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Gender Alert: Gender-related impacts of evictions of internally-displaced persons and destructions of informal settlements – focus on Badghis



GENDER
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION
Afghanistan

20 December 2022

Photo: UN Women/SayedHabibBidel



This Gender Alert has been developed by the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group and the Women Advisory Group (WAG) to the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in Afghanistan. The Gender Alert is based on updates, information and reports received from women organizations and humanitarian actors, including in the Badghis province, Western Region of Afghanistan.

2022 was marked by increased pressure from the De facto Authorities (DfA) to accelerate the pace of return of families who fled conflict and natural disasters over the past years to their place of origin. In the first two weeks of December 2022, the DfA took steps to dismantle 8 informal settlements and infrastructures in Badghis, home to approximately 2,800 displaced families. Just under 20,000 individuals¹ saw their shelter destroyed and were forcibly asked to go back to their areas of origin on 15 December.

Previous decades of fighting, and more recently drought, had forced thousands of families to flee their homes in the rural areas of Badghis and seek out safety and humanitarian support in the capital, Qala-e-Naw. The populations of these informal settlements are highly vulnerable and dependent on humanitarian assistance. **Moreover, women and Women Headed Households (WHH) make up a majority of the persons living in such settlements**, as women are more likely to be displaced in Afghanistan, and to take their families with them when they flee conflicts or natural disasters². In Badghis, **187 WHH were identified among the evicted population, while the exact number of women and girls impacted by the evictions is not yet available.**

¹Afghanistan: 20,000 displaced people evicted from makeshift camps in freezing temperatures, Norwegian Refugee Council, 15 December 2022, available from: <https://www.nrc.no/news/2022/december/afghanistan-20000-displaced-people-evicted-from-makeshift-camps-in-freezing-temperatures/>, accessed on 20 December 2022 (NRC December 2022)

²Afghanistan Crisis Update, Women and Girls in Displacement, UN Women and UNHCR, September 2022, available from: Afghanistan crisis update: Women and Girls in Displacement II | Global Focus (unhcr.org)

³<https://www.nrc.no/news/2022/december/afghanistan-20000-displaced-people-evicted-from-makeshift-camps-in-freezing-temperatures/>

Many IDP households are highly vulnerable to return to their areas of origin. Evictions are also further compounding their already dire situation in the face of the current economic crisis which has worsened their prospects for work and survival. Economic prospects and stability are unclear in areas of origin, where households are likely to have had their homes destroyed or no homes left in their villages of origin, or may not have documentation to prove ownership. **This is especially true for women IDPs, given the historically low rates of home or land ownership of women in Afghanistan.**

This alert aims to shed light on the gender-related impacts of IDP evictions and destructions of informal settlements in Badghis and to put forward recommendations for the humanitarian community.

Findings: gendered impact and consequences

- **The evictions will have a multiplier impact on the already dire situation of WHH in Badghis.**

With temperatures expected to drop below 0 almost every night in the coming months, evicted populations are in dire need of shelter, firewood, fuel, and winter clothes for themselves and the children in their household, in addition to food and non-food items that will allow them to respond to their basic humanitarian needs.

Although standard humanitarian assistance is being provided to evicted IDPs, including WHH, through cash and in-kind distributions, women organizations report that in-kind support may not meet the needs of WHH. CSO reports show that WHH' preference was to receive cash, to obtain the means and opportunity to address their own priority needs. While cash is intended to be used to buy food, clothes and winter equipment available in local markets, CSOs also highlighted that dignity and hygiene kits, which are not easily accessible to women and WHH, should be provided directly to women by humanitarian partners.

- **Evicted WHH are heavily reliant on humanitarian assistance, but they are at risk of being left out of the humanitarian response.**

In the Western Region, for one out of four WHH, humanitarian assistance is the primary or secondary source of income.⁴ In line with this regional trend, women CSOs from Badghis highlighted that displaced WHH in the informal settlements highly relied on humanitarian assistance and that evictions could deprive women and their households of the assistance they need to survive.

Throughout the years, WHH living in informal settlements were able to access humanitarian assistance through networks of neighbors or other members of the community who collected humanitarian assistance on behalf of WHH and passed on the aid provided by humanitarian partners. However, evictions and return, combined with increased restrictions on women and their mobility, mean they will be unable to rebuild these networks. Without these connections, WHH are also at risk of not being able to access information on humanitarian assistance, as information often circulates through men leaders and men family members. Due to limitations to women's rights, WHH without a male relative will thus be unlikely to access humanitarian assistance and basic services, should they return to their areas of origin.

Access to humanitarian assistance for evicted WHH can be further complicated by the fact that the DfA refused to register them as internally displaced and to officially include them in their list of evicted populations, due to the absence of a man in these households.⁵ While DfA are reported to have excluded these WHH from their own list of humanitarian assistance beneficiaries, humanitarian partners have included them as beneficiaries of the standard package prepared in the context of these evictions.

Reports have also highlighted that WHH have been initially prevented by the DfA from returning to their areas of origin, resulting in some WHH staying at the sites of informal settlements, without shelter and infrastructures. As of 20 December, unconfirmed reports were received that all WHH had been returned to their places of origin.

- **Evicted WHH are at acute risk of losing their economic opportunities, which will impact their ability to rebuild their lives and recover their livelihoods.**

⁴ REACH, 2022 Whole of Afghanistan Assessment data

⁵ NRC December 2022, available from <https://www.nrc.no/news/2022/december/afghanistan-20000-displaced-people-evicted-from-make-shift-camps-in-freezing-temperatures/>

Women organizations also reported potential significant losses in economic and livelihoods opportunities for affected women and WHH. Some women in the Badghis settlements worked outside of their households, engaging in daily labor or running their own businesses. Others were engaged in home-based income generating activities (e.g., weaving, baking). These sources of income and women's empowerment opportunities are at risk if market opportunities are not found in their areas of origin. Restrictions on women's mobility and rights may also prevent them from finding similar opportunities, should they not be assisted to do so.

Recommendations for all clusters and humanitarian actors:

Immediately:

- **Continue addressing immediate humanitarian needs of evicted women.** This includes **ensuring that women heads of household are included in the final list of beneficiaries** of humanitarian assistance as well as providing **gender-disaggregated breakdowns of the evicted population** to ensure the response caters to women's needs.
- **Ensure evicted women can voice their needs regarding the humanitarian assistance received.** To do so, **consult with women, women leaders and CSOs on the needs of evicted women**, with regards to their place of relocation, needs in terms of humanitarian assistance and livelihood opportunities. For women to voice their concerns and preference regarding humanitarian assistance, **create gender-sensitive feedback channels, including face-to face feedback mechanisms which are preferred by women⁶.**
- **Ensure WHH are reached with cash distribution through appropriate and gender-responsive cash interventions**, to cover their specific needs. **Dignity and hygiene kits** which women cannot easily access should also be distributed immediately.
- **Complement these efforts with obtaining a better understanding of the constraints facing WHH** and how these may affect their access to humanitarian assistance and lifesaving services. **Gender-specific protection concerns** should also be better understood by undertaking protection and other sector specific assessments.
- **Based on this, design alternative solutions to reach women and WHH in particular.** This includes **ensuring the presence of women staff** who can interact with WHH and **dedicating specific capacity to ensure vulnerable women** (such as WHH and widows), who cannot safely rely on men to access assistance, or who do not wish men to access assistance for them, are identified and reached by humanitarian teams.

In the coming months:

- **Provide livelihoods and economic opportunities to evicted women through income-generating activities**, enabling them to build on existing skills and trainings, and ultimately to rebuild their lives.
- **Provide awareness-raising of and support to obtain rights and entitlements to evicted women (such as tazkira, land ownership or HLP rights)** in areas of origin or where they resettle, to enhance sustainability of livelihood and economic interventions.
- **Continue advocating** with the DfA against evictions of IDPs and destructions of informal settlement.
- **Continue advocating for WHH to be recognized as displaced households, and advocate for their rights to return to their place of origin if and when this is their preference.**
- **Continue mapping the specific needs of vulnerable populations at risk of being left out such as WHH, including in populations at risk of eviction.**

For further information, please contact GiHA WG co-leads:

UN Women: Anouk Heili anouk.heili@unwomen.org (Kabul);

Claire Van Loveren claire.vanloveren@unwomen.org (Herat)

IRC: Zuhra Wardak Zuhra.wardak@rescue.org

⁶OCHA, Engaging Marginalized Women in Afghanistan in Decision-Making and Accountability, June 2022, available from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/engaging-marginalized-women-afghanistan-decision-making-and-accountability-findings-feedback-system-design-workshops-car-olyn-davis-ocha-afghanistan-accountability-affected-people-advisor-april-2022>