

# Promoting the Well-being and Inclusion of Hard-to-reach Populations

A Case Study on Integrated CCCM and Protection  
Programme in Informal Settlements in Kandahar



*DRC team in an informal settlement in Panjwayee district (Kandahar province)*

## Background

While the reduction in conflict post-August 2021 provided some respite, Afghanistan continues to grapple with new and protracted displacement, exacerbated by several factors, including climate change and the resulting drought. In 2021 and 2022, Afghanistan experienced an unparalleled surge in displacement and return. A total of 2.6 million individuals, constituting 40% of the 6.6 million displaced since 2012, were affected across the country. In 2022 alone, 5.7 million individuals returned to Afghanistan, accounting for more than half (52%) of the million individuals who have returned since 2012<sup>1</sup>. These figures do not include the estimated 1.3 million returnees from Pakistan expected to arrive between 2023 and 2024 due to the Pakistani government's "Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan"<sup>2</sup>.

The province of Kandahar, our case study focus, hosts approximately 250,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs)<sup>3</sup>, representing about 30% of the population<sup>4</sup>. These IDPs, mainly residing in informal urban settlements, face multifaceted challenges.

DRC currently operates in all the 15 informal settlements in Kandahar city, as well as an additional informal settlement in Panjwayee district, providing aid to more than 30,000 individuals who have experienced displacement due to various factors such as conflict, drought, and scarce livelihood opportunities in their areas of origin. The demographic composition of these settlements is mixed, with 62% being IDPs from various provinces, 13% internal province returnees, and 25% host community members.

The living conditions in Kandahar's informal settlements are highly concerning, particularly for women and children. These settlements lack clean drinking water, have inadequate sanitation facilities, and subpar shelter conditions. While DRC is the primary service provider in all the 15 ISETs in Kandahar, the level of assistance remains insufficient, with the authorities encouraging IDPs to return to their areas of origin, which are now safe from conflict, and pushing NGOs to provide essential services in underserved areas outside of the city centers. Despite this, DRC's intention surveys found that the overwhelming preference of IDPs is local integration<sup>4</sup>.

Beyond the need to address challenges to local integration, the ISETs assessments<sup>5</sup> conducted by DRC highlight the need for protection of at-risk groups (especially children and female-headed households), basic service provision, improvement to living conditions, and livelihood opportunities. DRC's assessment also found how policies and cultural norms limiting freedom of movement present particular challenges for IDPs residing in informal settlements. Because of this, women are restricted from conducting most jobs – especially the ones without a male chaperone – and they are often in greater need to engage in temporary forms of work due to poverty and limited social networks following displacement but find themselves further restricted in the types of livelihoods activities they can engage in.

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<sup>1</sup> DRC, Afghanistan Country Strategy 2022-2025, Jun. 2023

<sup>2</sup> Border Consortium, Border Consortium Appeal, Oct. 2023

<sup>3</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2022

<sup>4</sup> ADSP, Briefing Note on Local Integration for IDPs in Kandahar, Apr. 2023

<sup>5</sup> DRC, ISETs Assessment Report, Dec. 2022

## DRC ISETs Assessments & Protection Findings

At the start of the intervention, DRC teams conducted a comprehensive multi-sectoral assessments to identify the needs, gaps, and vulnerabilities of the populations living in targeted IDP sites and informal settlements. Technical CCCM and protection assessments conducted by DRC and external consultants throughout implementation allowed not only to monitor the situation in target settlements, but also to identify challenges and appropriate avenues for promoting the inclusion of this population in the social fabric of Kandahar and in standard processes for basic service provision.

The ISETs Report is an assessment conducted in December 2022. It employs a mixed methodology that combines the analysis of quantitative data from household surveys, such as the Household Emergency Assessment Tool (HEAT), with qualitative data collection through key informant interviews (KIIs) and Mapping Focus Group Discussions (MFGDs). On the other hand, Protection reports are more focused on qualitative data, gathered with in-depth interviews both in person and remotely, and designed to identify trend in risks and vulnerabilities.

The findings of the DRC's ISETs assessments and of the Protection Monitoring reports reflects a complex scenario:

- Movement intention: 97% of IDPs expressed their intentions to stay in their current location.
- Shelter: 21% of IDPs are unable to afford rent, and they are at risk of eviction, as most settlements are informal and lack proper legal agreements; tents and mud houses, prevalent among IDPs, are vulnerable to weather conditions.
- WASH: 71% of IDPs don't have enough access to water for drinking and cooking.
- Food security: 76% of IDPs don't have enough food/money to meet the household's essential needs.
- Education: children between the ages of 6-17 are not attending school and 48% reported that there is no school in the area.
- Health: 22% of IDPs are unable to access functional health facilities due to the cost of services and 13% reported that required medicine and treatment are not available.
- Protection: widespread socio-economic vulnerabilities are often the drivers of protection risks, as IDPs and vulnerable residents of informal settlements are forced to rely on negative coping mechanisms to cope with economic hardship. Child protection incidents, gender-based violence, safety and security incidents, HLP violations, and access to services being deliberately denied or prevented were reported by residents of informal settlements. Violence against children is a significant concern, with cases of child marriages and hazardous child labor being widely documented. Women and girls are prevented from accessing public spaces and forced into polygamous arrangements, especially as a way to repay debts to creditors. 100% of the ISETs Assessment participants responded that there are no mechanisms to report any protection incident or concerns or to address discrimination/GBV. Persons with disabilities and IDPs experience discrimination and exclusion from services, leading to child labor, child marriage, and forced evictions.
- Economic Inclusion: according to the ADSP "Briefing Note on Local Integration for IDPs in Kandahar"<sup>4</sup>, daily uncontracted labor emerges as the most common income-generating activity in the assessed areas, with 93% reporting its prevalence. The informal nature of this income activity contributes to income volatility for many households. Only 21% of DRC HEAT respondents reported having enough money or food to meet essential needs in the 30 days before the interview. Male-headed households, those with a member with a disability, and IDP returnees faced higher likelihoods of insufficient resources. Returnee IDPs, in particular, resorted more frequently to extreme livelihood coping strategies, with 76% reporting such measures. Female-headed households, while more likely to report sufficient resources, were also more likely to declare unavailable or exhausted livelihood coping strategies.

## DRC Approach to Integrated Programming for hard-to-reach populations



*Informal Settlement in Kandahar province with shelters provided by DRC*

In order to respond to the acute needs documented by DRC across all areas of operations and in line with our global mandate as a protection and displacement-focused agency, DRC Afghanistan's program aims at reducing violence and mitigating the impact and risk of shocks on target communities through the implementation of integrated protection, multi-purpose cash assistance, emergency shelter, and CCCM. This is in line with the main objective of DRC's Global Strategy 2025: *Improving Protection of the Hard to Reach*.

### **Hard-to-Reach**

Hard-to-reach populations in Afghanistan include, women and girls who are often confined within their homes and have limited mobility to access services or limited opportunity to have a voice in decision-making or representation within the public space as a result of Afghanistan's patriarchal societal structure and restrictive gender norms; ethnic and religious minorities who are often persecuted and victims of targeted attacks and are victims of other forms of exclusions; IDPs, returnees including deportees, often lacking civil documentation to access services or claim entitlements/rights; persons with disabilities, often neglected and stigmatised by society owing to their specific physical, mental or socio-economic condition.

Throughout 2023 in Afghanistan, DRC has developed an integrated approach to address the complex needs of IDPs, returnees, and other vulnerable residents of informal settlements located in urban areas of Kandahar. Looking at the definition and comparing it to the needs assessments, one can see how IDPs and other vulnerable residents of urban ISETs in Kandahar should be considered hard-to-reach. Drivers of this exclusion, thus qualifying them as hard-to-reach, include:

- Restrictions on ability to work and move freely of women and girls.
- Stigmatisation and marginalisation of persons with disabilities by community members that leads to the exclusion from services.
- Exclusion and discrimination of IDP populations.
- Humanitarian actors face significant bureaucratic access impediments when targeting these populations

To diminish the marginalization of hard-to-reach populations, DRC employs a proactive strategy centered on robust engagement with both authorities and the community. With the support of AHF and BHA, DRC implemented a comprehensive, multi-sector program with the primary objective of alleviating the marginalization of the hard-to-reach populations. Immediate outcomes of reduced marginalization encompass improved living conditions, enhanced access to basic services, fortified governance structures, and diminished protection risks.

To overcome administrative barriers mentioned in the previous paragraph, DRC actively engaged with authorities, community leaders, and various groups within the community.

DRC's commitment to community engagement and participation is evident throughout its projects, ensuring active involvement of local community members in decision-making processes. This inclusivity extends to host communities from both targeted and surrounding areas, mitigating internal conflicts between IDPs and host communities. The project places a strong emphasis on conflict sensitivity, guaranteeing that all of DRC's activities are viewed through this lens.

In pursuit of the overarching goal of reducing marginalization, DRC leverages its engagement with communities and authorities in combination with an integrated approach. In implementing an integrated CCCM and protection program, DRC ensured that the multifaced needs of the communities were addressed.



*DRC's water tank in an informal settlement in Kandahar province*

### **Step 1: Engagement with authorities and communities**

Before, during, and after the implementation of the project, DRC engaged with authorities, community leaders, and communities.

### **Step 2: Site profiling - Multi-Sectoral Assessment**

DRC conducts several preliminary site assessments, including Protection activities, KIs, MFGDs, Safety Audits, and HEAT. During these assessments, DRC collects data on a range of topics, including the total population of the area, the movement intentions of the population, Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) issues, the availability of and access to services, shelter and infrastructure conditions, community structures, and protection concerns.

### **Step 3: Establishing & Capacity Building of Site Management Committees (SMCs)**

DRC creates male and female SMCs through a participatory process that involves consulting with affected communities to identify representatives for the committee. The community leaders are informed of the selection process for committee members and are advised that those chosen should represent all residents without discrimination based on age, gender, or ethnicity.

### **Step 4: Service Provision - Integrated Response**

DRC works together with SMCs and other community members to identify the most critical needs. Based on their feedback, DRC prioritizes activities that include a wide range of services, such as distributing ES/NFI materials like emergency tents, shelter repair kits, hygiene kits, and promoting hygiene. DRC also provides protection services, emergency service provision, and improves site infrastructure. In addition, DRC undertakes community-based initiative projects in consultation with the SMCs to ensure a tailored and effective response.

### **Step 5: Referrals**

To effectively address the diverse and complex needs of vulnerable populations residing in ISETs in Kandahar, DRC actively engaged with other humanitarian actors operating in Kandahar and developed a comprehensive service mapping, which serves as a crucial tool to identify the partners on the ground, their respective responsibilities, and the key persons responsible. This service mapping is then shared with all relevant partners and stakeholders to understand the gaps in service provision and avoid duplication of services.

### **Step 6: Monitoring & Evaluation**

DRC has developed a set of checklists to assess and improve its performance in various aspects, such as accountability, beneficiary involvement, complaint and response mechanism, and running a SMC. DRC, after each distribution, conducts post-distribution monitoring to measure beneficiaries' satisfaction levels and regular spot checks to verify the data's accuracy and reliability and to address any issues or complaints raised by the beneficiaries through DRC's complaint and feedback response mechanism.

### **Step 7: Phase Out**

As part of its exit strategy, DRC plans to gradually transfer site management and coordination functions to the SMCs. DRC provides continuous mentoring and support to the SMCs and facilitates linkages between them and service providers. To ensure a smooth transition, DRC conducts service mapping exercises to identify existing service providers and their responsibilities.

## Case Study

DRC has effectively started implementing in June 2022 integrated protection and CCCM programming in Kandahar City's underserved sites and informal settlements. Later, we have expanded our approach to a large informal settlement in Panjwayee district, approximately one hour away from Kandahar city. The project's primary objective was to reduce the marginalization of the hard-to-reach, fortifying the self-management structures and mechanisms of IDPs and other vulnerable residents of these sites, increasing their active involvement in humanitarian response efforts, and nurturing their self-reliance and independence. Additionally, the project sought to ensure that assistance and protection in informal settlements and IDP sites adhered to national and international laws, guidelines, and established standards.

Based on the extensive needs assessments conducted in the area, DRC designed a programme aiming at the reduction of the marginalization of the hard-to-reach population in ISETs in Kandahar through an integrated approach of CCCM and protection interventions.

Under the CCCM component, the DRC CCCM team assisted more than 2,800 households received hygiene kits, 11,681 individuals attended hygiene promotion sessions, 657 households received shelter self-repair kits, 893 households tarpaulins for shelter improvements, and 125 households received tents. In addition to the immediate assistance provided, DRC established and trained 15 Site Management Committees (SMCs) across targeted sites to strengthen, support, and establish inclusive and representative governance structures. DRC ensured the mobilization and participation of people living in the site's governance system to promote a sense of ownership, ensure relevance, and devolve responsibilities in a manner that fosters sustainability. Finally, DRC conducted two CCCM training sessions in Kandahar province, that included one for DRC staff and one for other service providers active in the targeted area. These training sessions were designed to enhance skills and knowledge of the participants, enabling them to provide effective support and services to the targeted communities.

Under the protection intervention, DRC was able to achieve all set targets for protection activities, despite the contextual and bureaucratic challenges. Between 2022 and 2023 under this programme, DRC provided individual protection assistance to a total of 817 individuals living in ISETs, supported 1,200 individuals through legal counselling or access to documentation, referred 100 individuals to services offered by external providers or other DRC departments, and established and trained 2 Community-Based Protection Committees (CBPCs) of 20 male and 20 female members. These CBPCs were formed with the aim of empowering affected populations in their own self-protection and promoting meaningful access, participation, and ownership of project interventions. CBPCs' members received capacity-building trainings on protection, community-led advocacy, and safe referrals, enabling them to take lead in developing community-based protection action plans that address key risks identified by site residents and effectively refer at-risk individuals to DRC for timely assessment and response.

In an effort to effectively address the multifaceted needs of the community, DRC's CCCM team collaborated with the protection team to identify households with specific requirements, such as female or child-headed households and individuals with disabilities. Ongoing protection monitoring led to the identification of 11 households facing eviction due to rent arrears. These cases were referred to the CCCM team, which promptly provided cash-for-rent, covering three months' rent to prevent eviction. Additionally, efforts were made to connect these households with livelihood programs, fostering self-sufficiency through vocational training and skills development.

Extensive community consultations and meetings were conducted to ensure that DRC's interventions aligned with the needs and priorities of the site residents. Consequently, DRC successfully implemented 40 community-based projects through cash-for-work schemes. These projects encompassed the repair and installation of hand pumps, installation of solar lights, road repair initiatives, installation of gates at the entrance of the sites, construction of culvert bridges, and installation of waste bins. Additionally, DRC established specialized first aid and fire prevention sub-committees, equipping them with necessary training and materials to ensure site safety and effective emergency responses.

The same package of services will be extended to the newly targeted informal settlement in Panjwayee district.



*DRC implementing a Cash-for-Work activity in Kandahar's informal settlements*

## Impact of the assistance

The integrated approach to implementation in informal settlements has resulted in significant positive impacts on the beneficiaries.

Between April and August 2023 DRC conducted a Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) involving 724 recipients. A mixed method was employed to get both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data collection tools were developed, targeting the direct beneficiaries of the project. Structured interview questionnaires covering the different activities conducted were included with consideration of the disaggregation by gender, age, disability, residency status, and other parameters as required. DRC MEAL team utilized the Kobo platform to collect data, both in person and remotely. For quantitative data collection, the MEAL team selected a sample of approximately 10% of beneficiaries through a simple random sampling technique. Interviews with a randomly selected group of recipients were conducted between the months of April and August 2023. The qualitative data collection was conducted through FGDs with direct and indirect beneficiaries of the Cash-for-Work initiatives.

Under both the protection and the CCCM interventions the overall satisfaction was very high. Under the protection assistance, recipients unanimously found IPA highly beneficial, with a reduction of 98% in protection risks, while legal counseling and support to obtaining civil documentation significantly contributed to enhancing the well-being of beneficiaries by enabling access to key services and assistance. 91% of respondents reported improvements in access to rights and services and 94% of respondents were satisfied with the quality, timeliness, and relevance of the protection response.



*This CFW scheme was so handy for poor families as they now comfortably access basic needs and food.*

(Male respondents from Haji Aziz Camp)<sup>4</sup>

Within the CCCM and shelter intervention, DRC's extensive multi-sectoral services benefited a total of 26,187 individuals. The impact was tangible, as the assistance significantly improved the living conditions of beneficiaries, offering protection from adverse weather conditions and allowing them to live with dignity in secure and sheltered accommodations. The resounding endorsement from beneficiaries further underscores the effectiveness of the initiative, with 99% expressing their belief that humanitarian assistance was delivered safely, accessibly, accountably, and with meaningful participation.

The cash-for-work program not only offered short-term employment opportunities but also contributed to the overall improvement of living conditions within informal settlements. All (100%) of the respondents reported high satisfaction of cash-for-work initiatives. This integrated approach fostered cleanliness in these settlements, subsequently enhancing residents' hygiene. In conjunction with the indirect positive impact on hygiene from the cash-for-work program, DRC extended its support by providing ES/NFI and hygiene assistance to 25,450 individuals. Across all designated sites, the response was remarkably positive, with 95% of the respondents reporting that the assistance met their basic needs.

In summary, DRC's integrated interventions have had a profound and lasting positive impact on the well-being and living conditions of beneficiaries in Kandahar's informal settlements. The integrated approach opened access through the sequencing of specific aid tailored to the context, not only addressing immediate needs but also paving the way for a reduction in the marginalization of the normally excluded hard-to-reach populations. Including them in community-based projects and empowering them through CBPCs and SMCs allows for long-term impact and buy-in. DRC's work showcases how effective collaboration, strategic engagement based on integrated programming, and innovative approaches can bring about positive changes even in the most challenging circumstances.

## Conclusion

DRC has demonstrated its unwavering commitment and capacity to deliver an integrated response to the hard-to-reach populations residing in Kandahar's informal settlements and IDP sites. By implementing a range of multi-sectoral interventions, DRC has adeptly tackled the intricate and multifaceted needs, and access to, these hard-to-reach populations, resulting in tangible improvements to their living conditions and overall protection.

Moving forward, DRC remains dedicated to ongoing collaboration with community leaders to promote a reduction in the marginalization of specific population groups, ensuring a sustainable and long-term humanitarian response for this population with safe, principled, and sustainable access. DRC's proactive inclusion of the surrounding host communities in the program has served as a bridge for building understanding and reducing tensions between host communities and IDPs, ultimately improving acceptance. This inclusive strategy not only benefits the targeted populations but also contributes to fostering a more harmonious and cooperative environment among all residents.

A key strength of DRC's approach is the integration of protection and CCCM programming, which has provided a tailored and encompassing solution to address the diverse requirements of these communities. This holistic approach has proven to be effective in addressing the most immediate needs, while implementing projects that aim to foster self-sufficiency and to empower affected populations in their own self-protection and promoting meaningful access, participation, and ownership of project interventions. With one comprehensive project, DRC managed to increase protection of people affected by shocks and displacement, helping them to seek safety and claim their basic rights, and to access hard-to-reach communities, enhancing inclusion and helping them to reduce their marginalization and to pursue self-reliance.



*Culvert bridge build by DRC in an informal settlement in Kandahar*



Founded in 1956, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is Denmark's largest international NGO, with a specific expertise in forced displacement. DRC is present in close to 40 countries and employs 9,000 staff globally.

DRC advocates for the rights of and solutions for displacement-affected communities, and provides assistance during all stages of displacement: In acute crisis, in exile, when settling and integrating in a new place, or upon return. DRC supports displaced persons in becoming self-reliant and included into hosting societies. DRC works with civil society and responsible authorities to promote protection of rights and inclusion.

Our 7,500 volunteers in Denmark make an invaluable difference in integration activities throughout the country.

DRC's code of conduct sits at the core of our organizational mission, and DRC aims at the highest ethical and professional standards. DRC has been certified as meeting the highest quality standards according to the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability.

HRH Crown Princess Mary is DRC's patron.

To read more about what we do, see: [www.drc.ngo](http://www.drc.ngo)

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