

SEEKING DURABLE SOLUTIONS FOR AFGHANS IN A FRAGILE AND VOLATILE CONTEXT

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2016 has seen a significant deterioration in the Afghan context across humanitarian, political and economic dimensions. Recent months have seen civilian deaths and displacement levels reach record highs as well as an influx of vulnerable returnees, political gridlock and stagnant economic growth. In this complex and worsening crisis, the international humanitarian community must continue to address the needs and vulnerabilities of both those Afghans internally displaced and those returning. Simultaneously, the search for durable political solutions must be at the forefront of the attention of the international community.

The Danish Refugee Council reaffirms its commitment to a renewed effort to promote safety, dignity and solutions for Afghans both within and outside Afghanistan. Drawing from its extensive experience of working with displaced Afghans, DRC proposes three recommendations:

Saving lives of the most vulnerable – both among returns and the internally displaced – is the first priority.

- In the first nine months of 2016, record numbers of Afghan civilians were killed or injured and over 245,000 Afghans were displaced by conflict. Conflict occurred in 31 out of 34 provinces, with the monthly number of conflict instances in Afghanistan rising to 2,000. This indicates serious threats to both Afghans who return and those who are internally displaced. In this same period, 225,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan, instigated by a variety of complex and steadily intensifying factors. One significant element of the returns is a deterioration of the protection situation in Pakistan, with increased instances of detention, forced evictions, police raids and harassment. The humanitarian community has relatively limited capacity to meet the needs of the newly returned – planning figures for 2016 included only conflict induced displacement, not return, and figures were low.
- The international community needs to urgently address acute vulnerability among both returnees and the internally displaced, and must begin planning and preparing for additional returns.

An approach that focuses on building resilience will help to protect the most vulnerable.

- Once immediate humanitarian needs are met, displaced populations are often subject to long-term vulnerability. The challenges they face include lack of access to documentation and services, inadequate shelter, unsought skills and subsequent unemployment and lack of income. Returnees find themselves in a comparable situation and undocumented returnees are particularly vulnerable – 75% of the undocumented receive no assistance, compared to 15% of the documented, according to a 2015 DACAAR study. Building the resilience of both displaced communities and returnees can help to protect the most vulnerable. Two complementary approaches to building resilience are (1) assuring access to documentation, and (2) developing income generation possibilities among the displaced, building on existing assets and skill sets. Ensuring access to documentation among the displaced facilitates better access to services already provided by the Afghan government, including health and education. Support for income generation options includes capitalising on technical skills among displaced populations, as well as among strong diaspora networks and trading links.
- International actors need to adapt programming to maximise the opportunities for developing resilience among the displaced.

The international community needs to advocate for political solutions that are appropriate to the current context.

- Both the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan have demonstrated, through 30 years, an extraordinary commitment to their international responsibilities for displaced Afghans. Many positive developments have been made unilaterally by host governments. For example, decisions by the Islamic Republic of Iran to extend health care and education to Afghan refugees have helped to improve the protection environment for displaced communities. In recent years, there has also been increased dialogue between host countries and the international community. The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), adopted in 2012, represented a move toward improved coordination. The SSAR, however, was developed in a particular context, in which return was anticipated to be feasible; this context has changed dramatically within the last 12 months due to the worsening security situation in Afghanistan.
- The international community needs to advocate for appropriate political solutions that improve the legal, material and physical protection of Afghans in the current humanitarian environment.