



WOMEN AND GIRLS

AND INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan remains one of the world's most complex emergencies. Sustained conflict has resulted in high numbers of civilian deaths and injuries, and protracted displacement. Between January and December 2019, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) recorded 3,403 civilian deaths, a five per cent decrease as compared to 2018.¹ UNAMA also documented 1,202 women casualties (345 killed and 857 injured), a four per cent increase from 2018. The surge in returns by an estimated 1.7 million documented and undocumented Afghan refugees during 2016-2017 remains a pressure on the country's institutions and economy. The situation deteriorated in 2017 and 2018 with large-scale displacement due to drought. In 2019 the total number of undocumented and registered returnees reached 504,605 (496,526 undocumented² and 8079 documented³).

Internal displacement and large-scale return within a challenging economic and security context pose protection risks for both displaced and for host communities. The cumulative impacts of decades of war, combined with chronic poverty and recurrent natural disasters including the severe drought of 2017 and 2018 and massive flooding in early 2019 has put pressure on service delivery systems and has increased competition for already scarce public services and economic opportunities. 9.4 million people require some form of humanitarian and protection assistance of which 4 million are IDPs. Over 14 million people are projected to experience crisis and emergency levels of food insecurity, in the first quarter of 2020. Malnutrition is soaring, with over 3 million women and children and women acutely malnourished, requiring specialized

¹ UNAMA/OHCHR Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report, 2019.

² IOM Situation Report https://afghanistan.iom.int/sites/default/files/Rports/iom_afghanistan-return_of_undocumented_afghans-situation_report_15-28_dec_2019_002.pdf

³ Refugees Situation <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>

nutrition supplies and medicines. In Afghanistan, 563,000 women of reproductive age are under-nourished. Women of reproductive age and adolescent girls affected by under-nutrition suffer adverse impacts on their own health, as well as later, on the birth outcome of their children⁴.

Women and girls are differentially impacted by displacement. The majority of women IDPs have limited or no access to basic services such as health and education. Access is limited for several reasons including lack of documentation, unavailability of services, and social and cultural barriers. Use of negative coping mechanisms among the IDPs has been widely reported by humanitarian partners such as child marriage, child labor, and unsafe work.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a critical component of achieving inclusive, effective and life-saving humanitarian action. However, humanitarian responses often miss opportunities to transform gender relations through the leadership and empowerment of women and girls in their role as decision makers, first responders and economic actors — notwithstanding that these are key to respond effectively and to building longer-term resilience and social cohesion of communities. Women and men are differentially impacted and often highlight different concerns and bring different perspectives, experiences and solutions to issues. They also have differing perceptions and concerns regarding culturally acceptable practices. As such, women must be consulted directly and not through men who are seen to speak on their behalf. It is critical that women and girls are fully engaged in the design, implementation and monitoring of humanitarian responses.

Progress has been made in Afghanistan in areas which have been of some benefit to IDP women and girls: revision of IDP SOPs has facilitated faster access and response to the IDP crises and raised awareness on the situation of IDPs by national and international stakeholders; progress has been made in the provision of rapid emergency response services, particularly in the cash and health sectors; coordination of stakeholders at the national level has improved; the nexus debate has resulted in expansion of the definition of “humanitarian response plans”, providing an opportunity for humanitarian partners to link humanitarian program-



ming to early recovery and resilience followed by long-term development programming. However, few initiatives have been designed and taken to scale which directly set out to understand and address the needs of women and girls IDPs. In addition, given the scale of the humanitarian crisis, there is currently limited capacity amongst humanitarian actors in Afghanistan to effectively carry out gender inclusive humanitarian preparedness and response work. Similarly, women's machineries and women's CSOs are generally not included in response mechanisms and some lack the technical capacity to engage – thereby negating the potentially powerful effects of leveraging the development-humanitarian nexus to bring gains to gender efforts in both arenas.

Challenges remain for humanitarian actors in Afghanistan in ensuring women and girls benefit equally from humanitarian response. The lack of gender analysis in IDP programming results in women's perspectives and priori-



ties being left out in strategies for humanitarian response. Some IDP male representatives manipulate this situation for their benefit, and due to protection concerns, people may not report such incidents, especially women. The lack of economic and livelihood opportunities, especially for women, is a significant challenge. Most economic programs focus on short term vocational trainings.

Key recommendations to ensure women and girls benefit equally from humanitarian response include:

- A comprehensive gender analysis to more effectively identify and respond to the needs of IDP women and girls;
- Overcoming barriers to fully represent women's voices in all data collection efforts, including investing in building women's agency and increasing their ability to understand and participate in such requests;
- Engagement of women at all stages of humanitarian programme planning, design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation;
- Improved training and capacity building for all stakeholders on adopting a gender sensitive approach to addressing internal displacement;
- Expansion of evidence-based programming for sustainable economic and livelihood opportunities for women;
- While there is consensus on the importance of girl's education, there is a clear need to design long-term education programs for women;

- Investment in expanding GBV in Emergencies response and services, and catalyzing synergies between GBViE and EAW programming in the development sector;
- Inclusion of reproductive health services including contraception in healthcare packages.

On 23 October 2019, the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres announced the establishment of a High Level-Panel on Internal Displacement. The Secretary-General has tasked the Panel with finding solutions to and raising awareness of internal displacement. The Panel will submit its final recommendations to the Secretary-General one year after its first meeting in February 2020, in Geneva. The findings and recommendations will be drawn from meetings of the Panel, field visits, consultations and an expert advisory group. The panel includes representation from countries particularly affected by displacement. Eight members have been appointed to the panel, including Dr Sima Samar from Afghanistan.

This policy brief is drafted by UN Women Afghanistan, based on consultations with humanitarian actors in Kabul and in Herat, and is released to coincide with the first meeting of the High-Level panel. It is the first of a range of consultations, research and analysis planned in 2020 regarding women, girls and internal displacement in Afghanistan.

