internally displaced across the country in areas accessible to humanitarian actors alone, continuing an upward trend witnessed over the last four years.

“Warnings by humanitarian partners suggest that many more IDPs could be displaced by the end of the year, yet attention and resources allocated to their needs seem to be waning rather than increasing in line with the growing challenges and need for durable solutions,” he stated.

“The displacement picture in Afghanistan is changing as the conflict evolves and intensifies,” Mr. Beyani explained. “Displacement is becoming more protracted for more people as the security situation has led many to make the difficult decision not to return to their homes.”

In that regard, the rights expert called on the Government and its international humanitarian and development partners to continue emergency responses, while they should also dedicate more attention and resources “to finding development based sustainable solutions for those in protracted displacement.”

Mr. Beyani, who visited IDP locations

around Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif during his fact-finding visit, met with numerous IDP communities, both relatively newly displaced and those who have been displaced for several years.



Special Rapporteur meets IDP community leaders in Herat. Photo: UNOCHA.

“During my ten-day mission, IDPs described to me their stories of displacement, sometimes multiple times, due to conflict and insecurity. Many thousands live in dire conditions and face abject poverty on the margins of urban centres, often with little or no long-term assistance,” he said. “They described their priorities as access to land, improved housing, education facilities, also for girls, healthcare clinics, water and sanitation, and livelihoods.”

“The onset of winter will bring additional challenges for already vulnerable IDPs while resources to support them are dwindling,” the Special Rapporteur warned. “In September 2016, the UN issued a Flash Appeal for US\$ 150 million to meet urgent needs, including winter assistance packages, by the end of the year. I urge the donor community to respond

generously and rapidly to that call.”

The expert pointed out that the commitment of donors, partners and the Government of Afghanistan to improving the lives of Afghans through the Brussels Conference held in October 2016 has provided a positive momentum. “I hope, and I encourage partners to ensure, that the funding and national initiatives within this framework for development fully include IDPs and their hosting communities who require both immediate and longer-term assistance,” he added. The Special Rapporteur noted that many IDPs lack National ID cards or ‘*Takira*’, which restricts their access to services and justice, and education for their children. “It is no exaggeration to speak of a lost generation of displaced Afghan children deprived of education since children constitute about 56 per cent of the displaced population,” he stated.

He praised the Government for demonstrating the political will to address the IDP situation. However, a National IDP Policy, while a positive step, remains largely unimplemented in practice. National institutions charged with IDP responses lack resources and capacity to fulfill their functions. The influx of tens of thousands of Afghan returnees from Pakistan has further increased pressure on the Government and its international partners to resolve the situation of other vulnerable groups.

The Special Rapporteur, who visited the country for the second time at the invitation of the authorities, thanked the Government for its cooperation with his mandate as well as UN and other national and international partners. He will produce a comprehensive report and recommendations for presentation to the Human Rights Council in June 2017.

## Communicating with communities

UNHCR’s *Communicating with Communities* initiative, which monitors social media traffic in Dari and Pashto to better understand trends and changes in popular opinion regarding migration options, has found that smuggling networks remain active despite the onset of winter. Smugglers generally communicate in code words with their clients on the ground. Those codes are so widely known by now that they have started using the same terminology on social media as well. On Facebook and when communicating with their clients on the ground, smugglers use code words such as “game” for “crossing the border”. In their offers, they explain prices for “new games” to Turkey and Europe. They openly add their phone numbers on their pages and contact information for Telegram and WhatsApp.

The smugglers are often confronted with tough reactions by Afghans; former clients call them manipulators who lure people into making the mistake of going to Europe which they later regret. Smugglers justify their activities, explaining that they are the only service

providers and are reacting to increasing criticism against their practices on Facebook using the notion of “God’s will” to justify that people are dying on the trip. They continue posting attractive images with new offers to advertise journeys to Turkey and Europe from Afghanistan.



Some Afghan refugees say there is no way forward or back.

On their Facebook pages, smugglers explain that dozens of children seeking asylum are worried about their situation in Calais. They post their phone numbers and explain that

they can provide asylum services. Since the Calais “Jungle” camp is being dismantled, smugglers are also offering to take care of the minors that are “left behind” and to protect them.

Smugglers are also innovating by adding a religious spin on the dangers of the boat ride. A smuggling network called “Sapehr Sair Travel Co” posted a “journey prayer” on its Facebook page. The prayer says: “I thank God for giving me this chance and the possibility of embarking on this boat for travel.” Thus, placing the life of the traveller in God’s hands and this absolves the smugglers of any responsibility.

Meanwhile, Afghan activists continue to warn Afghans in Europe to stay vigilant of increasing deportations. In a very unfortunate incident, a 23-year old Afghan man jumped to his death from the window of his apartment in Sweden when he heard that he was going to be “deported to Afghanistan”. In comments, Afghans expressed their sadness and some explained that suicide is better than returning to Afghanistan.

## Programmatic Responses

### A work in progress: The challenges of ensuring durable solutions for IDPs in Herat, western Afghanistan

The inter-agency Durable Solutions Initiative in Herat, Western Afghanistan has mobilised diverse partners, UN-Habitat, UN-HCR, UNICEF, IOM, UNDP and OCHA, and INGOs NRC and DRC, to a common cause. The eight partners along with the Provincial Governor of Herat and other government stakeholders; Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DORR), Mayor's office, Department of Urban Development and Housing (DUDH) and Afghanistan Independent Land Authority (ARAZI), have collaborated to conduct a comprehensive profiling of protracted IDPs in five IDP hosting sites; Shaidayee, Naw Abad, Karizak, Police Station and Minaret. The initiative led to the collection of a robust evidence base followed up with the development of a Response Plan, forming the basis of ongoing programming and joint advocacy for durable solutions for IDPs.

#### Government buy in for the initiative

The issue of local integration of IDPs especially in highly priced urban land is heavily politicized and sensitive. The political elite have historically favoured return to place of origin as the preferred and only durable solution option. Therefore ensuring government buy-in at the highest level was crucial for the success of this initiative. The support of the President of Afghanistan was leveraged. Participating agencies were also fortunate to have the support of a key champion in the form of the Provincial Governor who is an extremely progressive leader. In addition to the Governor, other key Government line depart-

ments were engaged and their support sought for this initiative.

The initiative commenced with a survey/profiling exercise in five protracted IDP settlements.<sup>1</sup> One of the critical gaps filled by the survey was to address a pervasive lack of data and evidence base regarding protracted IDPs. It was also fulfilling a key objective of the Provincial Action Plan (PAP) of the IDP Policy for the government to survey and profile IDPs.

#### A summary of key findings of the survey/profiling exercise

The majority of IDPs in the vicinity of Herat are conflict induced. However natural disasters including floods and droughts are also significant causes of displacement.

Despite living in Herat for years and decades, the overwhelming majority of IDPs are food insecure.

Chronic illnesses are pervasive in the settlements, disabilities, both mental and physical are common. Vulnerability is further compounded by poor access to health facilities. Even in cases where facilities are in the vicinity they are frequently beyond the means of IDPs to access.

Water and sanitation is a serious issue in all settlements surveyed. A significant number of families still have no access to latrines and must resort to open defecation. In many cases water and sanitation facilities are listed by IDPs as their number one development priority.

Shelter: The overwhelming majority of dwellings are single room mud brick, offering insufficient protection from the elements,

particularly the extreme cold of winter. A significant number of families also live in makeshift dwelling and tents, offering even less protection from the elements and highly vulnerable to weather events.

Durable solution intentions: The overwhelming majority of IDPs aspire to remain where they are and integrate locally. A recurring theme throughout our discussions with the IDPs was the desire to no longer be labelled as IDPs and to be accepted as citizens of Herat Province.

The end product of the survey was to produce a response plan outlining activities to move towards durable solutions. It was critical to align and mainstream the Plan with the Government's development framework - including the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF 2017-2021) and key National Priority Programs such as the Citizen's Charter and the Urban National Priority Programme (NPP) to ensure continuity and sustainability of this initiative. The plan by aligning itself with Government's development framework moves away from the vagaries of annual budget cycles and short term interventions of international actors.

To continue the momentum in Herat and to further build on the foundations created by this Initiative, a concerted effort is required from agencies and other actors to support the Government of Herat in applying the findings, and moving closer to durable solutions and addressing one of Afghanistan's most pervasive issues.



Maslakh IDP settlement, Photo: UN Habitat



Discussion with IDPs at Maslakh settlement, Photo: UN Habitat.

<sup>1</sup>Maslakh and Shaidayee settlements were established in 1992, Minaret in 2000, Naw Abad, Shaidayee Clinic and Karizak established in 2011 and Police Station in 2012. Since Maslakh has been surveyed twice in the recent past (December 2013 and November 2015) it was agreed by all participating agencies to not survey Maslakh again.