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New and long-term IDPs risk becoming neglected as conflict intensifies

During 2014 and the first six months of 2015, at a time when most international troops were withdrawing from Afghanistan, internal displacement has been on the rise. It has been driven by an increase in violence by non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and counterinsurgency operations by national and, to a lesser extent, the remaining international security forces. Operations have increasingly involved the use of mortars, rockets and grenades in populated areas.



Internally displaced woman in her temporary shelter in an informal settlement on the outskirts of Herat city, Afghanistan. © Kennet Havgaard for NRC, March 2015

IDMC estimates that as of the end of June 2015, six months after the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), at least 948,000 people were living in displacement as a result of conflict and violence. The figure includes around 103,000 people newly displaced in the first six months of 2015. Significant new displacements have taken place in Kunduz province since April 2015 and in Badakshan, Badghis, Baghlan, Faryab, Ghazni, Kapisa and Maydan Wardak provinces since June 2014. These, and continuing instability in Helmand province and central areas of the country, add to a crisis that has been ongoing since at least 2001.

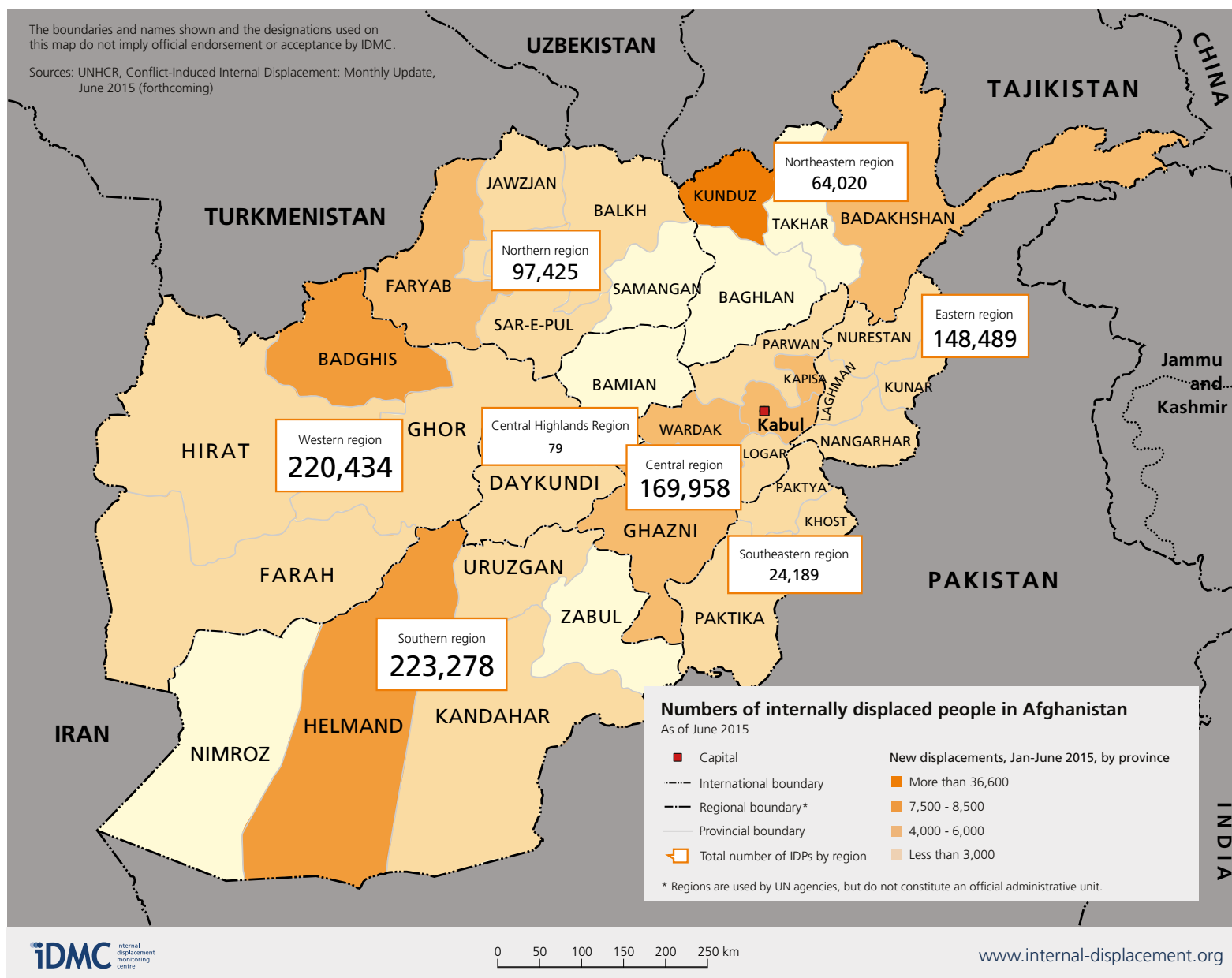
The escalating conflict has led to a growing number of civilian casualties. People's lives, including those of internally displaced people (IDPs), are also threatened by the presence of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) in refuge and return areas. Most IDPs would prefer to integrate locally rather than return, although there have been reports of some IDPs, including people recently displaced in Kunduz, who have chosen to go back to their homes in conflict-affected areas prematurely in an effort to maintain their agricultural incomes.

Disasters brought on by natural hazards and development projects continue to cause people to flee their homes, including in some cases people already displaced by conflict and violence.

IDPs struggle to meet specific needs resulting from their displacement, in particular when it comes to accessing water, food, adequate housing and employment. These challenges are most pronounced in areas where they are inaccessible or invisible to humanitarian responders and as their displacement becomes more protracted.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IDMC.

Sources: UNHCR, Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement: Monthly Update, June 2015 (forthcoming)



Map by: IDMC

More maps are available at www.internal-displacement.org/search?Type=Map

Host communities are generous in their support for new arrivals, but their resources become depleted rapidly. This in turn helps to drive rural to urban displacement, which has continued to increase over the last two years. Urban IDPs tend to live in informal or unplanned settlements without authorisation, dispersed among other groups of urban poor including economic migrants and returning refugees, all of whom face the threat of forced eviction.

The Afghan president, Ashraf Ghani, has acknowledged the need to respond to internal displacement, but implementation of the country's landmark policy on IDPs adopted in February 2014 has been set back by contested presidential elections in April 2014, delays in forming a unity government and ongoing conflict. Authorities also lack the political will to take concrete steps at the provincial level. As of July 2015, the policy had yet to deliver any positive tangible impact for IDPs themselves in terms of addressing outstanding gaps in the prevention of displacement, the delivery of protection and assistance during displacement, and facilitating durable solutions for the large numbers trapped in protracted displacement.

Provincial action plans are urgently needed to inform practical steps in addressing IDPs' needs and facilitating their achievement of durable solutions. This would include the improvement and regularisation of a number of informal urban settlements where local integration is both appropriate and IDPs' preferred settlement option.

The government and its international humanitarian partners have struggled to respond to new displacements while maintaining much-needed assistance to long-term IDPs. Donors have continued to support the response beyond ISAF's withdrawal, but the country's displacement crisis has been dwarfed by emergencies elsewhere in the world. This has led to the diversion of limited funding and resources from chronic to acute needs.

Implementation of the national policy on IDPs is first and foremost a national responsibility, but the

international community also has a role to play in following up on measures taken, or lack thereof. This is particularly important given protracted IDPs' increasing vulnerabilities and the need to better co-ordinate humanitarian and development responses in order to facilitate durable solutions.

Background

Afghanistan's history of displacement driven by conflict goes back to the late 1970s. During the war between its Soviet-backed government and mujahideen opposition fighters, and the subsequent Soviet invasion and occupation, up to five million people were forced to flee the country ([MERIP](#), 24 September 2001). After the fall of the communist government in 1992, civil war between mujahideen factions broke out along ethnic lines, and by the mid-1990s more than 400,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) were living in camps near Jalalabad, Mazar-i-Sharif and Herat ([Vincet and Refslund Sorensen](#), 20 October 2001, p.122; [Banerjee et al](#), 2005, p.38).

Following the Taliban's rise to power in 1996, another million people were displaced by conflict between its predominantly Pashtun forces and the Northern Alliance, made up of former mujahideen fighters from the Tajik, Uzbek and other ethnic groups. Northern and central parts of the country were particularly hard hit. Recurrent drought has also contributed to displacement since 1998 ([IRIN](#), 22 April 2014; [IDMC](#), 4 April 2011, pp.14, 23, 26, 35, 47; [Brookings](#), 8 November 2007; [Banerjee et al](#), 2005, p.37; [IDMC](#), 26 April 2001, pp.31-33; [UNHCR](#), 23 June 2000).

In response to the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US, perpetrated by members of the Taliban-backed al-Qaeda network, NATO established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and intervened militarily in Afghanistan. US forces launched their own parallel intervention. Conflict between the US-backed Northern Alliance and the

Taliban and its supporters also continued, as did inter-ethnic violence, the combination of factors driving more large-scale internal displacement, which reached its peak in 2002 at 1.2 million people. Millions more fled the country ([IDMC](#), April 2011, p.13-14; [BI/TLO](#), May 2010, pp.7-14).

Displacement since 2001

Armed conflict between non-state armed groups (NSAGs) including the Taliban and the Afghan security forces backed by ISAF, fighting among NSAGs and their targeting of civilians have all continued to cause displacement since ([IDMC](#), 25 March 2013, p.5). The politicisation and ultimate failure of western-backed disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes has helped to prolong the conflict and violence ([USIP](#), 20 May 2015).

ISAF's 13-year mandate came to an end and the Afghan security forces assumed full responsibility for combat operations in December 2014 ([Guardian](#), 28 December 2014). In the year leading up to ISAF's withdrawal and the first six months of 2015, NSAGs intensified their activities and the security forces stepped up their counterinsurgency operations. The latter have increasingly involved the use of mortars, rockets and grenades in populated areas.

The result has been further displacement and a significant rise in the number of civilian casualties. More than 10,500 were reported in 2014, a 22 per cent increase on 2013, and more than a third were deaths. NSAGs were responsible for three-quarters of all casualties, but the number caused by the Afghan security forces and their international counterparts also increased. The trend has continued in 2015 (UNGA/UNSC, A/69-929-S/2015/422, 10 June 2015, p.4; [UNAMA](#), 18 February 2015, pp.1-2, 38, 41, 78; [UNAMA](#), 12 April 2015; [ICRC](#), 9 February 2015; [UNSC](#), 22 June 2015, p.2). Another 4,216 civilians were killed or injured between January and June 2015 ([UNSC](#), 22 June 2015, p.2).

The escalating conflict has made planned peace negotiations between the government and the Taliban

more difficult ([Chatham House](#), 4 December 2014). The two sides held informal talks in Qatar in early May 2015, but both were keen to emphasise that they did not constitute peace negotiations ([NYT](#), 3 May 2015; [NYT](#), 21 June 2015). Formal talks held in Pakistan in July, however, were described as a step forward, and further negotiations are planned after Ramadan in mid-August ([NYT](#), 7 July 2015; [Reuters](#), 8 July 2015).

ISAF has been replaced by a smaller NATO-led mission codenamed Resolute Support (RS), to which the US contributes more than 6,800 troops, or over half of its contingent. RS provides training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces but does not have a combat role. There are, however, still another 4,000 US soldiers in the country with a mandate for active combat in support of the government's counterterrorism efforts and to protect their RS counterparts ([NATO](#), June 2015, p.2; [NYT](#), 12 February 2015; [NYT](#), 21 November 2014; [AAN](#), 12 January 2015, pp.1-3).

Political transition and economic decline

Following disputed presidential elections in April 2014, Ashraf Ghani was formally declared the winner in September. His opponent, Abdullah Abdullah, was appointed to the newly created role of chief executive, and they agreed to form a government of national unity.

Parliamentary confirmation of most of their nominations for cabinet posts was only completed in April 2015, however, and on 22 June a suicide attack on parliament interrupted voting on the nominee for defence minister (UNGA/UNSC, A/69-929-S/2015/422, 10 June 2015, p.2; [RFERL](#), 22 June 2015; [AFP](#), 22 June 2015). Parliament rejected a second candidate for the post in July ([Reuters](#), 4 July 2015).

Parliamentary elections scheduled for late April or early May were postponed until 2016, and a new date is still to be set (UNGA/UNSC, A/69-929-S/2015/422, 10 June 2015, p.3).

Afghanistan has experienced chronic poverty for decades. It ranks 169th of 187 countries on the UN Development Programme (UNDP)'s Human Development Index, and a third of the population live below the poverty line. Another third live just above it ([UNDP](#), 24 July 2014, p.159; [FP](#), 5 January 2015).

Economic development has been impeded not only by the ongoing conflict, but also by the illicit opium trade, and widespread corruption, bribery and political patronage. The country is currently ranked the world's fourth most corrupt ([Reuters](#), 14 June 2015; [UNFPA](#), 8 February 2015, p.4; [TI](#), 3 December 2014; [Devex](#), 10 December 2014; [FP](#), 5 January 2015). It narrowly escaped being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force in 2014, after passing an anti-money laundering law at the last moment ([Reuters](#), 11 June 2014; [EIU](#), 1 July 2014).

There are 2.6 million registered Afghan refugees, 1.5 million of them living in Pakistan and 950,000 in Iran. The total number of Afghans living abroad is estimated at 6.7 million, and this despite the fact that 5.8 million returned between 2004 and 2014 ([UNHCR](#), Afghanistan, December 2014; [UNHCR](#), Pakistan, December 2014; [UNHCR](#), Iran, December 2014; [FMR](#), May 2014, p.4; [MoRR](#), 2014; [Guardian](#), 11 December 2014).

Deportations and the voluntary return of undocumented Afghans from Pakistan have increased since a government crackdown in response to a deadly attack on a school in Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in December 2014. As of June 2015, more than 33,500 documented refugees and more than 77,000 undocumented migrants had returned ([UNHCR](#), June 2015, p.1; [IOM](#), 6 June 2015; [BBC](#), 16 December 2014; [VOA](#), 28 May 2015; [Brookings](#), 2008, p.3).

Afghanistan meantime hosts more than 205,000 registered refugees from Pakistan in Khost and Paktika provinces. They have been fleeing insurgent violence and government counterinsurgency opera-

tions in North Waziristan agency since June 2014 ([UNHCR](#), 11 June 2015, pp.2,3).

Causes of displacement

A number of factors, including conflict, disasters brought on by natural hazards and development projects, often combine to cause internal displacement in Afghanistan ([IOM/Samuel Hall](#), 30 March 2014, pp.11, 16). Widespread unemployment, poverty, landlessness and a lack of basic services complicate the situation further.

Armed conflict and generalised violence since 2001

All parties to the conflict have caused displacement. They include the Afghan security forces, their international counterparts, an increasingly fragmented array of NSAGs such as the Taliban, al-Qaeda, the Haqqani network, Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin, and local groups such as Wilayat Khorasan and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan that associate themselves with Islamic State. Armed criminal groups also support various parties to the conflict.

Civilians have been forced to flee fighting, including cross-border shelling in the east of the country, and NSAGs' use of improvised explosive devices, targeted killings, arson attacks, abductions, assaults on schools and hospitals, and harassment and intimidation, including illegal taxation ([UNHCR](#), 1 July 2015, pp.2, 6; [Guardian](#), 19 April 2015; [NYT](#), 4 June 2015; [UNAMA](#), February 2015, pp.24, 65-69). Civilian and military officials and pro-government agents have also been accused of human rights violations, but such allegations are rarely, if ever, investigated ([HRW](#), 3 March 2015).

Since ISAF's withdrawal, the Afghan security forces have increasingly sought the support of warlords, militias and paramilitary forces, including the Afghan local police, in their counterinsurgency operations. These groups, however, often commit human rights violations and have used weapons supplied by the government to pursue their own

political, ethnic and tribal interests ([ICG](#), 4 June 2015, pp.i-ii; [Economist](#), 30 May 2015; [NYT](#), 24 May 2015). Inter-tribal and other community disputes have also fuelled localised conflict and caused displacement ([UNHCR](#), 1 July 2015, p.6).

An increase in NSAG attacks and counterinsurgency operations in Kunduz province since the end of April 2015 has forced growing numbers of people to flee their homes in Qalaizal, Imam Sahib, Dashte Archi and Chahar Dara and Kunduz districts. The security forces gave prior warning of their operations, asking civilians to leave before launching artillery and air strikes. The authorities did not, however, put enough measures in place to guarantee “satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition” nor to care for IDPs with specific needs, as required under international humanitarian law ([task force on IDPs](#), 21 May 2015, p.1).

Displacement caused by natural hazard related disasters

Afghanistan is a mountainous country. Almost half of its territory lies at altitudes of more than 2,000 metres, and the highest peaks are more than 7,000 metres ([ADKN](#), 2009). Seasonal rainfall, floods and the landslides they trigger regularly affect northern and north-eastern regions, destroying homes and infrastructure and driving displacement ([OCHA](#), 30 April 2015, p.2).

The country is also exposed to drought, earthquakes, extreme temperatures, avalanches and storms. Disasters often make the effects of conflict in the same regions worse, and it tends to be a combination of both factors that forces people to flee ([OCHA](#), 23 November 2014, pp.4-5; [FMR](#), May 2014, p.6).

Limited investment in disaster risk reduction and preparedness measures, combined with the effects of 35 years of conflict and environmental degradation, have increased the country’s vulnerability and complicated responses to displacement caused by disasters ([OCHA](#), 23 November 2014, pp.4-5; [FMR](#), May 2014, p.6). Projections suggest that 137,000

people on average are at risk of being displaced each year over the next decade ([UNFPA](#), 18 November 2014, p.110; [IDMC](#), March 2015, p.21).

Displacement figures

Armed conflict and generalised violence

IDMC estimates that as of the end of June 2015 at least 948,000 people were living in displacement as a result of conflict and violence. The figure includes around 103,000 people newly displaced in the first six months of 2015, among them more than 36,600 people newly displaced in Kunduz province since April 2015. Significant new displacements have also taken place in Badakhshan, Badghis, Baghlan, Faryab, Ghazni, Kapisa and Maydan Wardak provinces since June 2014 ([UNHCR](#), Monthly IDP Update: June 2015, forthcoming).

The number of people in protracted displacement is also significant. As of the end of May 2015, almost 60 per cent of the displaced population had been living as IDPs since 2012 or earlier ([UNHCR](#), 1 July 2015, p.1). As of mid-2012, an estimated 74,000 people had been doing so since before 2003 ([UNHCR](#), July 2012, p.8). No updated breakdown of the number of IDPs by year of first displacement was available, however.

Displacement caused by natural hazard related disasters

Displacement triggered by natural hazard related disasters is tracked and recorded separately from that caused by conflict. More than 13,300 people were forced to flee their homes in 2014 as a result of disasters triggered by landslides, flash floods and avalanches in northern Badakhshan, Baghlan and Takhar provinces and central Bamyán province (IDMC disaster displacement database, as of 1 June 2015).

Gaps in data collection

IDMC’s estimate of displacement associated with conflict is based on figures provided by

Afghanistan's national task force on IDPs, led by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) ([UNHCR](#), 1 July 2015, p.1). The figures tend to be underestimates, because they do not include all IDPs living in urban areas, who are often dispersed among economic migrants and the urban poor and so are difficult to identify. They also exclude IDPs in inaccessible areas across all regions. Nor is data available on former refugees unable to return to their places of origin with which to determine whether they should be considered IDPs.

Not all IDPs are profiled soon after their flight, because of the limited resources available and insecurity that prevents access. They may only be interviewed a couple of months after their displacement, once their areas of refuge become accessible to humanitarian responders. As such, the task force figures do not capture all of the new displacement that has taken place at the time they are published ([UNHCR](#), 31 October 2014, p.3). Furthermore, needs assessment data tends to be collected at community, rather than household, level. Without data disaggregated at household level, however, it is difficult to inform humanitarian response plans. Finally, data collection tends to focus on areas of displacement, and more information on IDPs' areas of origin is needed.

IDPs displaced for short periods may also not be taken into account. In some cases displacement only lasts a matter of days, though such movements have become less common than they were in the past. Nor do the figures capture onward movements, returns or secondary displacements, many of which are small-scale and spontaneous and so more difficult to track.

The International Organisation of Migration (IOM)'s data on displacement associated with disasters does not include those who flee within their villages or who take refuge with host families. They are usually counted as "disaster-affected" people rather than IDPs.

Overall, a comprehensive system and strategy for the collection of displacement-related data according to accepted standards and which all institutions responsible for data collection could use is lacking.

Afghanistan's national policy on IDPs adopted in February 2014 requires each provincial task force to collate all of the displacement data available for their jurisdiction, and, if incomplete, to complement it with profiling exercises. The aim is to build a comprehensive picture that includes the number of IDPs disaggregated by age and sex, their places of refuge and origin, ethnicity, reasons for fleeing, the duration of their displacement, settlement preferences, education and vocational skills and livelihoods ([MoRR](#), 25 November 2013, pp.71-72). So far, however, efforts have fallen short for lack of national capacity and international support.

Patterns of displacement

Most of Afghanistan's provinces have been affected by displacement associated with conflict in recent years. Fighting and NSAG activities spread during 2014 and the first half of 2015, causing new displacement in the centre and north-east of the country, which had previously been relatively less affected. Most new displacement between 2012 and 2015 was concentrated in the centre, west and south ([UNHCR](#), 1 July 2015, p.1).

The central provinces experienced most new displacement in 2014, but in the first six months of 2015 the focus shifted to the north-east, including Kunduz province where more than 36,600 people were forced to flee their homes. Fighting and smaller-scale displacement continued in many other parts of the country ([UNHCR](#), 1 July 2015, pp.1, 2; [UNAMA](#), February 2015, p.24).

IDPs tend to remain relatively close to their homes, moving from rural areas to the provincial capital or a neighbouring province ([UNAMA](#), February 2015, p.24). Many seek shelter with host communities or,

in the case of those who flee to urban areas, in informal or unplanned settlements.

Half of Afghanistan's overall population are children, but they account for a disproportionate 57 to 61 per cent of all IDPs ([UNFPA](#), 18 November 2014, p.3; [task force on IDPs](#), 21 May 2015, p.2; [UNHCR](#), 30 April 2015, p.1; UNHCR, Monthly IDP Update: June 2015, forthcoming).

Protracted displacement

Some IDPs flee for relatively short periods, but many others are displaced for longer. Protracted displacement has become a growing concern for humanitarians, because return options are limited by the ongoing conflict, IDPs continue to have significant needs and they tend to become more vulnerable the longer their displacement lasts ([OCHA](#), 24 November 2014, p.7).

A 2012 survey of more than 1,000 displaced households found that 11 per cent had been displaced for over a decade and nearly 50 per cent since 2009. IDPs living in protracted displacement struggle just as much as those more recently displaced to meet their families' food needs and find employment ([Samuel Hall/NRC/IDMC/JIPS](#), November 2012, pp.22, 69).

Rural to urban displacement

Afghanistan's urban population has almost doubled over the last 15 years, and it currently makes up 30 per cent of the total population ([IDMC](#), March 2015, pp.24-25; [Samuel Hall](#), November 2014, pp.15-17). Kabul is estimated to be the world's fifth fastest-growing city ([City Mayors](#), no date).

The majority of urban dwellers have experienced some form of migration, be it as IDPs, refugees or economic migrants. Urban poverty is on the rise, and 40 per cent of the country's IDPs formed part of the urban poor in Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad and Kandahar as of the end of 2014 ([OCHA](#), 23 November 2014, p.10; [FMR](#), May 2014, p.4). IDPs move to the cities from rural areas because

they perceive them as relatively safe and providing better access to infrastructure, services and livelihoods ([IDMC and NRC](#), February 2014, p.5; [OCHA](#), 26 November 2014, p.10; [Samuel Hall](#), November 2014, pp.16-17, 30-32). In a new trend, IDPs have been observed to increasingly prefer settlement in peri-urban areas ([DACAAR/Samuel Hall](#), forthcoming on 28 July 2015).

Most of the 40,000 inhabitants of Kabul's 50 slum-like settlements are IDPs displaced by conflict or refugees who have returned from Pakistan and Iran. They also include people displaced by disasters, economic migrants and members of the Jogi ethnic minority ([KIS task force](#), 16 April 2015, p.2; [ODI](#), June 2012, p.7). Local authorities and humanitarian responders struggle to meet the increased demand for services caused by rural to urban displacement ([task force on IDPs](#), 21 May 2015, pp.2, 3).

Many people displaced within Kunduz province since April 2015 have fled from rural areas to Kunduz city, where most found temporary rented accommodation or took refuge with host communities ([UNHCR](#), 1 July 2015, p.2). Others are believed to have fled within their district or to neighbouring districts. Some families left older members behind to protect crops and livestock. Some returns have been reported, but these may be temporary and may only involve male family members, often to harvest their crops and ensure their families' income ([task force on IDPs](#), 21 May 2015, pp.1, 2).

Multiple causes, secondary and short-term displacement

IDPs and returning refugees are often forced to flee again, and many former refugees become IDPs upon their return, but no data is available on the scale of the phenomenon ([UNHCR](#), 2015, p.66; [FMR](#), May 2014, pp.41-42). Many IDPs surveyed in Herat and Helmand provinces in late 2013 had previously fled either to Iran or Pakistan or had been displaced internally several times ([IOM/Samuel Hall](#), 30 March 2014, pp.11, 16).

Short-term displacement can also lead to people having to flee again. This is particularly problematic when IDPs return prematurely to insecure areas, though such cases are rare. Some people displaced in Kunduz province since April 2015 had returned spontaneously returned by June to harvest their crops, despite the fact that the fighting that forced them to flee had only subsided temporarily. People newly displaced in Helmand and Uruzgan provinces also returned after a matter of days or weeks ([UNHCR](#), 1 July 2015, pp.4-6).

Protection concerns

IDPs in Afghanistan tend to face similar protection challenges regardless of the cause of their displacement ([Samuel Hall](#), 30 May 2014).

Physical safety

Afghanistan has more landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) than any other country in the world, accumulated since the beginning of the Soviet invasion in 1979. An area totalling more than 541 square kilometres across all parts of the country is contaminated, putting several hundred thousand people at risk ([MACCA](#), 21 June 2015, p.3; [ICBL](#), 1 December 2014; [DW](#), 4 April 2013). NSAGs including the Taliban make extensive use of victim-activated and other improvised explosive devices (IEDs) ([ICBL](#), 1 December 2014; [UNAMA](#), February 2015, p.45).

More than 20 per cent of all civilians, or 97 people, who were killed or injured by landmines, UXO and abandoned IEDs in 2013 were IDPs, according to the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA) ([ICBL](#), 20 June 2015, p.2; [ICBL](#), 1 December 2014).

Basic needs, livelihoods and education

The majority of Afghanistan's IDPs are extremely vulnerable in socio-economic terms, and more so than their counterparts in the general population, given that displacement further erodes their resilience and ability to rebuild their lives. Joblessness and under-

employment are widespread, and many displaced households go into debt to meet their basic needs ([Samuel Hall/National IDP Policy Working Group](#), April 2015, p.7).

Emergency assessments show that many newly displaced people lack access to food and non-food items. IDPs may receive help and hospitality from local communities based on their ethnic and tribal affiliations, but many host families are economically vulnerable themselves and deplete their resources rapidly ([UNHCR](#), 1 July 2015, p.2).

Many IDPs, particularly those in urban areas, lack access to safe drinking water, sanitation and health services. They are also worse off than other urban poor in terms of access to food and livelihoods. IDPs' shelters in Kabul's informal settlements do not provide enough protection against the city's harsh winter conditions ([KIS task force](#), 16 April 2015, p.2; [Samuel Hall](#), November 2014, pp.7-9, 90-91).

In the absence of alternative livelihoods, many urban IDPs work as daily labourers. Their income, however, is often not enough to meet their basic needs, particularly during winter months when there is less work available. Those newly displaced have little access to local networks that might enable them to borrow money, and many are unable to afford a healthy diet, putting them at risk of illness and even death as winter sets in ([KIS task force](#), 16 April 2015, p.2; [Samuel Hall](#), November 2014, pp.7-9, 90-91).

Displaced children often miss out on their education. Many work in order to contribute to their families' income, while others lack the documentation required to enrol in school ([KIS task force](#), 16 April 2015, p.2; [UNHCR](#), 1 July 2015, p.3). Facilities in areas affected by conflict are often destroyed in the fighting or occupied by parties to it, including the security forces ([task force on IDPs](#), 21 May 2015, p.3).

Women and girls displaced to urban areas face particular protection risks in terms of education, health and livelihoods ([NRC/TLO](#), 23 March 2015, p.8).

Housing, land and property

Many IDPs do not have secure tenure in their areas of refuge, particularly those living in informal urban settlements. Unable to afford adequate housing, they resort to occupying public and private land without authorisation, which puts them at risk of forced eviction to make way for development and infrastructure projects ([Samuel Hall](#), November 2014, p.60; [IDMC](#), 19 June 2014, p.7; [FMR](#), May 2014, p.16; [IDMC](#), 11 February 2014). Early in 2015, 1,430 people living in informal settlements on both public and private land in Kabul received verbal notice that they would be evicted in June and July ([OCHA](#), 31 May 2015, p.1).

Durable solutions

Settlement choices

Studies conducted in 2012 and 2013 suggest that the majority of IDPs would prefer to integrate locally, though those in Herat and Helmand provinces said they did not have enough information to choose a settlement option ([Samuel Hall/NRC/IDMC/JIPS](#), November 2012, p.45; [IOM/Samuel Hall](#), 30 March 2014, p.27).

Afghanistan's national policy on displacement recognises that IDPs should have all three settlement options – return, local integration and settlement elsewhere in the country – available to them. It also provides for the establishment of provincial action plans, in recognition of the fact that obstacles to durable solutions vary across the country ([MoRR](#), 25 November 2013, pp.21, 49-50; [IDMC](#), 19 June 2014; [IDMC](#), 25 March 2013). Article 39 of the Afghan constitution also guarantees IDPs' free choice of settlement, given that it enshrines people's right to freedom of movement and to choose their place of residence.

In reality, however, authorities tend not support IDPs' efforts to integrate locally, but treat them instead as temporary residents. This is particularly the case in urban areas, which is precisely where IDPs'

preference for local integration is most pronounced ([Samuel Hall/NRC/IDMC/JIPS](#), November 2012, p.46; [Samuel Hall](#), November 2014, p.30; [Guardian](#), 11 December 2014). In some areas, resentment among local residents towards IDPs from other parts of the country or other ethnic groups may also play a role ([IRIN](#), 20 October 2014).

Obstacles

Insecurity continues to be a major factor in prolonging displacement and preventing IDPs from achieving durable solutions. Like all civilians, IDPs are also affected by the escalating ground war and the increasing use of mortars, rockets and grenades in populated areas. The presence of UXO prevents many from returning to their home areas, and hampers the recovery of agricultural livelihoods. The intensification of the conflict in Kunduz province since April 2015 has left the area particularly contaminated ([task force on IDPs](#), 21 May 2015, p.6; [UNHCR](#), 1 July 2015, p.2).

The government has yet to take measures to ensure IDPs' right to adequate housing, including the identification of land that is available and suitable for relocation and the upgrading of informal settlements by providing basic services and infrastructure, as envisaged in the national policy on displacement ([FMR](#), May 2014, p.15; [Samuel Hall](#), November 2014, pp.16, 112). A comprehensive policy and system for land distribution are also needed ([UNAMA](#), March 2015, p.36).

Any new measures should avoid the shortcomings of the current land allocation scheme, which was established in 2005 to provide public land and housing to landless refugee returnees and, to a lesser extent, IDPs. Many of the sites allocated lack access to basic services and livelihoods ([UNAMA](#), March 2015, p.30; [FMR](#), May 2014, pp.15-17; [Majidi](#), June 2013).

Only around 20 per cent of Afghanistan's land is correctly titled. Traditional mechanisms of customary ownership and management have broken down as a result of more than three decades of armed conflict,

displacement and population migration. The country's land management law does not recognise the customary system and makes the establishment of ownership conditional on valid documentation. All undocumented land is assumed to be public ([USIP](#), June 2015, pp.2-4, 7). This represents an obstacle to return for both refugees and IDPs living in protracted displacement, and disputes over land are increasing ([FMR](#), May 2014, p.15).

Corruption has also been a significant obstacle to IDPs' achievement of durable solutions. In the northern part of Helmand province, it is said to be more prevalent in the formal justice system than in the parallel structures put in place by the Taliban ([UNAMA](#), February 2015, p.63).

National response

MoRR is the lead ministry mandated to respond to displacement. The Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), which comes under the National Commission on Disaster Management, coordinates emergency responses to that caused by disasters brought on by natural hazards.

Afghanistan has a law on disaster response, management and preparedness, which was adopted in 2012, and a national disaster management plan. Its national policy on IDPs also mentions the need for measures to prevent displacement associated with disasters ([IDMC](#), March 2015, p.31). ANDMA, however, is chronically underfunded, and has only recently started to draft a national disaster management strategy. Nor has a comprehensive disaster management programme been established ([ANDMA](#), 18 February 2015, pp.2, 6).

Implementation of policy on IDPs stalled

Afghanistan adopted a comprehensive national policy on IDPs in February 2014 ([MoRR](#), 25 November 2013; [Samuel Hall/National IDP Policy Working Group](#), April 2015, p.8). It covers the human rights of

people displaced by armed conflict, NSAG abuses, disasters brought on by natural hazards and development projects, and all three settlement options that can lead to durable solutions. It reaffirms national authorities' primary responsibility to address and respond to internal displacement, from prevention, assistance and protection to facilitating durable solutions in both rural and urban areas. It also aims to improve the situation of host communities.

The policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of different responders, including government bodies and humanitarian and development organisations, and it emphasises the importance of efforts to prevent and limit displacement, and to mitigate and resolve its effects ([Samuel Hall/National IDP Policy Working Group](#), April 2015, pp.8-9; [IDMC](#), 19 June 2014, p.11).

A policy working group was established to guide implementation, made up of the Office of Administrative Affairs of the President, the Office of the First Lady, MoRR, ANDMA, the Independent Directorate for Local Governance, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, IOM, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNCHR, the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Norwegian Refugee Council.

MoRR is tasked with developing an annual implementation plan, and provincial authorities are responsible for drafting their own action plans ([Samuel Hall/National IDP Policy Working Group](#), April 2015, pp.6, 9).

As of July 2015, the policy had yet to deliver any positive tangible impact for IDPs themselves in terms of addressing outstanding gaps in the prevention of displacement, the delivery of protection and assistance during displacement, and facilitating durable solutions for the large numbers trapped in protracted displacement. Implementation has been

set back significantly by the contested April 2014 presidential elections, the subsequent delay in forming a unity government, which have also involved a change of governor in several provinces, and the ongoing conflict. Authorities also lack the political will to take concrete steps at the provincial level, where different interests and clashing priorities often compete for political support and limited finances. The inclusion of large numbers of IDPs as beneficiaries in provincial development plans and strategies is a controversial issue in a number of provinces (IDMC interviews, July 2015).

The dissemination and roll-out of the policy through workshops and sensitisation with local stakeholders started in September 2014 in Nangarhar and Kandahar provinces, and the process is being expanded to Herat, Balkh, Kabul city and other provinces in 2015. Nangarhar is the only province so far to have taken initial steps in drafting an action plan. It began doing so in February 2015 ([Samuel Hall/National IDP Policy Working Group](#), April 2015, pp.6, 9, 12; [UNHCR](#), 28 February 2015, p.5; [UNHCR](#), 30 April 2015, p.6).

International response

The national task force on IDPs, co-chaired by MoRR and UNHCR, coordinates the emergency humanitarian response to people displaced by conflict. Other members include the government, UN humanitarian agencies, national and international NGOs, the Afghan Red Crescent Society and the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The International Committee of the Red Cross is an observer. Regional task forces have been established in Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, Herat, Gardez and Kandahar, and provincial ones in Kunduz and Faryab ([task force on IDPs](#), 21 May 2015, p.1).

The focus of a review of humanitarian coordination that began in mid-2015 including a reassessment of the roles and responsibilities of the IDP task forces should aim at improving the response to IDPs.

International organisations need to support the government in ensuring that all IDPs are comprehensively profiled. This includes those living protracted displacement, who often fall outside assistance programmes despite their significant humanitarian and protection needs. Such profiling is an important precondition for the development of adequate response plans (IDMC interviews, July 2015).

Implementation of the national policy on IDPs is first and foremost a national responsibility, but the international community also has a role to play in following up on measures taken, or lack thereof. Implementation is particularly important given protracted IDPs' increasing vulnerabilities and the need to better coordinate humanitarian and development responses in order to facilitate durable solutions. An increasing number of national and international plans and strategies include references to the policy, but it is unclear which activities beyond dissemination and awareness-raising the donor community should support, given that the authorities have so far done very little to develop provincial action plans (IDMC interviews, July 2015).

Lack of humanitarian access

Insecurity has increasingly impeded humanitarian access, a major factor preventing comprehensive assessments and the provision of assistance. It is restricted in many parts of the country that host IDPs, but there is no information on the number inaccessible to responders ([OCHA](#), 21 June 2015).

The situation has been made worse by the escalation in fighting and large-scale displacements in Kunduz province since April 2015 ([IRIN](#), 9 September 2014). In their wake, the task force on IDPs was only able to carry out assessments in urban and semi-urban areas. A number of affected areas, including Chahar Dara and Imam Sahib districts, remain inaccessible ([task force on IDPs](#), 21 May 2015, pp.1, 5; [UNHCR](#), 1 July 2015, pp.2, 3).

NSAGs continue to kill and abduct the staff of national and international humanitarian organisations.

There has been an increase in such incidents since November 2014, but whether those affected were targeted because of their affiliation to a humanitarian organisation or for other reasons is not known ([Guardian](#), 29 January 2015; [MACCA](#), 20 January 2015; [MACCA](#), 14 December 2014; [OCHA](#), 31 May 2015, pp.4-5; [OCHA](#), 31 March 2015, pp.1, 5; [OCHA](#), 30 April 2015, p.4).

Role of development sector

Afghanistan has received more development assistance than any other country worldwide every year since 2007 ([GHA](#), November 2014, p.28). UNDP's country programme for 2015 to 2019 lists IDPs among its beneficiaries and envisages measures including livelihood support to help them achieve durable solutions. The UN development assistance framework (UNDAF) also includes IDPs as a population of concern, and the implementation of the national policy on displacement is one of its target activities. Overall, however, the development sector still tends to regard internal displacement as a humanitarian issue ([UNDP](#), DP/DCP/AFG/3, 11 July 2014, pp.6, 9).

It also tends to prioritise support for rural areas, despite growing needs in urban centres ([UNHCR](#), 2015, p.66). That said, UN-Habitat and UNHCR are running a joint project to upgrade Maslakh, an informal urban settlement in Herat province, in an effort to improve IDPs' living conditions ([FMR](#), May 2014, p.17).

Afghanistan was chosen as one of three pilot countries for the UN secretary general's framework on ending displacement in the aftermath of conflict in 2012, though the appropriateness of this choice is questionable since Afghanistan has not widely been considered a post-conflict context ([UN SG](#), 4 October 2011). The current status of the piloting is unclear, although it appears that priority has been given to ensuring implementation of other durable solutions frameworks, including UNHCR's regional solutions strategy for Afghan refugees, also adopted in 2012, and the process of developing the national

policy on IDPs ([UNHCR](#), May 2012; Global cluster on early recovery, 6 May 2015, pp.13, 38, in draft, on file with IDMC).

Funding

Afghanistan's economic growth over the last decade was driven largely by the foreign funding that accompanied the presence of international troops. ISAF's withdrawal has already led to a drop in growth, despite the Tokyo mutual accountability framework established in 2012 to support sustainable economic development in Afghanistan during the its "transformation decade" of 2015 to 2024 ([UNSC](#), 22 June 2015, p.1; [IPS](#), 11 December 2014).

The country is unusual in that only seven per cent of the international assistance it receives is humanitarian ([OCHA](#), 24 November 2014, p.11). As of July 2015, 44 per cent of the humanitarian strategic response plan for Afghanistan had been funded, which is less than what would have been expected by mid-year ([FTS](#), information as of 14 July 2015).

Donors have continued to support the response to internal displacement since ISAF's withdrawal, but the needs of Afghanistan's IDPs have been dwarfed by emergencies elsewhere in the world. This has led to the diversion of limited funding and resources from chronic to acute needs ([OCHA](#), 24 November 2014, p.7).

About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) is the leading source of information and analysis on internal displacement. For the millions of people worldwide displaced within their own country, IDMC plays a unique role as a global monitor and evidence-based advocate to influence policy and action by governments, UN agencies, donors, international organisations and NGOs.

IDMC was established in 1998 at the request of the Interagency Standing Committee on humanitarian assistance. Since then, IDMC's unique global function has been recognised and reiterated in annual UN General Assembly resolutions.

IDMC is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), an independent, non-governmental humanitarian organisation.

Contact:

Caroline Howard

Head of Middle East, Europe, Caucasus and Asia department

Tel: +41 22 795 07 40

E-mail: caroline.howard@nrc.ch

Anne-Kathrin Glatz

Senior regional analyst

Tel: +41 22 799 07 07

E-mail: ak.glatz@nrc.ch

IDMC

Norwegian Refugee Council

Chemin de Balexert 7-9

1219 Geneva, Switzerland

www.internal-displacement.org

Tel: +41 (0)22 799 0700

Fax: +41 (0)22 799 0701