

REPORT

Afghan Displacement Forum in Kabul

Bringing the Global Refugee Forum discussions to Afghanistan



The Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR) jointly hosted the **Afghan Displacement Forum** on 5th February 2020, at UN's Palace 7 in Kabul, Afghanistan. The Kabul event sought to bring together a wide range of organisations and key players interested in and supporting efforts on addressing Afghan displacement. This follows the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) which was held in Geneva in December 2019 and aimed to maintain dialogue and thinking around how to work collectively towards meeting the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).¹ The event was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

The Forum brought together a wide range of organisations and entities including government officials, UN agencies, the donor community and international and national civil society actors – with over 55 participants.² Seven national and international NGOs participated in the marketplace, exhibiting their ongoing projects and displaying products and handicrafts produced by the communities they support. These included NRC, PARSA, WASSA (from Herat), ABRAAR, Zardozi/Nisfe Jahan, Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Organization (SWRO) and the Accessibility Organization for Afghan Disabled (AOAD). The NGOs were selected based on submission of interest

¹ The two GCR objectives directly relevant to Afghanistan: ii) Enhancing refugee self-reliance; iv) Supporting countries of origin to create the conditions for return in safety and dignity.

² Please see Annex 1 for list of participants

received through ACBAR, ensuring the marketplace was representative of the wide range of activities and interventions being delivered to communities impacted by displacement.



A high-level panel discussion included attendance by H.E. Hussein A. Balkhi, Minister for Refugees and Repatriation; Toby Lanzer, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator; Marnie Gustavson, Executive Director, PARSА and Palwasha Hassan, Executive Director, Afghan Women’s Educational Centre (AWEC). The Panel was moderated by Alistair Boulton, Deputy Representative, UNHCR. The significance of the topic under discussion and the nature of participation of the Forum was evident by the fact that the government was represented at ministerial level with the Minister reiterating Afghanistan’s strong commitment in contributing towards the achievement of GCR objectives.

The panel discussion and questions from the floor addressed issues and realities on the ground vis-a-vis successful re-integration of returnees and achieving durable solutions within the overall context of Afghanistan. The country is already struggling with the negative consequences of safety and security concerns which, in the absence of peace, hinder efforts to address the dire need to generate jobs and livelihoods opportunities, improve access to housing, land and property and ensure access to education and universal health care - all of which are still considered as priorities for the wider Afghan community yet to be sufficiently achieved. These challenges become even more significant when seeking to support re-integration of IDPs and returnees into communities that lack adequate infrastructure and resources.

Within this context, it is important to recognize the need for space to enable the inclusion and participation of returnees within the communities they seek to re-integrate into. ‘Returnees can bring a lot of knowledge back into the country’, said panel speaker Palwasha Hassan, a former refugee. ‘Returns should be considered a human issue and not as a burden.’ This is even more significant in the case of youth returnees who, in many cases, are in fact coming to Afghanistan for the first time and face the challenge of adapting and settling into a country they feel unfamiliar with. In such cases, integration will undoubtedly require more time and effort and ideally should be

supported by targeted programmes. Where returnees have had access to education in countries of asylum, examples of successful re-integration have been seen, with significant numbers of educated and skilled returnees being able to contribute to Afghan society, working in government positions, in civil society organisations and setting up businesses.



Panel members (left to right): Marnie Gustavson, Executive Director/PARSA, Toby Lanzer, UN RC/HC, Hussein A. Balkhi, Minister/MoRR, Palwasha Hassan, Executive Director/AWEC. The panel was moderated by Alistair Boulton, Deputy Representative/UNHCR (far right) and interpretation provided by Malang Ibrahim, Associate Reintegration Officer/UNHCR

The Minister outlined various efforts adopted by the government over the years to ensure durable re-integration for returnees. In the past, support was mainly limited to providing humanitarian assistance upon return, alongside legal and executive measures which focused on, for example, allocation of land. These resulted in varying levels of success and in subsequent years, had to be adapted. Case in point is the Presidential Decree 305 which addresses housing, land and property rights for returnees and is currently being rolled out in a phased approach in 12 provinces. The new decree recognizes the need to adopt a more integrated and comprehensive way in comparison to earlier approaches. At present, two commissions, comprised of national and international entities, have already been established and have begun activities in Herat and Kabul, developing standard operating procedures; one commission is tasked to address land allocation for returnees and the second is a consortium responsible for identifying and selecting eligible beneficiaries. Presidential Decree 305 also recognizes the need to create livelihood opportunities alongside land and shelter allocation, such as in support of farming, agriculture and industries. ‘In order to reach durable re-integration, we must not only address housing, land and property issues, but also livelihoods. These, however, requires resources’ the Minister said, referring to a trust fund that has been established in the Ministry of Finance for the purpose of absorbing new financial resources. The Citizens’ Charter is also tasked to ensure returnees are included in programmes at community levels. Toby Lanzer reiterated the need to listen to the people and to be stronger advocates for what is most needed. ‘Unless there is peace, you will not get foreign direct investment and repatriation of capital to Afghanistan, so the economy will not grow’. Mr. Lanzer also pointed out that Afghanistan

'already needs to generate 450,000 additional jobs per year to meet the needs of its existing population', and more would be required in the event of large-scale return. Marnie Gustavson pointed to the challenges faced by Afghan families, many of which are under tremendous pressure and becoming increasingly transitory, contributing to family breakdown. Ms. Gustavson also stressed the need to focus on success stories, allowing them to 'shape the narrative and to provide a blueprint' for what works in integration.

Discussions and questions from the floor also expanded to the current status of the asylum space in host countries such as Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. Minister Balkhi and Toby Lanzer shared views on the critical need for asylum space to be respected and protected. Mr. Lanzer pointed out to the essential need for dialogue to continue with not only hosting countries but also with donors at capital level to ensure that a political discussion remains between all parties and that host countries are also rewarded for those measures that have contributed to the protection of asylum space. The Minister referred to measures being implemented in host countries with the engagement of the Afghan government and the UN, mainly through MOUs and through Afghanistan's representations in those countries. Interaction with three countries which host the largest numbers of undocumented Afghans has in particular been focused on how to ensure regularization and this has resulted in measures being underway for registration of a large number of undocumented Afghans within those countries. These include the registration of around 870,000 Afghans in Pakistan to receive Afghan Citizen Cards. In Iran nearly 700,000 have been registered in a headcount and the Afghan government will be sending a delegation to issue Tazkeras and passports to enable this population to access certain services provided by Iran. Negotiations continue to be underway in Turkey with a focus on addressing the needs of those who are undocumented.

The event was also opportunity for ADSP to screen videos produced on showcasing good practices in meeting the needs of returnees and their re-integration.

