



# Afghanistan Displacement & Solutions Strategy



October 2017

The *IRC's Afghanistan Displacement and Solutions Strategy* is a comprehensive guide to IRC's response to the Afghan refugee, returnee, and internal displacement crisis. This guide, when not denoted otherwise, can be used in part or in full to share with current and potential partners, donors, and other interested parties. The strategy outlined in these pages has been designed collaboratively between IRC's Afghanistan and Pakistan country offices, Communications and Advocacy teams, and Asia Regional Unit. The pages that follow include:

- Problem statement in the form of a letter from Asia's Regional Director, Sanna Johnson.
- An in-depth strategic analysis of the current context for the vulnerable Afghan populations in Pakistan and Afghanistan. After a contextual overview, these pages present IRC's current efforts to address the crisis.
- A detailed, holistic response plan that emphasizes the need for collaboration from one side of a border to the other as well as keeping a sustainable, long-term view while responding to the most urgent needs of beneficiaries.
- A brief summary of the joint collaboration among IRC, NRC, DRC and RI – Afghans Displacement and Solutions Platform

While this guide has been designed as an easy-to-use resource for IRC colleagues and external partners alike, any questions, comments, or requests about this document can be directed to the following:

- Sanna Johnson, Asia Regional Director  
[Sanna.Johnson@rescue.org](mailto:Sanna.Johnson@rescue.org)
- Soso Bagashvili, Asia Regional Emergency Preparedness Coordinator  
[Soso.Bagashvili@rescue.org](mailto:Soso.Bagashvili@rescue.org)
- Adnan Junaid, Pakistan Country Director  
[Adnan.Junaid@rescue.org](mailto:Adnan.Junaid@rescue.org)
- Vicki Aken, Afghanistan Country Director  
[Vicki.Aken@rescue.org](mailto:Vicki.Aken@rescue.org)

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# Letter from Regional Director

Dear Friends,

I am proud to present the *Afghanistan Displacement and Solutions Strategy*, a comprehensive look at the situation faced by millions of Afghan women, children, and men, which is deteriorating even as I write this. The pages that follow outline the most immediate needs and what the International Rescue Committee (IRC) will do to respond to those needs and empower Afghans to sustainably rebuild their lives.

IRC has been supporting the Afghan people in their fight against displacement and poverty for three and a half decades, assisting displaced people and returnees affected by conflict, natural disasters, and poverty. In recent years, IRC has reached millions of Afghans through interventions such as the National Solidarity Program (NSP) where, in partnership with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and with the support of World Bank, we reached close to four million people and empowered 3,800 Community Development Councils (CDCs) to implement projects ranging from rehabilitating roads to building schools, irrigation structures, and bridges.

Afghanistan has been in a state of complex and protracted crisis since the Soviet occupation of the 1980s, and the overall security situation further deteriorated in 2016 when in-country fighting increased between the various armed opposition groups and the government. Consequently, Afghanistan continues to be one of the most crisis ridden in the world today. According to the 2017 Global Peace Index, it is the second least peaceful country, after Syria. The disintegration of Afghanistan's political, security, and economic situations is most apparent through the shift in internal and regional displacement trends.

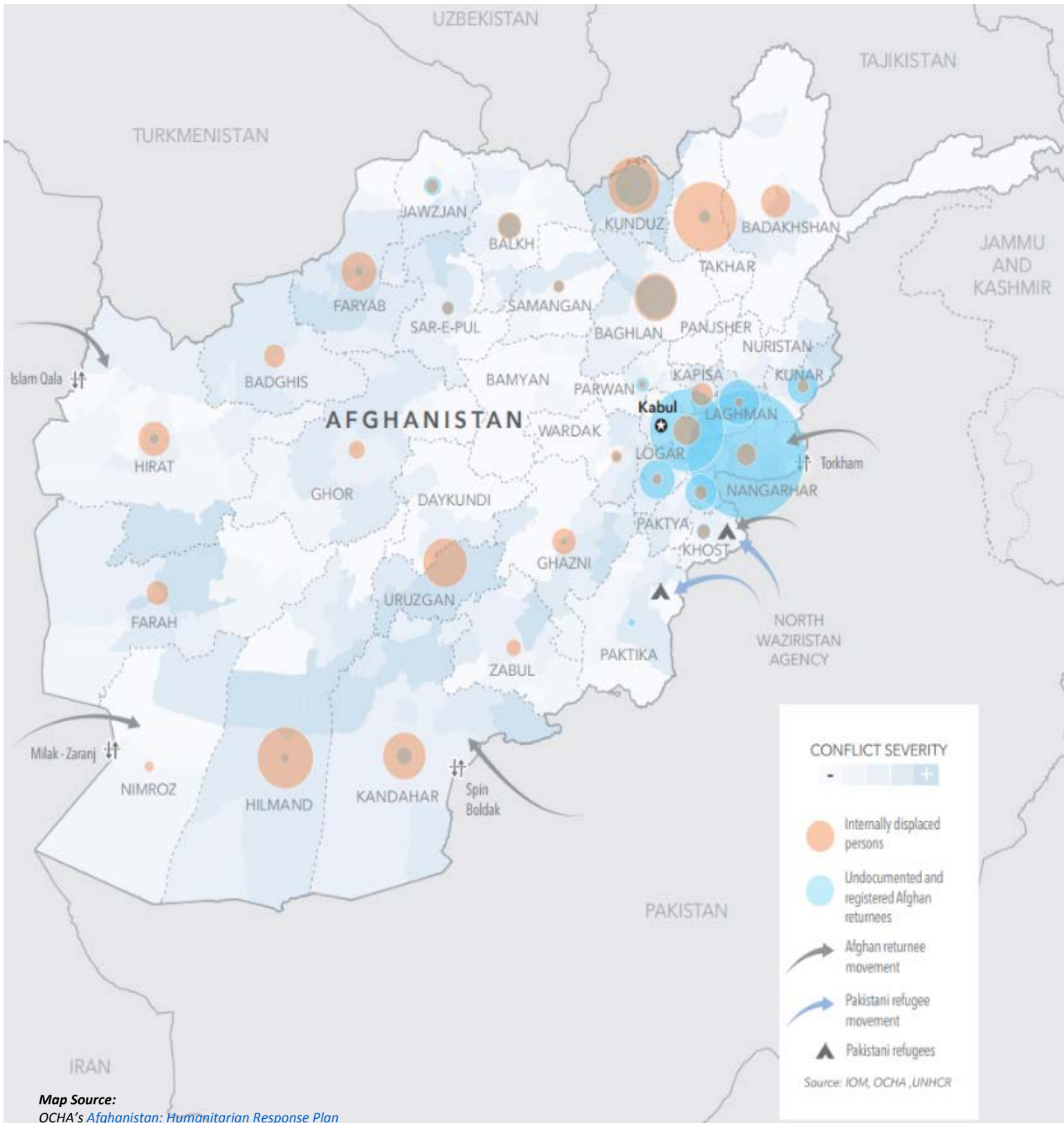
The conflicts of 2016 led to unprecedented levels of displacement in Afghanistan with **4.7 million Afghans forcibly displaced** within and across the country's borders, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). More than 650,000 people were newly displaced internally last year alone, according to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (UNOCHA) Year-End Report. Further exacerbating the situation, **hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees returned** from Pakistan and Iran in 2016, adding to the overwhelming number of displaced families. **An estimated two million refugees have lived in Pakistan for decades**, but are feeling the effects of the deteriorating relationship between the two countries, including pressure to return to Afghanistan. As the number of Afghans on the move increases every day, so do the number of people in need of both emergency response and development support so that each individual is empowered to proactively face their future.

IRC has leveraged the experience of its on-the-ground teams in Afghanistan and Pakistan to create this guide to the crisis, including a three year strategic plan for IRC's response which will pave the road forward in providing vital support to the Afghan people. IRC's response will be centered on establishing a continuum between the simultaneous and complementary interventions of immediate humanitarian assistance and the more sustained efforts addressing longer-term social and economic effects of displacement.

Please join me in supporting our colleagues in Afghanistan and Pakistan to make their vision a reality.

With gratitude,

Sanna Johnson, Asia Regional Director, IRC



In a continually deteriorating context, UNOCHA estimates that 7.4 million people<sup>1</sup> are in need of humanitarian aid within Afghanistan's borders. According to UNHCR, as many as 2.5 million Afghan refugees are still remaining in nearby host countries with majority in Pakistan and Iran<sup>2</sup>. Afghans who fled unlivable circumstances, many of them decades ago, are feeling increased pressure from the hosting countries to return to their home country Afghanistan, where resources are critically low, unemployment is extremely high, and internal conflicts are displacing more people every day. The economy and society of Afghanistan is still fragile after decades of warfare, resulting in about two million dead, 700,000 widowed and orphaned, and about one million Afghan children raised in refugee camps outside Afghanistan. Insecurity and conflict within Afghanistan, which have increased in recent years and remain widespread in 2017, continue to threaten lives and livelihoods of civilians and have caused new displacement of over 295,000 people as of mid-August 2017<sup>3</sup>.

As conflict intensifies and more Afghans are on the move, the region is seeing a decline in available funding. Trends in recent years recognized some of the other populations in need as areas of severe crises, whereby humanitarian assistance reportedly concentrated on Syria, Yemen, Iraq, South Sudan and Ethiopia in 2016<sup>4</sup> receiving more than half of all funding (54%). In 2015 Syria, Yemen, Jordan, South Sudan, Iraq were recipient countries of largest amounts. Together with IRC, organizations including United Nations agencies, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), International Office of Migration (IOM), Human Rights Watch (HRW), European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Dutch MoFA), Department for International Development in the UK (DFID), and many others are implementing important programs to serve Afghans in need of humanitarian assistance in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran.

The Afghan refugee population in Pakistan constitutes one of the world's largest protracted refugee situations. Of the estimated two million Afghan refugees still in Pakistan, 1,389,754 are registered by the Government of Pakistan (GOP)<sup>5</sup>, and 600,000 are undocumented<sup>6</sup>. Afghan refugees have lived in Pakistan for more than 37 years and both registered and unregistered populations have been affected by the growing tension of a tumultuous relationship between their home and host countries. In June 2016, clashes broke out across the Afghanistan/Pakistan border, exacerbating the deterioration of the relationship between the two countries. Over the past two years, a sharp increase both in returns of documented refugees and deportations of undocumented refugees has been recorded. At the beginning of 2016, an estimated one million documented and 1.5 million undocumented Afghan refugees were believed to be living in Pakistan; combination of deportation threats and police abuses pushed out nearly 616,620 Afghans from Pakistan<sup>7</sup>. By mid-October, an additional 391,000 undocumented<sup>8</sup> Afghans had returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran in 2017, with estimated 53,000 documented Afghans returning from Pakistan<sup>9</sup>.

Refugees remaining in Pakistan will be subject to Pakistan's Comprehensive Policy on the Repatriation and Management of Afghans approved by the GOP in February 2017. This new policy requires undocumented refugees to register, and some documented refugees who wish to stay to relinquish their refugee status and apply for a visa<sup>10</sup>. As part of the new policy's implementation, in July 2017, under collaboration with UNHCR, a pilot for registering undocumented refugees with Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC) was initiated in Islamabad. The ACC signify temporary legal status within the country and ostensibly granting legal protection<sup>11</sup>. The impact of this pilot has yet to be determined. Due to a restricted environment for humanitarian work in Pakistan, assessments and evaluations of Afghan refugees, both documented or undocumented, have been difficult, resulting in availability of limited information regarding living conditions, accessibility of services, protection and other needs.

There has been an increase in Afghans making westward journey, running into perils of transiting Iran, in search of safety in Europe. The prospect of asylum in Europe is also diminishing for Afghans, running a risk of deportation as rate of successful Afghan asylum applications falls to only 53%. In 2015, UNHCR reported more than 200,000<sup>12</sup> Afghans fled home, through dangerous routes of Iran and Turkey and making risky crossings across the Aegean Sea to Greece. There are about 14,000 refugees and asylum seekers, mostly from Afghanistan<sup>13</sup>, currently living in Indonesia, a transit country that has opened its doors to those fleeing war, conflict and persecution.

In 2017, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Currently, 36% of the population lives below the poverty line, with the unemployment rate hovering at almost 40%<sup>14</sup>. Around 9.3 million Afghans are severely or moderately food insecure<sup>15</sup>. 2016 saw the highest displacement ever recorded in Afghanistan, with half a million Afghans newly<sup>16</sup> and the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) Mid-Year Review for Afghanistan estimated that over 160,600 individuals were displaced during the first six months of 2017 (a 15% overall reduction in displacement from the same period last year)<sup>17</sup>. From January to late October 2017, nearly 322,000 displaced individuals were provided with humanitarian assistance in all 34 provinces and 101 districts, where only basic emergency assistance, such as food and emergency shelter, was provided following initial displacement. Inadequate shelter, food insecurity, insufficient access to sanitation and health facilities, as well as a lack of protection, often result in precarious living conditions that jeopardizes the well-being and dignity of affected families. The assessment is ongoing in most provinces<sup>18</sup>.

After over three decades of protracted displacement, Iran remains host to almost 1 million documented and over 2 million undocumented Afghans<sup>19</sup>. Many face constraints and limitations to livelihoods, health, access to education and other essential services. Iran recently committed itself to include all registered Afghan refugees in the national health insurance scheme on the same basis as its own citizens. In addition, all foreign children irrespective of their legal status have recently been permitted to enroll in the national education system<sup>20</sup>. A majority of refugees reside in the Provinces of Tehran (33%), Khorasan Razavi (16%), Esfahan (13%), and Kerman (8%) with the rest dispersed in other provinces. While 97% live in urban areas, less than 3% are hosted in the 18 Afghan refugee settlements run by the Iranian government's Bureau for Alien and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA). Afghan refugees and undocumented Afghans face constraints and limitations with regard to registration, livelihoods, health, access to education and other essential services. Undocumented Afghans are generally in a more vulnerable situation as without legal status they have been ineligible for most of the assistance provided until 2015. The situation started to change slowly with the Supreme Leader's decree in May 2015, allowing undocumented Afghan children to access formal education. Vulnerable Afghan refugees in Iran, mostly undocumented, are being pressured by the Iranian authorities, or are motivated to fight in Syria by enticing promises of financial benefits, including legal residence for the fighters and their families in Iran. These incentives without sufficient protections could increase the risk of child recruitment; as the UNHCR has emphasized, "...refugee children and adolescents... are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by government armed forces..." and has called upon governments to implement policies to prevent this human rights violation. The process of attaining legal status is lengthy and difficult for refugees and without it life is challenging for Afghans in Iran.

Further exacerbating the situation, the increasing rate of return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran has added to the caseload of displaced families, straining an already frail economy. UNHCR and IOM data reveals that 618,189 people has spontaneously returned or were deported from Pakistan (248,189 undocumented Afghans and 370,000 registered Afghan refugees), and 443,968 spontaneously returned or were deported from Iran in 2016. As of mid-August, 353,671 returnees have arrived in Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran in 2017<sup>21</sup>. As of April 2017, 951,142 documented Afghan refugees are hosted in Iran<sup>22</sup>. About three million Afghans in these two host countries are coping with discouraging local integration prospects, restricted movements, worsening living conditions, deteriorating protection spaces, and limited access to livelihood and income opportunities.



# IRC's Programming Methodology

The IRC's global strategy is to make measurable improvements in health, safety, education, economic well-being, and decision making power. The IRC has made investments to design more effective programs, use resources more efficiently, reach more people more quickly, and to better respond to beneficiaries' needs. The IRC's global strategy is tailored to local circumstances by way of Strategy Action Plans. The Afghanistan Displacement and Solutions Strategy is guided by IRC's Strategy Action Plans for Pakistan and Afghanistan; from now until the end of 2020, the IRC will improve the safety, health, education and economic wellbeing of Afghan communities. The IRC will continue to respond to identified needs of refugees in Pakistan and IDPs and returnees in Afghanistan and will adapt its program model so that they are responsive to the particular operating context. More specifically, IRC will seek funding to continue programming in:

- **Health** access through proven WASH projects.
- **Safety** interventions for the most vulnerable beneficiaries, particularly women, children, and people with disabilities, via Safe Healing and Learning Spaces (SHLSs) and CDCs.
- **Education** programming in the form of community based education (CBE) and accelerated learning program (ALP) classes, as well as building the capacity of the Ministry of Education (MoE).
- **Economic wellbeing** activities, including entrepreneurship and technical training, financial support, and facilitating the formation of women-powered savings and loans associations.
- **Emergency response** for immediate survival and longer-term sustainability with a focus on cash transfer programming.
- Activities to **empower** the government and communities to implement, influence, and navigate policy and utilize available resources.

The IRC in Pakistan and Afghanistan drafted the Afghan Displacement and Solutions Strategy together to ensure that the response to the Afghan population is coordinated and meets their needs regardless of where they reside. The IRC's strategy is organized by outcome areas and the interventions are tailored to meet the specific population needs in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and eventually in Iran in a coherent way. The IRC will facilitate regular coordination and periodical reviews of the strategy during the course of strategy implementation.

### The IRC in Pakistan

The IRC has been working with Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan for over three decades and in Afghanistan since 1988. The support in Pakistan has significantly declined due to a decrease in donor funding in recent years as well as changes in NGO registration and ATW status. IRC has carefully considered the policy and operational context in Pakistan as well as the most pressing needs of documented and undocumented Afghan refugees, and designed a strategic response that optimizes our current work and expertise in the country to focus on three major pillars including, 1) to build a relevant and updated body of data through vulnerability assessments and profiling; 2) to improve community-based protection; and 3) to provide cash support and skills development, implementing through local organizations when possible. In addition to continuing IRC's established skills development work, the IRC in Pakistan will seek funding to continue its support to Afghan refugees using the vulnerability assessment and profiling program to implement targeted and focused protection and skills development interventions for 25,000 refugees in FY2018, including those preparing to return to Afghanistan. To meet already identified critical needs, the IRC in Pakistan will support 25,000 refugees, including those preparing to return to Afghanistan, with direct cash assistance, skills development, and safety interventions, such as building referral mechanisms, case management, and access to services. Due to the limiting operational environment for working with either documented or undocumented Afghan refugees in Pakistan, IRC has focused on building reservoir of data and conducting safety and economic wellbeing interventions to address the most immediate needs of this population in a way that will empower beneficiaries to face their futures, regardless of whether they return to Afghanistan or remain in Pakistan.

### **The IRC in Afghanistan**

Inside Afghanistan, IRC is implementing programs in nine provinces most of which face great insecurities and host some of the largest vulnerable populations of IDPs and returnees. These provinces include: Kabul, Herat, Badghis, Logar, Khost, Paktya, Nangarhar, Laghman, and Helmand. IRC has offices in Kabul (main office), Qal-e-Naw (Badghis), Pul-i-Alam (Logar), Khost City, Gardez (Paktya), Jalalabad (Nangarhar), Laghman, and Lashkar Gah (Helmand). The IRC's intervention strategy in Afghanistan will build on the ongoing work, and focus on three pillars:

- 1) To build a relevant and updated body of data through vulnerability assessments and profiling
- 2) To ensure the immediate survival of IDPs and returnees
- 3) To ensure sustainable reintegration and rehabilitation including well-being and psychosocial stability of the IDPs and returnees so they can build healthy and sustainable futures.

### **The IRC and Iran**

The IRC conducted a feasibility assessment in 2016/17 for operations in Iran to respond to the Afghan refugee situation. At this time the IRC is not planning any work inside the country but will continue to monitor and follow the in-country developments via the Durable Solution Framework performed in partnership with Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council and Relief International.

## Analysis and Objectives by Sector

### Environmental Health (WASH)

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*Being healthy is about being alive, as well as enjoying the benefits of **being physically and mentally well***

According to the World Health Organization, insufficient sanitation facilities leave many Afghans vulnerable to diseases spread by contaminated water sources such as diarrhea which is one of the primary causes of child death in Afghanistan. Only 23% of the population have access to safe water and 12% have access to adequate sanitation. Just a quarter of people have hygienic toilets, many foregoing hand washing after going to the toilet due to lack of facilities and/or hygiene education<sup>23</sup>. Afghanistan has more than a 9% mortality rate for children under five years. Nearly 25% of child mortality is due to poor sanitation practices, and more than 40% of young children in Afghanistan are stunted due to the combined factors of malnourishment and exposure to pathogens of fecal origin<sup>24</sup>.

**Specific Objective:** To provide clean drinking water and protect 175,000 Afghans (including children, women, persons with disability and other vulnerable groups) from water-borne diseases through improved hygiene and sanitation practices in Afghanistan by 2020.

**Major Activities:** IRC's WASH response in Afghanistan will expand access to safe drinking water, improve hygiene and sanitation, and provide nutrition, hygiene, and sanitation informational materials in appropriate language and literacy levels, focusing children, women, persons with disability and other vulnerable groups)

**Required Budget: USD 3,500,000**

### Safety (Protection)

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*Safety is defined as people being **free from harm** in the places where they live, work, and go to school*

Afghan refugees in Pakistan are vulnerable to negative impacts of unpredictable political and security developments. While the UNHCR uses its own mandate to confer refugee status and the GOP issued temporary Proof of Registration (POR) cards, these measures do not provide adequate protection of all Afghan refugees in the country. The temporary nature of POR cards serves as a reminder to registered refugees that their status is accepted only for a limited time, and is often interpreted as encouragement to return to Afghanistan. Additionally, unregistered refugees remain at risk of arrest and detention by the authorities<sup>25</sup>. Concerns specific to child protection include threats of violence, harassment and abuse due to poverty, lack of education, and insufficient access to basic and specialized services, including legal assistance and psychosocial support.

Internal conflicts are ongoing throughout Afghanistan, exacerbating existing protection concerns and generating new threats to the Afghan population as a whole. According to UNOCHA, over 52,000 civilian casualties caused by conflict were reported between January and June 2017 alone. During this period, Afghanistan saw a 23% increase in female casualties and a 9% increase in child deaths. Additionally, data suggests that more than 33% of children are affected by psychological distress. All of these factors leave the population more prone to a high risk of protection concerns such as early and forced marriage and domestic psychological and sexual abuse<sup>26</sup>. A survey released by Save the Children at the beginning of 2017 found that children of Afghan families returning from Pakistan, who do not go to school and have no access to education, are increasingly at risk of child labor as well as early marriage. At least a quarter of all Afghan children between 5 and 14 are engaged in the workforce for a living or to help their families. Many jobs held by children have hazardous working conditions and poor enforcement of safety and health standards<sup>27</sup>.

**Specific Objective 1:** To protect 20,000 refugees (special focus on most vulnerable groups comprising people with disabilities, women, and girls) in Pakistan from violence and exploitation ensuring their safe and dignified access to services by 2018.

**Major Activities:** Establish community-based protection mechanisms, build community safety networks to address issues of harassment by authorities, case management, provision of support to specific cases, legal assistance and support in acquiring POR cards, counselling and information dissemination with respect to policy provisions, situation/services at places of returns, etc. All of these interventions will have a specific focus on the most vulnerable groups including people with disabilities, women, and girls.

**Required Budget: USD 500,000**

**Specific Objective 2:** To protect 35,300 children (especially girls) in Afghanistan from abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect by 2020.

**Major Activities:** Train communities and create SHLSs, for both emergency and longer term programs, in districts of high returns and displacements, provision of psychosocial support focusing on girls, establishing referral mechanism to provide support to individual vulnerable cases, developing linkages with safety nets, etc.

**Required Budget: USD 6,050,000**

**Specific Objective 3:** To protect 125,000 most vulnerable individuals (with special focus on women and girls) in Afghanistan from any potential violence, exploitation and abuse through community-based protection system by 2020.

**Major Activities:** Establish community-based protection mechanisms, train local government officials, CDCs, and community members on protection of most vulnerable individuals with especially focus on children, women, persons with disability, including child labor and early and/or forced marriage. Support in registration and in obtaining civil documentation case management, and setting up and training of CDCs, Community Shuras, and others on safe referral mechanisms in case of violence. Referrals include cooperation with health services, especially for mental health and psychosocial support.

**Required Budget: USD 4,250,000**

## Education

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*Education constitutes three types of skills that a person needs to survive and recover from conflict or crisis and regain control over their future: literacy and numeracy skills, social-emotional skills, and livelihoods skills*

During UNHCR's 2016 Protection Community Assessment conducted in Nangarhar, 80% of focus group discussion (FGD) participants reported that classrooms are overcrowded, 47.7% mentioned that families forsakes girls' formal education at puberty (between 10 and 14 years old), and 16.2% cited long distance and lack of transportation to school as reasons for girls dropping out of school<sup>28</sup>. More than 20% of children in Afghanistan are working to support the livelihood of their families. Based on the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP III) of the Ministry of Education (MoE)<sup>29</sup> and the National IDP policy<sup>30</sup>, an estimated 3.5 million school age children (the majority of which are girls) are currently out of school. Current government provisions cannot meet the scale of increased educational needs, and Afghanistan remains off-track in meeting targets on eliminating gender disparity in education<sup>31</sup>.

Following a decree by the Supreme Leader in 2015 in Iran that all Afghan children should attend school regardless of documentation status, close to 400,000 Afghan and Iraqi children are now enrolled in primary and secondary school, of which over 46,000 are undocumented children. For the 2015-16 and 2016-17 academic years, some 77,000 undocumented children have registered for school<sup>32</sup>. The common challenges faced by Afghan students are transportation cost, School "contribution" fees, books and uniforms Afghans are required to get to enroll in schools and child laborers who cannot adapt their working hours to attend school<sup>33</sup>. In May 2016 the revision of regulations on the registration of foreign national students in Iran resulted in the removal of any refugee-specific tuition fees (70-90 USD per student) for primary and secondary education; UNHCR and its government counterparts are closely monitoring the implementation of this revision.

**Specific Objective 1:** To provide 40,000 school-age children in Afghanistan with equal opportunities for girls as boys, to build their literacy, numeracy and social & economical skills through increased access and provision of conducive learning environment by 2020.

**Major Activities:** IRC will provide CBE and ALP classes which will include literacy, numeracy, social-emotional skills development and hygiene promotion for girls and boys. Will include building of libraries and ensuring learning spaces have improved WASH facilities for males and females. IRC will continue to develop a partnership with the Ministry of Education to measure and generate evidence on the quality of Afghan education services. Assist in teacher recruitment and training, and provide materials where needed. IRC will support reintegration of returnee Afghan children and youth through border education help centers, temporary transition classes, and provide internship opportunities.

**Required Budget: USD 16.6 Million**

## Economic Wellbeing

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*To ensure economic well-being, people must have their most basic survival needs met and be food secure. Once met, they must be **able to generate an income and have the ability to use and control their resources***

Children and youth constitute nearly 70% of the Afghan refugee population in Pakistan, a fact that underlines vulnerability of the displaced communities but also points to the significant human capital that these new generations can offer in the context of future reconstruction efforts needed in Afghanistan<sup>34</sup>. The labor force of Afghan refugees above 10 years old is around 35 percent, which states that only 35 people out of 100 Afghan refugees are economically active in Pakistan and rest of them are living in a dependency condition. Another concerning issue is the composition of labors done by structure of ages (25 to 50 percent of Afghan refugee adults are workforce) which has affected their human capital both in term of education and health. According to UNHCR published 2012 PPVR, 65% of Afghan refugees are living dependent on those with income, on humanitarian aid, or both. Of those who are working, 55% make a living as day laborers, while self-employed and salaried workers make up 22% and 19% of the workforce respectively. Of those currently reported to be economically active, 23% work as refuse workers (and other elementary occupations), 21% as sales workers, and 12% as handicraft and printing workers, with another 7% engaged in other crafts, including woodwork and garments. Laborers in mining, construction, and manufacturing constitute 9%. Skills training leading to sustainable livelihood is the most critical humanitarian need of refugees today. As they return back to their country, they are left with nothing – be it the cash assistance by UNHCR or any other forms of NFIs/savings. The only humanitarian assistance which may not be taken away from them in the form of bribes or any other means of exploitation is the skills they have acquired or shall acquire to make their living.

Afghanistan has a high unemployment rate (~40%) and a population that is one of the youngest in the world (46.6% under 14 years old<sup>35</sup>). More than 70% of its population lives in rural areas. The agricultural sector accounts for a third of the gross domestic product (GDP). Agriculture, including the livestock sector, is the backbone of the Afghanistan economy and is a source of income for approximately 49% of families, and the primary source of income for 30%<sup>36</sup>.

The increase in returns from Iran is primarily due to the perceived pressure by the Iranian government that Afghan undocumented migrants put on the Iranian economy<sup>37</sup>. Being a protracted displacement situation, many young refugees are second or even third-generation Afghans living in Iran who seek to make a sustainable income for themselves and their families. As a result, livelihoods and skills development projects for refugees are an important part of humanitarian programming in Iran.<sup>38</sup> The lack of livelihood and education opportunities can make unemployed youth more at risk of turning to illicit activities to support themselves and their families<sup>39</sup>. In recent years there has been a positive shift in the Government of Iran's view towards enhancing refugees' various livelihoods opportunities, recognizing that refugees should be empowered to earn a decent living and be able to positively contribute to the society. Over time, engaging refugees in skills and livelihoods opportunities prepares them to find a sustainable durable solution to their situation, either in their own country or elsewhere. In 2017, UNHCR plans to collaborate with the Government of Iran and non-governmental partners to implement a diverse portfolio of livelihoods interventions targeting more than 1,500 refugees<sup>40</sup>. Jointly with the Government of Iran, UNHCR is currently exploring further ways to diversify its cash-based interventions, and leads a Cash Working Group between INGOs, UNHCR, and WFP to harmonize approaches and maximize cooperation between all CBI actors across the country.

**Specific Objective 1:** To equip 5,000 refugees in Pakistan with market-driven vocational skills and cash assistance for sustainable livelihood opportunities for men and women by 2018.

**Major Activities:** Cash assistance to those planning to return voluntarily and voucher programming for the most vulnerable refugees residing in Pakistan. Will also provide the tailor-made swift skills development opportunities and training programs for refugees receiving cash/voucher assistance. Swift-skills training will teach skills relevant to male

and female in both Pakistan and Afghanistan labor markets. The IRC will collaborate with and build the capacity of local organizations and key private sector institutions to deliver the program. Moreover, the skills training program will contribute to reducing beneficiaries' vulnerabilities and building resilience to future shocks.

**Required Budget: USD 1 Million**

**Specific Objective 2:** To provide 100,000 most vulnerable Afghans (including IDPs and returnees) with sustainable livelihood opportunities, for men as well as for women, for the immediate survival and longer-term dignified living in rural areas of Afghanistan by 2020.

**Major Activities:** The establishment of field farmer schools; training of women in livestock and dairy production and distribution of the required toolkits; installation of greenhouses and kitchen gardening; establishment of village savings and loan associations and provision of related trainings; provision of Agro related trainings and necessary inputs/tools to selected farmers, both male and female.

**Required Budget: USD 9 Million**

**Specific Objective 3:** To equip 45,000 Afghan youth in Afghanistan with market-driven vocational skills for employment and self-employment opportunities for males and females through business startup support for a sustained and dignified living by 2020.

**Major Activities:** The IRC will set up comprehensive technical vocational education and training (TVET) system as part of Afghanistan's modernization strategy. Through the livelihood program, IRC will implement interventions to increase the knowledge and skills of youth through establishment of center-based vocational training programs targeting rural and urban youth with special focus on females. Returnees, IDPs, and vulnerable host community youth will be trained with marketable skills based on a 'skills and services gap' analysis in the targeted areas. Financial support, entrepreneurship training and mentoring will be provided to young Afghan returnees who already have technical skills to generate income, but require resources and support to start a new businesses. Activities include social support interventions like business development training, job skills training, mentorship, creating linkages between potential employers and business and training graduates, entrepreneurial programming and providing access to capital. Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) will be established to help female savings groups to provide larger and affordable loans for community members, create linkages to local markets, and promote local products linking to bigger markets. In these bundled approaches, the IRC has been at the forefront of addressing social empowerment through VLSAs with its Economic and Social Empowerment program.

**Required Budget: USD 4 Million**

## Power (Governance)

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*Power is defined as the degree to which people have control over their futures*

The absence of national land and property rights policies in Afghanistan adversely affects individual and household livelihoods and local governance. Afghans need these policies to secure property, which is an important step toward ensuring access to shelter, water, food, and access to credit and social and humanitarian services<sup>41</sup>. Some families that returned to Afghanistan in the last year have tried to settle in their places of origin, however for many, this was not possible due to land challenges, lack of family networks and shelter, and insecurity. These families instead settled in the provinces and districts of arrival. These circumstances result in a displaced population, often living in informal settlements outside urban centers and district towns. While returning families often receive initial emergency assistance (usually in the form of a few cash installments), they must survive with little or no resources and often resort to negative coping strategies like incurring debt, child labor, child marriage, or child recruitment. According to an assessment conducted by the Afghanistan Protection Cluster in December 2016<sup>42</sup>, there are several barriers to the attainment of durable solutions for Afghan returnees and IDPs in order to empower them to take control of their future. Without addressing basic health, education, livelihood, and safety needs, these vulnerable groups of Afghans have little to no power over where and how they live, and their ability to influence decisions that affect them collectively.

There are severe restrictions on academic freedom and freedom of movement in Iran. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor transparency constraints on investigations by international and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) into alleged violations of human rights; legal and societal discrimination.<sup>43</sup> Basically, Iranians are known for their doing a

good deed and helping fellow-men, either individually or as group/community. As time goes by, a more formal type of help in the shape of NGOs is emerged. With respect to the development of civil society, Iran's political landscape has provided cause for optimism in recent years. The Iranian NGOs are involved in many different fields of activity including health, women, the environment, children wellbeing, and training. Their work may be divided, according to their expertise, into the following categories: informative, educational, operational consultation, small projects, supportive, production and training. Some of the NGO branches of mother organizations in different parts of the country, and some have been around for a long time. However, most of them have blossomed in the past few years. It is projected that the figures are growing exponentially in the recent years. <sup>44</sup>

**Specific Objective 1:** To empower the communities in Afghanistan through realization of their rights and by sensitizing and strengthening capacities of key duty-bearers by 2020.

**Major Activities:** The IRC will train and build Afghan Government's capacity to implement its National IDP Strategy. The IRC will educate communities about their rights when faced with land expropriation including strengthening the capacity of CDCs, RCs, local government actors and institutions by developing a Provincial Capacity Building Plan. Moreover, the IRC will establish local Peace Committee and will build their capacities.

**Required Budget: USD 2 Million**

**Specific Objective 2:** To monitor and inform all key humanitarian and development actors with up-to-date and live information with respect to most vulnerable population, focusing on children, women and people with disability, and their key needs for better and effective programming by 2019.

**Major Activities:** A vulnerability assessment and profiling mechanism will be established with major interventions such as direct data collection (using technology such as tablets, smart phones, databases and software as appropriate), conducting dynamic profiling of the populations against agreed interagency indicator sets, and assessing the beneficiaries' mental health and psychosocial support against prescribed indicators on departure (from Pakistan) and arrival points (in Afghanistan) to assess the effects on their mental health and psychosocial needs during repatriation process. This information would be made widely and publicly available for the use of partners and the wider humanitarian community through the use of periodical snapshots and bulletins.

**Required Budget: USD 2 Million**

## Analysis

### Rationale

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Afghanistan represents the longest protracted mass displacement of the modern era. Displacement dynamics are driven by a complex interplay of political, economic and social factors, but overall mass movements continue, with a 63% increase in conflict induced internal displacement in Afghanistan in 2015, a mass influx of Afghans returning under duress in 2017, and high rates of migration out of the region, with Afghans representing the second highest group migrating to Europe. The policy and legal framework underpinning protection of the Afghan displaced is governed by regional political developments. Constructive, regional-level civil society input into the policy dialogue has been relatively limited, due partially to the closed context for civil society in the region. The result, however, of lack of civil society input into political processes is limited, insufficient and/or inappropriate response to Afghan movement, as evidenced by the lack of unified response to the Pakistan return situation, the lack of follow up on SSAR projects and the lack of roll out of policy initiatives such as the IDP policy.

### Collaborative Response by IRC, DRC, NRC & RI

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IRC, DRC, NRC and RI collaborated to establish an Afghan Displacement and Solutions Platform with the aim to improve the environment for providing long-term, comprehensive solutions for displaced Afghans across the region (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran), both with regard to meeting needs and accessing rights. The platform addresses 'solutions' rather than 'durable solutions' in recognition of the fact that Afghans do not currently have access to the 3 UNHCR-defined durable solutions, and that there is little prospect of achieving durable solutions in the short term. The platform aims to support Afghans in accessing comprehensive solutions: it will support transitional solutions, including increased access to rights, in the short term to pave the way to durable solutions in the future. The ADSP Platform aims to provide a

platform for constructive, evidence based dialogue around improving legal, material and physical safety, and developing long-term legal, economic and social solutions for Afghans among humanitarian, development, policy and other relevant stakeholders. This will take place through 4 work-streams:

- **Research:** The ADSP will facilitate the development of a clear evidence base system across Afghanistan and Pakistan that identifies challenges for the Afghan displaced and analyses the effectiveness of potential solutions.
- **Capacity Building:** The ADSP will strengthen the capacity of NGOs and other stakeholders to provide comprehensive solutions for displaced Afghans in the region
- **Policy:** The ADSP will open space for constructive, evidence-based dialogue between civil society and key stakeholders across the Afghan displacement axis.
- **Coordination:** The platform will improve and support coordination at the regional level, in close collaboration with existing national and regional coordination bodies

## **Intended Impact**

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The Afghan Displacement and Solutions Platform aims to achieve changes at the country, regional and global level:

- **Changes in humanitarian and development assistance:** The platform aims to identify and promote ways of improving humanitarian and development assistance through initiatives such as advance preparation for displacements among humanitarian and development implementers, and integrating solutions into early responses.
- **Changes in national level policies:** The platform aims to support governments in implementing appropriate response mechanisms for Afghans, developing national policy and action frameworks and reviewing and improving existing policies to ensure a solid foundation for durable solutions for the Afghan displaced.
- **Changes in regional and global policy frameworks:** The platform aims to advocate for the review and improvement of regional policy frameworks with input from key non-governmental organizations, UN humanitarian and development agencies for sustainable solutions to Afghan Crisis including re/settlements of Afghans, their immediate survival and protection, respect for their rights in any and every status by a joint collective approach beyond than individual country's political, social or economic interests.

The IRC continues to raise the voice for the humanitarian imperative. In the course of implementing this strategy, the IRC commits to keep reminding the key duty-bearers of their responsibilities individually and collectively to help Afghans regain control of their lives with a dignity. The IRC thus shall ensure to collaborate and advocate with all key stakeholders on the following fronts:

## **Basic Service Delivery to Afghans**

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- Ensure that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) delivers basic services, including health, education, water, and sanitation to its citizens, including hard-to-reach and rural areas
- Advocate for an ongoing role for INGOs to assist in providing basic services in areas where GIROA cannot reach or does not have capacity

## **Needs of Internally Displaced Afghans**

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- Raise awareness of the situation of Afghan IDPs with governments, donors, and the general public

## **Humanitarian Space in Afghanistan**

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- Ensure that all parties to the conflict allow unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need as prescribed by International Humanitarian Law

## **Safe & Voluntary Return of Afghan Refugees**

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- Monitor and seek international attention to the continued needs of refugees in Pakistan and Iran; and urge that returns should only take place when conditions allow in Afghanistan

## **Continued & Increased Donor Attention**

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- Draw donors' attention to the severe and critical need of resources to support Afghan refugees leading their lives under harsh and challenging conditions in neighboring countries particularly Pakistan



## **Support Refugees Overseas (Europe)**

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- Ensure a fair, thorough and effective asylum process for all nationalities, including Afghans
- Expand relocation to Afghans and accelerate family reunifications from Greece to other EU countries
- Ensure Afghan and other Non-Syrian refugees' meaningful access to protection in Turkey
- Commit to an expanded resettlement program and safe alternate pathways into Europe



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