

UNDERSTAND AND PROTECT AFGHAN REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND MIGRANTS

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Afghans represent the second largest nationality among those crossing into Europe, with 267,485 people arriving in 2015. Some of those who arrive are fleeing persecution, threats to their lives and dignity in Afghanistan; others experience human rights violations along the route. These refugees, asylum seekers and migrants have little, if any, recourse to support or justice.

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) asserts that people's right to a life with dignity is inviolable. With respect to this right, DRC believes that it is crucial to ensure access to basic protection services through a better understanding of Afghan displacement and migration and a more effective, coordinated response.

The Afghan context is steadily deteriorating, generating more displacement and greater incentives to migrate.

Afghanistan was marked by troubling political, economic and security trends in 2015, and 2016 has demonstrated little to no improvement. The National Unity Government experienced increased challenges, generating a decline in confidence from 75% to 56% in 2015. The economic growth rate fell to 1.2% in 2015, and civilian casualties from conflict in the first six months of 2016 rose to the highest levels since UNAMA started collecting data. This chronic fragility on social, political, economic and security fronts generates push factors for Afghans to move.

The routes followed by Afghan refugees and migrants are complex and poorly understood.

Afghans move, not only to Europe, but also eastward, such as to Indonesia and Australia. Western routes pass through Pakistan, Iran and Turkey; eastern routes pass through India and Indonesia to Australia. Afghans decide on precise migration routes based on a variety of factors, including available information, ethnic and family networks, policy changes in destination countries and changes in home environments. Data about the full extent of Afghan mixed migration routes is currently inadequate; no systematic monitoring is taking place along routes. This represents a critical knowledge gap for both policy makers and implementers.

Afghans are acutely vulnerable to violations of rights at home and across mixed migratory routes.

71% of Afghan refugees and migrants arriving in Europe experienced war and/or conflict before they left Afghanistan, with 43% experiencing internal displacement. Although Afghans often start migrating to reach safer environments, they face serious risks along the routes. According to initial indications from Greece, 52% of Afghans witnessed or experienced protection incidents during the journey, including detention, theft, physical assault and shooting.

To address these realities more effectively, the DRC proposes that the humanitarian and development community – donors, international organisations, NGOs and government actors – take concrete measures to support refugees and migrants. DRC has three recommendations:

1. Improved understanding of Afghan displacement and migration, and a stronger evidence base, is needed.

- The international community and host and donor governments need to better understand refugees and migrants in mixed flows, in particular the root causes of their movement and the scale and scope of protection risks they face. Mixed migration policies and response should be evidence-based, and we should collect comparable data across countries and regions across the entirety of displacement and migration routes.
- DRC recommends that donors fund longer-term data collection and protection monitoring along mixed migratory routes.

2. A focus on protection of basic human rights through flexible response mechanisms is key.

- Humanitarian support to individuals and groups in mixed migratory flows should aim at addressing protection gaps and putting a stop to rights violations. Those travelling along mixed migratory routes face a range of protection violations, from physical threats, such as kidnapping and assault, to material issues, such as lack of food and water to legal challenges caused by lack of documentation and consequent lack of access to services. The nature of the violations, and the support to which refugees and migrants have access, depends on the route taken, the network used to facilitate movement and the regulations in place in transit countries. With improved understanding of the routes, it would be possible for humanitarian actors to provide access to services along mixed migratory routes.
- DRC recommends that donors support an increased surge capacity to provide basic protection services along mixed migratory routes.

3. To ensure the protection of displaced and migrant Afghans, a comprehensive rights-based approach is needed.

- Afghans residing abroad – both displaced and migrants – face a dire choice. If they return home after protracted displacement or migration, they often do not have the skills or the knowledge to secure basic livelihoods. In addition, they often return to ‘home’ locations in rural areas which are at the greatest risk of increased insecurity in case of political or economic changes. If they migrate to third countries, they face difficult and uncertain routes along which they risk violations of their basic rights. The constraints faced by this population and the rights to which they currently have access upon return and during displacement are not fully understood.
- DRC recommends that donors and international agencies support a rights-based approach to seek ways to bridge challenges faced by refugees and migrants in home, transit and destination locations.