Forced Migration Working Group
Online
30 August 2021 (11:00-12:30 CEST)


Agenda:
1. Afghanistan forced displacement situation
2. Externalization & UNHCR ExCom side event
3. AoB

1. Afghanistan forced displacement situation

ICVA Asia Regional Hub: Update on regional level and activities
- The situation is evolving day by day and at the regional level, the focus has been on information sharing and coordination through different channels. It was on the agenda for a long time but for now through the emergency preparedness working group as well with an interagency UN-NGO group at the regional level where we look at the possible outcomes.
- On August 3rd, UNHCR started interagency briefings at the regional level with NGOs and the UN, mainly as an information-sharing forum to share updates as well to hear from other UN agencies about key issues and then look for potential actions to move forward.
- The Asia Displacement Solutions Platform and ICVA held a meeting among NGOs early in August to understand across the region, not just in Afghanistan, to share information and discuss outcomes.
- The projection in terms of displacement inside Afghanistan is around 550,000. 70,000 internal displacements are reported to come into Kabul over recent weeks. Movement is still fluid, depending on what movements will be, whether to provinces both in host communities and some other temporary sites. Internal displacement situation will evolve.
- Projections from UNHCR of cross-border movements is around 500,000. This projection came with the thinking of conflict displacement when the troops will be out with possible fighting between Taliban and Afghan forces. But now with the fall, there are other considerations such as the drought, economic situation, access to supplies that may lead to displacement and it is difficult to go out to the borders with Taliban controlling.
- On preparedness plan, there were sensitivities at governmental levels, e.g. in Pakistan. Plan happens mostly at UN level. It is more country-by-country plan and then coming together at regional level looking at common needs (e.g. Pakistan does not have a separate plan and might be open to that but for now they have been included in that regional response plan).
- Pakistan said they will not accept Afghan refugees. There is access and people coming through mainly medical visas, seeing family or for trade.
- There is a concern with Pakistan and the air bridges.
- In Iran, the border is closed but obviously refugees have been coming through smuggling routes, through visas or other reasons. There are high protection concerns about smuggling routes and the cost of travel. We are also hearing about pushing back from the border.
• There were provisional visits with UNHCR and authorities to look at 2 potential sites in Iran.
• On both those areas with Pakistan-Iran, the government discussions are focused on encampment but there is push in advocacy support from UNHCR and others for this to not be the only solution and to look at other opportunities.
• In Tajikistan, most people have come through by air.
• People’s status is an issue, and it also relates to advocacy with the host governments.
• There is also the issue around what does ‘stay and deliver’ mean and what are the plans?
• The UN side is working on the joint operating principles and making sure the response is principled. There are discussions around where will the remote hub be.
• Next steps: there is interest to look at common advocacy points and positions between NGOs and UNHCR and that is something we can follow-up.
• UNHCR has released 2 emergency appeals including a supplementary plan (here). IOM has also its appeal. We have heard that probably there will be no amendment to the Humanitarian Response Plan or flash appeals at this stage because the situation is too fluid.
• Open Society Foundation (OSF) has released an emergency funding for those active in Afghanistan. If you want to have a discussion with OSF on the appeal and other information such as key concerns for donors, this might be an opportunity (contact ICVA Asia Rep.).
• How NGOs will engage with the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) is also on the radar.

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• At the briefing organized on 26 August at global level, we did not necessarily get enough details about what stand and deliver means, who stays to deliver what and what is the program criticality approach which was referred once by Auravsi Patel but certainly something that needs to be more detailed.
• On the state of operational presence and reach space in Afghanistan, it is important for us in this group in relation to IDPs. The future of the operation also depends on the UNAMA bridge, and I wonder whether there is a role for WFP and UNHAS.
• We received information on the UNHCR non-return advisory.
• There was a distinction made between resettlement and evacuations and there is uncertainty on the status of those evacuated.
• We heard about the Support Platform for SSAR and how the GCR has been used, which is key because we have spent the last five years discussing it and if it is not used in those situations, what is the aim of it?
• It seems that the Support Platform is being used to provide support to neighboring countries. Resettlement issues are being dealt separately of the platform, especially the High-Level Resettlement Forum led by the EU with involvement from the U.S. and Canada. We will follow-up on the Forum.
• Other important topics included the protection of women’s rights and winterization issues.
• UNHCR referred to advocacy perspectives and support they would like to see from NGOs. ICVA mentioned the interest in discussing with UNHCR on possible cooperation or at least exchanging between UNHCR and NGOs around advocacy on the Afghanistan situation. Themes UNHCR flagged was around advocating for resources, women’s rights, the non-return advisory and access to territory for Afghan refugees and resettlement space including family reunification and humanitarian visas.
• We had feedback from UNHCR on the meeting mentioning that NGOs came in more in a listening mode and had hoped to hear more inputs from NGOs.
• We welcome your suggestions on whether ICVA should follow-up with UNHCR on another meeting on Afghanistan and also on advocacy and at which level it should take place?
Good Neighbors International

- Unless you have confidentiality and security issues, do you think it would be ok to share informally and very briefly how you are dealing within Afghanistan operations, to get a sense of how everybody is doing? On GNI side, we did not have a strong operation with NATO in Kabul, but our staff is extremely concerned and did not engage in a systematic evacuation of the field. The situation was relatively stable, we decided to stay but we feel that due to the political situation we had to put on hold our activities for IDPs in Kabul at the field level and the field do not have the capacity to participate in global platforms.

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- An information shared on behalf of Act for Peace that could not join today’s meeting is that the APRRN, the Asia Pacific Network Of Refugees (APNOR), the Global Refugee Network, members of the Global Refugee Forum Legal Community Pledge, and PILnet, recently held an Urgent Consultation on Meeting Legal Needs Arising from the Afghanistan Situation.
- The next steps included a plan to consolidate information on those conducting intake and identifying legal needs, legal resources, and legal pathways and how to access them, and how to clarify/improve referrals pathways, and to link relevant web portals. It also included to plan further workshops and consultations, consider how to better facilitate continued collaboration and coordination across jurisdictions, explore funding and pro bono support to help specific projects designed to address the legal needs of Afghans.

Refugee Council of Australia

- APNOR is a Refugees Led Network, and they established a hotline for people displaced in Afghanistan, Afghan refugees in Iran, also community members in Australia to contact the Network and share their concerns about the situation and try to find solutions in terms of mental health support, legal referrals, emergency items.
- APNOR also launched an emergency appeal for displaced Afghan women and children.
- We are seeing a lot of information about the horrific situation that many families are facing at the moment particularly in and around Kabul but also in other parts of Afghanistan.
- One challenge is that there is nowhere for people to go. Many diaspora organizations try to get people who are at risk on lists of governments involved in evacuation and also to try to gather information on what the process for resettlement out of the country is going to be.
- The situation is incredibly chaotic and the Australian government says they have evacuated 4000 people out, which is a surprisingly high number as it went fairly slow initially.
- In terms of resettlement, Australia committed to a minimum of 3000 places on top of the people who have been evacuated. They are in the United Arab Emirates and some people coming to Australia are under quarantine with different arrangements including visas.
- The Australian government announced today that the Advisory Panel on Afghan Resettlement – involving Afghan diaspora members, refugee councils – advising the government on Australian policy and resettlement over the coming year. This is encouraging because the Australian government is usually quite disinclined to seek information from independent NGO and refugee community voices.
- The APRRN statement on situation on Afghanistan is accessible here.

Oxfam

- It would be good to discuss further with UNHCR on Afghanistan advocacy. It was good to hear their main messages at the briefing last week, which are closely aligned to NGO
concerns, but we could also brainstorm on potential advocacy opportunities in coming weeks/months. Is UNHCR planning something linked with the Executive Committee?

World Vision
- WV would also welcome further discussions with UNHCR on Afghanistan.

Refugees International
- RI will welcome further discussion as well.

Amera
- Although we do not have any direct intervention in Afghanistan, we share up to date resources and country information on our website on Afghanistan, neighbouring countries, and other countries as well. It is freely accessible by Afghans and persons helping Afghans. [Here](#) is a link to the Rights in Exile website.

ICVA
- Based on your suggestions, we should keep focus on advocacy including Afghanistan and see when we will organise another meeting.

2. Externalization & UNHCR ExCom side event

- Linked with the second agenda item, wondering if there is a need to link the NGO ExCom side event with the Afghanistan situation? We can keep the same approach on responsibility-sharing/externalization and have one panellist zooming on Afghanistan or the Afghan situation or we keep the same concept but with a full focus on Afghanistan.
- We will see with UNHCR if they are planning any ExCom side event on this. We also asked them if there will be side events at the Standing Committee and have not yet an answer.

Refugees International
- Interesting idea for the NGO ExCom side event to still focus on externalization but zooming on Afghanistan, what is happening right now in real time and how these threats are playing out in terms of protection that will not be available and accessible to displaced Afghans.
- Refugees International is also leading the drafting of the ExCom statement on Protection, with a focus on externalization. There is space in that statement to dive deep on Afghanistan. It is a short statement and welcome inputs.
- We consider externalization as a major threat to the international protection system as a whole and it could be a useful lens to approach this topic. We already discussed here the idea of a side event on externalization so we thought that would be a useful complement.

ICVA
- The ExCom side event can be on advocacy around responsibility sharing, showcasing good examples of NGOs in this perspective, and having a Refugee Led Organisation speak on their work supporting Afghan refugees. Here there is potential to discuss Afghanistan. **We welcome your perspectives on speakers** [Since this meeting, panelists have been identified].
- To remind or inform that there are NGO statements upcoming at UNHCR Standing and Executive Committees and space to provide inputs on the Afghanistan situation.
- For the September Standing Committee, there is a statement on the ExCom Conclusion focusing on International Protection and Durable Solutions in the Context of a Public Health Emergency [Since, the Standing Committee took place, see [here](#) the NGO statements].
For the Executive Committee, in addition to the statement on International Protection, there is a statement on the General Debate, including main themes on gender equality and the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement.

On externalization, we collectively decided that the first step would be to see if we could organize a meeting with UNHCR to better understand their approach, their plans and what is behind the UNHCR note and annex on the issue.

It looks like it is an issue being tackled by the Office of the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection and there was an agreement to organize a meeting between the Office and ICVA members in the coming weeks, before ExCom so that it can inform the NGO side event and the statement [Since then the meeting took place, notes to be circulated shortly].

UNHCR seem to be interested in clarifying what they are doing, their approach and raise awareness as a basis for further discussions around possible exchanges on advocacy or something more concrete to take the topic further.

Any questions and suggestions on externalization?

Refugee Council of Australia
- The Kaldor Centre has produced a policy brief on Australian offshore processing, thus contributing to the international discussion on externalisation.

Action for the Needy
- Can the advocacy be more inclusive to address similar issues not only in Afghanistan but also in other countries of priority in terms of IDPs challenges, e.g. in Ethiopia?

3. AoB
- High Level Panel on Internal Displacement: We will need to see collectively what our work will be the coming weeks and months, following the report to be released in late September. We will see whether we can have an advance copy of the report or some indication of its content and exactly the date it may be released. [Since the meeting, the date of the launch was announced for 29 September and draft recommendations have been circulated].
  - Some had suggested as a collective action to develop an NGO letter to the UNSG.
  - To Action for the Needy: we could certainly discuss and see your points around IDP challenges and continue the work that we have been doing in relation to the High-Level Panel. Now is the start of the new phase, we have been involved and we will do our best to remain engaged in supporting NGOs perspectives and advocacy and make sure recommendations are put in place and implemented.
  - Welcome information and suggestions you may have on the Panel.

Plan International
- We support the idea of a letter on the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement.

- Preparations for the UNHCR-WB Joint Data Center Strategic Advisory Council (1 September).
  - More information on the Strategic Advisory Council is accessible here. An important aspect is how the Strategic Advisory Council will engage with NGOs in particular small NGOs and Refugee Led Organizations, as last year there was a gap.

  - Several NGOs working in Greece have developed a joint advocacy brief on the ongoing construction of new reception centers in Greece, in the islands. There is the new “multi-
purpose identification center” with the aim to register and detain refugees at the same place. On the mainland, walls are also built.

- These practices are further deepening a policy of containment and exclusion that is going to undermine any prospect at integration for asylum seekers and will exacerbate all the mental health conditions with isolation and exclusion and also will likely impede the effective delivery of essential services in these reception facilities because of the new controls that are being introduced around access for NGOs, lawyers and journalists.

- Especially on the islands, these new camps are being built in remote locations far from towns where until now or prior to COVID-19, individuals were able to go into town and access services or buy goods that perhaps were not available in the camp. As we know conditions and services there are inadequate.

- We tried to tie it to the broader issues at the regional level in the EU because this is being supported by EU funding and there is a strong disconnect between the Greek government semantics saying that it is just controlled access and for the safety of the refugees, whereas Commissioner Johansson said that the EU would never pay for closed camps but clearly that is what these are.

- The policy brief is longer than an advocacy letter and reflects the significance of the issue and amount of NGO contributions. It will be distributed widely, aiming to target officials at the EU level. As much support with sign-on as we can get from around the region would be helpful. It will be published on September 8, marking one year since the fire that destroyed Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesvos. [Since the meeting, the brief here was released].

INTERSOS
- Hope many NGOs will support this important policy brief.

ICVA
- Summary of the action points of this meeting:
  - We will contact UNHCR and ask if there is plan for a side event on Afghanistan during UNHCR Standing Committee.
  - The NGO ExCom side event will tackle or at least discuss the Afghanistan situation. Welcome concrete suggestions about panelists.
  - We will look at the organization of another meeting on Afghanistan at the global level in the coming weeks and in discussion with our ICVA colleague in Asia to avoid any duplications.
  - Separate to that, looking at the discussion with UNHCR around advocacy. We can meet not only with UNHCR, but also others. We are open to suggestions and see if there is appetite with other stakeholders.
  - In terms of IDP challenges, we will need to look at it and it might connect with the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement.