



**LISTENING TO
WOMEN AND GIRLS
DISPLACED TO URBAN
AFGHANISTAN**

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NRC



THE NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL (NRC)

is an independent, humanitarian, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, established in 1946. NRC works to protect the rights of displaced and vulnerable persons during crisis. Through our programmes we provide assistance to meet immediate humanitarian needs, prevent further displacement and contribute to durable solutions. Through our advocacy we strive for rights to be upheld and for lasting solutions to be achieved. Through our stand-by rosters we provide expertise as a strategic partner to the UN, as well as to national and international actors. In Afghanistan, NRC has been assisting displacement-affected populations since 2002 with humanitarian programmes in education, shelter, legal assistance and emergency response.

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THE LIAISON OFFICE (TLO)

is an Afghan non-governmental organization that was established in 2003 at the request of south-eastern tribal elders wishing to be better integrated in the post-2001 peace and statebuilding process. Over the past decade, TLO's central mission has remained to improve local governance through a systematic and institutionalized engagement of local communities, and their traditional governance structures, as well as civil society groups and marginalized communities into the emerging peace, governance, justice and reconstruction frameworks of Afghanistan. Having always focussed on raising awareness about key protection issues, TLO increasingly focused its research and project implementation since 2010 on better understanding and addressing the particular needs of migratory and displaced communities, including returnees across Afghanistan.

www.tloafghanistan.org



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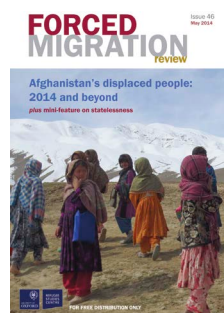
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Growing numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) live in informal settlements in major Afghan urban centres. Compared with other Afghans they are more likely to be non-literate, to have lower rates of school enrolment, to live in larger households (but with lower household incomes), to be unemployed and to be highly food insecure.

There is insufficient understanding of and response to the needs of youth, and particularly vulnerable females, displaced to urban areas. This report presents findings of research in three informal settlements in Jalalabad, Kabul and Kandahar which was commissioned by the Norwegian Refugee Council and researched by The Liaison Office (TLO), an Afghan non-governmental organisation.

The study confirmed earlier findings about the impacts for IDPs of living in poor urban settlements, characterised by inadequate and crowded accommodation, insufficient water and sanitation facilities, extreme food insecurity and inability to get education or employment.

The findings of the research break new ground, confounding the common assumption that urban women and girls should be more able – in a supposedly more secure and progressive urban environment with a concentration of service providers – to access services and employment and social opportunities than prior to their displacement.

This research found the opposite, showing that displacement places women and children at disproportionate risk, living with fewer freedoms and opportunities than those they enjoyed in their natal villages or when living in Pakistan or Iran. Evidence gathered shows that displaced females face significant enhanced gendered constraints to accessing education, health and employment opportunities. They have lost freedoms, social capital and networks they may have previously enjoyed. The controlling tendencies of their male kin, and their propensity to violence, are enhanced by their own desperation.

The report presents testimonies of how many youth feel cheated out of education and regrets at having to contribute to household livelihoods activities at a young age. Many have missed out on being children, youngsters and teenagers, taking on adult functions far too young and now feeling hopelessness. Negative

copied mechanisms – such as not seeking health care, not seeking professional assistance during childbirth and drug use all entrench poverty. Many women now experience high levels of psychological trauma.

Many are kept in seclusion, not allowed to venture much outside the house, reducing access to education and health care, but also opportunities to contribute to the family's livelihoods. In general, across Afghanistan, women are marrying at a later age than they used to. However, this is not the case for displaced women.

Representing a form of income, they are instead often married off to older men who are able to pay bridewealth/dowry. This leads to early child bearing with associated health risks and also to early widowhood. Furthermore, crowded living conditions and frustrated male family members often lead to an increase in domestic violence. The fact that more men are at home – often lacking skills to develop sustainable urban livelihoods – has increased levels of domestic violence.

The young men interviewed, while also frustrated, did not exhibit the same level of desperation and psychological problems. Many female interviewees demonstrated a palpable feeling of despair, an alarming number wishing for death or regret at having been born. Many reported the reason they wanted to talk about their lives was the hope they might get some form of support and assistance. Nearly all asked researchers to help resolve their problems.

Hunger is a real problem, many women fearing for the survival of their children. Nearly half of those interviewed reported they are forced to buy food on credit.

Nationwide, there have been impressive increases in rates of school enrolment for girls. This is not the case in the informal settlements. A majority of all young IDP women (71 per cent) reported never having attended schools and not one among the group of informants in Kabul had ever gone to school.

This report, largely presented through their own words, is the story of a often forgotten group of Afghani women, many of whom are in despair, potentially suicidal and with unmet mental health needs. We hope that their honesty and openness with researchers may trigger the assistance they need.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESPONSE ACTORS:

To better address the specific vulnerabilities of young women and girls in urban settings, it is important that:

- non-specialised humanitarian staff, including local staff, must be sensitised and trained to identify mental health care issues and understand how to refer cases appropriately
- gender analysis be mainstreamed into assessments and response strategies for informal settlements
- all IDP assessments include a component on mental health needs and fast track referrals for those populations at heightened risk
- advocacy for community-based psychosocial support are included in programming implementation and planning.
- women and girls are targeted for a mixed package of assistance, from specialised psychosocial support services, increased community and family support through to provision of basic services. Humanitarian actors should explore how to restart formal or informal education provision as early in the displacement cycle as possible, perhaps through home-based vocational training and livelihood-support activities.

Women and children are the biggest sufferers in this displacement because they are the ones who don't get enough nutrition and health care.

23 year-old IDP woman from Kandahar, 2 November 2014



INTRODUCTION

Research in Afghanistan and elsewhere has demonstrated that displacement places women and children at disproportionate risk compared with men. For they often lose the protection formerly provided by families and communities.¹ This is exacerbated by women's spatial and social isolation in urban settings.² This is particularly apparent in Afghanistan where females face traditional constraints on their mobility³ and prior to displacement were already disadvantaged when accessing basic services or seeking rights to make choices about their futures and their bodies.

Globally, there has been insufficient study of youth, especially females, displaced to urban areas. A 2013 multi-country study by the Women's Refugee Commission found that "the literature on urban refugee youth livelihoods was weak and fragmented, and [...] few rigorous impact evaluations were found."⁴ Similarly, a 2013 study by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) noted that "little data exists within UNHCR on the global displaced population aged 15-24 years and yet evidence suggests that youth form a majority of UNHCR's 'Persons of Concern'.⁵

Studies of young Afghan refugees in Iran⁶ and Pakistan⁷ have demonstrated how their outlook and needs are drastically different than that of older generations. A 2012 study by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) emphasised the need to improve understanding of "specific displacement-related vulnerabilities for IDP youth populations and related child protection risks."⁸

Responding to this knowledge gap, NRC commissioned The Liaison Office (TLO)⁹ to assess and profile the needs and vulnerabilities of displaced urban youth in Afghanistan, particularly women and girls. Project objectives were to give displaced women a voice so as to better inform evidence-based advocacy and improve programming.

METHODOLOGY

Research activities included a literature review and interviews, surveys and focus groups in October/November 2013 with a total of 446 people, 49 per cent of them women. Follow-up interviews were conducted a year later to verify 2013 information.

Interviewees were drawn from both displaced and non-displaced communities in Kabul, the eastern city of Jalalabad and Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. The mean age of those interviewed was the early 20s. Most of those interviewed were from the Pashtun ethnic group. Nearly one-third of all respondents were living in a female-headed household.

The study focused on two kinds of IDPs – those former refugees who had on return from Pakistan or Iran repatriated directly to urban informal settlements (rather than rural places of origin) and those who had sought refuge in urban areas to escape armed conflict, generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural disasters. In all three settlements respondents indicated that those IDPs displaced directly from places of origin were among the more recent arrivals and repatriated refugees had been settled there longer.

While the sample chosen represent a fraction of the entire urban IDP population of Afghanistan, NRC and TLO are confident that this snapshot of urban-affected displaced youth, nevertheless, provides clear indications of the challenges faced by young females who have been displaced to informal settlements in urban areas.

Full details of the methodology used are in Appendix 1.

URBANISATION AND THE GROWTH OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENT

Urbanisation has been largely driven by large-scale refugee return (around six million since 2002)¹⁰ and the movement of IDPs and migrants to urban areas. The lack of employment and services in rural areas as well as growing insecurity has led to rapid urban growth, with some 30 per cent of the population living in urban areas by 2011.¹¹ The rapidly growing capital Kabul, considered one of the fastest growing cities in the region,¹² alone counted 53 informal settlements in July 2013. Official statistics under-estimate their population but many government officials informally acknowledge that some 70 per cent per cent of the urban populations of Herat, Jalalabad, Kabul and Kandahar resides in informal settlements.¹³

Debunking the myth of inevitable antagonisms between hosts and IDPs

“There are no host or local community versus displaced populations because we live mixed with each other. ... The only difference between the families that live here is that some came early, some came in the middle and some came late. That is it.”

Resident, Campona, Jalalabad, 24 October 2013

Definitions for informal settlements vary greatly between agencies. Key characteristics are:

- They are unplanned, falling outside municipality master plans.
- They are informal: construction is haphazard, not conforming to regulations and often spontaneous.
- They are technically illegal as land is disputed between those who occupy it and state or private landowners.

UN-HABITAT defines informal settlements as:

- residential areas where a group of housing units has been constructed on land in urban areas to which the occupants have no legal claim, or which they occupy illegally.
- unplanned settlements and areas where housing is not in compliance with current planning and building regulations (unauthorised housing).¹⁴

So great has been the scale of displacement in Afghanistan that distinguishing between displaced and host populations is often artificial. With an estimated 76 per cent of all Afghans having been displaced at least once in their lives, many several times,¹⁵ one in three Afghans having been a refugee and some 2.5 million still registered as refugees in neighbouring Iran and Pakistan¹⁶ the lines between the displaced and the non-displaced are extremely blurred: displacement is the norm, not exception.

A majority of those displaced to urban areas (76 per cent) are relatively recent arrivals (post 2002), with over 40 per cent having been displaced for more than five years (and thus falling within the definition of protracted displacement.¹⁷ This suggests that the major difference is less whether an individual has been previously displaced or not, but rather the duration of displacement and time of arrival in an urban area. Thus, it might be more accurate to speak of longer-term residents vs. more recent arrivals.¹⁸

There is considerable uncertainty regarding the size of the population of Afghanistan, the numbers of repatriated refugees who have remained in Afghanistan and thus the number of urban residents. Compounding this is a lack of age-disaggregated information. Additionally, many in Afghanistan, especially women, do not know their exact age or date of birth. This leads to high incidences of age misreporting. Reported ages in surveys and censuses should thus be treated with caution.¹⁹

YOUNG NOT LISTENED TO

Cultural norms often attach little value to the views of those considered young or under-age, assuming that adults know best. Though some two-thirds of the Afghan population are under the age of 25, “young people’s voices are rarely heard.”²⁰ The percentage of individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 is higher in urban than rural areas. The draft Afghan National Youth Policy (ANYP) was only belatedly launched in July 2013. It seeks to “ensure that investment in young people lead to sustainable and more equitable development of all young women and men.”²¹



VULNERABILITIES OF URBAN FEMALE IDPS

ENTRENCHED GENDER INEQUALITY

Triple Jeopardy for Displaced Young Women (displacement, youth and gender)

Displacement usually results in the loss of financial capital, natural resources and important social connections. They often flee with few resources and their family and friend networks are disrupted.

Young women, especially, and young men may arrive in their host city with even fewer assets than adult refugees.

www.womensrefugeecommission.org/.../870-economic-empowerment-o... ; p.5

Despite some recent achievements by women in Afghanistan, young women and girls face significantly more and qualitatively different challenges in accessing education, health care and employment than their male counterparts. This seems to be even more pronounced in informal settlements. Afghanistan's score on the Gender Inequality Index – measuring gender-based inequalities in the areas of reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity – ranks it as one of the most unequal in the world, (147 of 148).²² Afghanistan has one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates. Nearly half of all deaths of women aged 15-49 in Afghanistan result from complications during pregnancy and childbirth.²³

School enrolment rates for girls continue to lag significantly behind that for boys, maternal health remains among the worst in the world and the government has shown little interest in either implementing new laws and policies that offer women protection from violence or in proactively promoting other improvements in the lives of women.²⁴

This slow progress is linked to rigid notions of female propriety which severely restrict their mobility and conduct. There are continuing reports of exceedingly brutal violence against women who defy family and societal control. In all ethnic groups a woman's 'purity' is closely linked to a man's honour and that of his family and extended clan. This is particularly prevalent among the Pashtuns,²⁵ enshrined in their customary law and the Pashtunwali, their cultural codex. Women are constrained in their movement and action in order to maintain veiling and seclusion (purdah) to keep them from the eyes of other men.²⁶ Outside the home women have, at least in theory, to be accompanied by a male guardian or chaperone (mahram). It is rare for girls to be allowed to complete primary education, leaving them with few opportunities to independently generate income or exercise control over any assets they may possess.²⁷ Women are not seen as individuals with a right to choose.²⁸ More often than not, men consider themselves the 'owners' of women and their children. This sometimes also leads to bad, a system whereby women are given in marriage to a family as compensation for crimes committed.²⁹ Interviewees in the Kandahar settlement reported this is still a common practice in their community.

EARLY MARRIAGE AND CHILD MOTHERS

Afghanistan's high adolescent birth rate (90/1,000 women aged 15 to 19)³⁰ poses a major risk to young girls' and women's health. In general, across Afghanistan, women are marrying at a later age than they used to.³¹ However, this is not the case for displaced women. Among the many comments made to researchers were:

*Our elders try to marry or engage our daughters from the age of 12. They say that it is a sin when girls are at the house of their fathers and that we should marry them as soon as possible. They are just like butchers, they don't take care for the future of their children. They just put them in the fire by marrying them off early.*³²

*Our men are very cruel; they engaged my eight-year old daughter. Can someone do this with the women of the city?*³³

*We are being sold in exchange for money like animals. Our rights are ignored; we are often sold to widowers, blind men, disabled or old men and we have no choice to refuse marrying them.*³⁴

*I feel fear from our house owner who is already married and sends his mother to our house to marry me. I am scared what will happen if my brother agrees him. Women in this place are in bad conditions, they are not able to stand against the challenges they face here and being futureless or accepting to marry much older or already married people are the main concerns.*³⁵

In the sample, young women reported having children as early as 16. Many may have married younger, however, given that some young women at the age of 18 reported having three or more children.

WIDOWS AND FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

Early marriage can also lead to early widowhood. Many of the young women interviewed were widows, several only in their twenties. Most widows worked, typically as cleaners or tailors, while others depended on their children.

I'm a young widow living with young orphans, my stepdaughters. I have many problems, we are very helpless, and we don't have food, water or residence. There's a child in our camp

*who goes out of home every day, collects plastic, cans and papers, sells them and brings us food. I, two young women and two children are living with the money he brings. I was a rich man's daughter and I could have whatever I wanted. My wedding was very luxurious but war took everything from me, my husband and his family. I don't even know whether or not my parents are alive. Here I live with two young girls and two children in sorrow. We just endure our life of poverty.*³⁶

*There are lots of poor people, widows, orphans and disabled. The government doesn't care about us and never helps us. I wish death was the solution so that we could commit suicide but how will our children live in our absence? They already have nothing so how can we take their lives too?*³⁷

*People complain about not having food, water or residence which seems nothing in comparison with my problems. I am a widow with two sons and a daughter. My elder son was engaged but unfortunately he couldn't get married and now my daughter-in-law is a widow, just like me. My younger son sold plastic bags at Mandayi but they arrested him, saying that he has joined the anti-government gangs. He doesn't even know himself yet how can he join those gangs? He used to earn 20 to 50 Afghanis a day but now that he is imprisoned for 15 years I beg for a living. I have no other choices.*³⁸

WIDESPREAD DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Violence against women will never stop. My brother beats me and my sister all the time for no reason. He says if I stop beating you, you girls will be ill-mannered and humiliate me in the community. He tells us I don't want to see you with short clothes and without your shawl. When we are sick he doesn't take us to a doctor until our illness gets very serious.

23 year-old IDP women from Helmand, Kandahar, 31 October 2014

A number of reports suggest an increase in violence against women in Afghanistan.³⁹ While there is better reporting, it remains the case that much remains unreported due to fears of stigmatisation, social exclusion, reprisals and threats to life.⁴⁰

Female informants in the three study sites were candid about the level of abuse they experienced. Men, however, generally downplayed the issue. The kind of abuse reported by women ranged from refusal of medical treatment, not being allowed outside the house, as well as physical violence in the form of beatings from fathers, brothers and husbands.

Our men do not care whether we are hungry or thirsty. We are beaten every day, there's only one rule which is we have to obey men. It's common all over the country.⁴¹

We are poor and cannot live a free life. My parents died in a suicide attack. Once I went out because I wasn't feeling good and when I returned my brother beat me up.⁴²

My uncle does not let us go to school and he beat us up.⁴³

I am not allowed to go out. Our men say that young girls should not go out and if they are seen outside, they are beaten up.⁴⁴

When we get sick we are not taken to the doctor on time. Despite having many issues, we are also beaten.⁴⁵

Women are both victims and perpetrators. Mothers, step-mothers and especially mothers-in-law often play a crucial role in the abuse of young women.

I have one other sister and our step mother is very cruel to u. She neither gives us permission to study nor lets us go to our friend's house. When I see other girls I want to kill myself and my sister too. Now we have moved here from our village, the problems have more than doubled.⁴⁶

My mother-in-law beats me and throws bad words at me. Violence in front of children affects them very much. When she yells at me my children get silent and scared. I can see tears in their eyes for me.⁴⁷

LIMITED MOBILITY

Conservative norms are deeply entrenched in informal urban settlements. Men often keep young women in isolation, limiting their movement ostensibly in order to protect them, but more often than not to protect their own honour.

Restrictions on their movement drastically reduce access to education, health care and livelihood opportunities. Only 40 per cent of respondents said women and girls could gain permission to leave the house in order to visit friends. At least one third said that they had to be in the company of a mahram to go out. IDP girls in Jalalabad spoke of not even being able to see their family and fearing the abusive husbands or drug-addicted fathers who control their lives.⁴⁸ Many young women compare their plight as a form of detention or life in prison. Often women feel that the seclusion is worse than in rural areas. Young women living in the informal settlements envy other women in the city they live in, believing they have more freedoms and opportunities.

*We miss the outside world so much, and feel like prisoners here. Prison is better; at least you are fed well.*⁴⁹

*Asking our men for permission to go out is like asking for death.*⁵⁰

*We are imprisoned in our tents and we don't have permission to go out. What is this sort of life worth?*⁵¹

*We don't have a free life here as we had in our own village. Most of our women are like in a prison.*⁵²

*If we went out, people would call me a whore because I was free.*⁵³

*We even don't have the right to watch TV. We are not allowed to meet our cousins or go to my married sister's house. I am sick of this life. Death is better than this.*⁵⁴

*They [male family members] are doing all the cruelty to us. They don't let us study, nor let us go anywhere. We have been living here for a long time, but we don't know our neighbours.*⁵⁵

*We don't have permission to go out or meet our relatives. Once my husband saw my cousin going to market he told me that your cousin has a boyfriend because she was going to the market. He warned me to take care of my girls and not let them out. I told him that this may not be true so he beat me up.*⁵⁶

In addition to the loss of networks from areas of origin, women have a hard time establishing new networks in the places of displacement due to not being permitted to venture outside their homes. Young women frequently lamented their inability to share their burdens with other women or build networks within their informal settlement communities.

*We don't know any other girls except for those around our tents. We are not allowed to go out. My father is a drug addict and we are afraid of talking to him. He doesn't even let me meet my aunts.*⁵⁷

*All day we have almost nothing to do ... the only thing we do is that the girls from the adjoining tents come together and complain about the life we are having, nothing beyond that.*⁵⁸

FEAR OF REPRISALS FOR MALE BEHAVIOUR

Women mention living under the constant fear (real or perceived) of threats from both the Taliban and the government because of the actions of their male relatives. Families are caught between acquiescing to Taliban demands and working for the government.⁵⁹

We moved from here about three years ago and we were living in a city in Helmand province. My husband and his brother were working for government and they were warned a few times by Taliban to stop. But, my husband and his brother said that if they stop working for the government, what else they would do and how they would feed our families. After the incident we moved to Kandahar city and left our home and assets. Despite the threats, my husband still works for the government. ⁶⁰

Other families were threatened when their husbands worked at a US base in Kandahar:

The Taliban knocked on our door at 10 pm and told my father to leave the job and stop sending his daughters to school. My father told us not to worry, saying they just want to threaten us, so continue to go to school. However, after three days they killed my brother in front of our house who was working in the base. After that we went to Pakistan for one year, but now we have returned and now my father thinks that they may come again and kill someone from our family. ⁶¹

POVERTY

In Afghanistan, IDPs when compared with their non-displaced compatriots have higher rates of illiteracy,

lower rates of school enrolment, larger households but with lower household incomes, higher unemployment rates (increasing with length of displacement) and high food insecurity.⁶²

Most of the young women interviewed were unsure how to begin to talk about poverty in their new location. The words of a 21 year-old IDP woman from Helmand in Kabul sum up the feelings of many:

What should I tell you about first, unemployment, hunger, thirst, homelessness or misery? All the sorrow and pain that has come upon us? Here we have got many widows, orphans and disabled people. Almost of the residents have lost some of their family members (like husband, father, brother) or body parts (like eyes, arms and legs). We need help. Our men should be employed. Our children should go to kindergartens and school and should study. Our life is ruined. ⁶³

Unemployment is endemic. Only 18 per cent reported steady employment.

All our men are jobless, they can't find job opportunities, stay all the day at home, and also there are no job opportunities for us. ⁶⁴

There is no work and our men are jobless. We brought some money with us from the village which finished. Our men only know farming, they don't do other kinds of work, and also we women are jobless. We can only do embroidery which does not exist here. ⁶⁵

Our men are addicted to unemployment now. They are uneducated and so are unable to find

jobs. Our men stay at home all day, fighting and beating us. ⁶⁶

My little brothers and sisters and I often don't eat because my father isn't always lucky to get work because finding work nowadays is very difficult. ⁶⁷

There are no jobs and unemployment has made my heart impatient. Which issues I should pay attention to homelessness, not having enough clothes or not getting enough food? The whole day passes in silly fights between the men and women. ⁶⁸

Lack of livelihoods leads to a cycle of debt. Around 65 per cent of all young men interviewed and 27 per cent of the young girls spoke of having had to borrow money. Nearly half of all those interviewed acknowledged that they are forced to buy food on credit, with 25 per cent stating they had to do this every month and six per cent every week. Such buying on credit, however, only lasts as long as families can actually repay their debt.

Grocers used to lend us food and other vital stuff but since we couldn't pay their loans on time, they won't lend us anything again. ⁶⁹

We are not allowed to go out or to work and our men are wandering unemployed. Whenever we need money we have borrow it from friends and then return it in its time. ⁷⁰

I'm illiterate so I cannot have a job. Whenever we need money urgently my brother, may he live long, borrows it from his friends, removes our

necessities and as soon as he earns money he pays his loan back. ⁷¹

My husband is in debt and he has to repay while we don't have money for our daily expenses. We don't know whether to pay our debts or feed ourselves. ⁷²

DRUGS

Many women lament the link between unemployment and male drug dependency:

Drug addiction, robbery and all other problems are all because of unemployment. ⁷³

Youths are unemployed and so are addicted to drugs. If this situation continues what else will come upon them? ⁷⁴

My brother is unemployed and addicted to drugs. When we migrated to Jalalabad, his friends addicted him to drugs. ⁷⁵

My son is a drug addict. My husband is old and cannot work. Shouldn't I be hopeless? ⁷⁶

I wish that my husband was not addicted so that he can work all the time, but no one gives him a job because they are afraid that he will steal something. ⁷⁷

Though appreciating the security they found in their new location, most felt their lives back in Pakistan, Iran or rural areas were much more comfortable.

When we were in our village we were very happy but here everything is very hard. Neither the government nor the locals care about us. There is no happiness in this settlement. The only thing is that here is no fighting, but we would be happy to die instead of living this kind of life.⁷⁸

Our life was better back in Pakistan. We had food and a garden but here we are miserable. May Allah have mercy on us! I work in strangers' houses and cook them food and clean their houses. I can hardly afford to feed my family.⁷⁹

When we returned from Pakistan, our misery started. My daughter sews clothes and tried to find money. Our homes are destroyed and we have nowhere to live. All we have is endurance.⁸⁰

Since we returned from Pakistan we've never seen happiness. My children cannot go to school and my husband is illiterate.⁸¹

This life is worse than our life as refugees. I could at least beg there; here it is miserable. People even laugh at us.⁸²

Many remain in limbo, neither really living in Pakistan nor in the present in Afghanistan.

FOOD INSECURITY

Last night my child asked for some bread, but we were out of bread so he started crying. He cried a lot so his father beat him. The child wasn't to blame; it was his right to feed. You see children outside live in luxury but inside this camp poor parents can't feed their children. Death is a lot better than this way of life. I wish we had died in the war.⁸³

24 year-old IDP woman from Kandahar, Bagrami, Kabul, 7 October 2013.

According to the most recent National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) – a series of European Union-supported country-wide multi-purpose household surveys⁸⁴ food security has deteriorated across Afghanistan. Some 30 per cent of the population report a calorie intake that is insufficient to sustain a healthy and active life. In urban areas 34 per cent are food-insecure. Lack of food is perhaps the single greatest problem of the displaced community, with hunger and malnutrition stalking all three settlements surveyed. Many spoke of eating once a day at most.

Many times we sleep without having dinner, but if we don't eat for a night we won't die.⁸⁵

Our children collect some papers, tires, tubes and plastics from the garbage and sell them for amount of money that can buy only three or four

*loaves of bread while there are 12 members in our family.*⁸⁶

*We have forgotten the taste of good food, my heart wants to cry loudly that what kind of life we live.*⁸⁷

*If we are dying due to hunger, there is nobody to give us one piece of bread.*⁸⁸

*We and our children suffer from hunger, we are adult and we can stand it but children can't keep patience, they need to eat and it's their right, but we are helpless and we cannot feed our children.*⁸⁹

*We are hungry, thirsty, no clothes, no shelter, our children grow illiterate and our beloved ones die of hunger and cold. We have nothing to eat for breakfast, lunch and dinner.*⁹⁰

*We have a little child who goes out early in the morning, collects plastic, paper and cans, sells them and brings us food. Our life and future is already ruined but we have to let his future ruin too, we have no other choice. Who else will bring us money and food?*⁹¹

consider renting. All are subject to threats of eviction as the government has repeatedly threatened to close their camp. In Kandahar and Jalalabad the luckier ones might have more than one room and some are able to afford to rent. Some households have as many as 20 people. The mental health of women forced to live in such close proximity to so many others, and not able to go out, inevitably suffers.

*I only wish for a shelter; shelter is enough. As we lack food, shelter and water as well we do not have any hope left.*⁹²

*We used to live in tents in Pakistan and now we don't even have a tent. My father cannot provide us with accommodation.*⁹³

*Of all things in the whole world we don't even own a tent. People from the government come to us and tell us that we should leave this place. Where should we go and how should we find food?*⁹⁴

*We went to Pakistan during the Soviet regime and now that we have returned I thought our country will bring us honour. Instead, I am frequently thrown out of the house because I cannot afford to pay the rent. May Allah have mercy on us.*⁹⁵

*We begged many people to give us at least a room to spend our life but they didn't. No one cares about others.*⁹⁶

*We don't have a home and after every rain our residence is full of water.*⁹⁷

SHELTER: OVERCROWDING AND TENURE INSECURITY

Those lucky enough to have housing are in very cramped living conditions with more than one family and more than one generation living together. In the Kabul settlement people live in a tent or a mud building with a tarpaulin and very few are able to

The intense cold in their makeshift accommodation, particularly in Kabul where temperatures can reach minus 20, makes freezing to death a constant fear.

Last year many of our children couldn't make it and died because of the cold weather.”⁹⁸

We haven't got warm clothes, blankets, wood fuel or stoves. One kharwar of wood (about 560 kg.) costs 7,000 to 8,000 Afghani (c. \$120-140), but in this cold weather even ten kharwars won't be enough to get us through the winter. We cannot afford bread then how are we supposed to buy such expensive wood? We need help so that we can survive this winter, last year many of our children passed away because of the cold.⁹⁹

POOR ACCESS TO WATER, SANITATION AND ELECTRICITY

All IDP interviewees report difficulties obtaining sufficient quality water. The Kandahar and Jalalabad IDPs obtain water from private or public wells or hand pumps while in the Kabul settlement there is almost total dependence on (often saline and foul) trucked water.

I have kidney problems and when I drink salty water my pain is doubled, I have no choices because we cannot afford clean drinking water and we can't pay five to ten Afghani (\$0.9-0.17) for a gallon daily.¹⁰⁰

Since we cannot afford it we've got used to drinking this salty water.¹⁰¹

None of the three settlements had sufficient access to sanitation. The worst situation was in the informal settlement in Kabul where latrines were shared and often lacked roofs and a proper door.

About a quarter of interviewees report having no access at all to electricity. Those with connections to public supplies suffer frequent power outages. The challenges of living in the dark further add to burdens of women.

ILL-HEALTH AND UNAFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE

According to the NRVA, health indicators and access to health care are significantly better in urban areas.¹⁰² However, a third of the women interviewed complained of difficulties in accessing care. Many lamented that they had had better support from traditional midwives in the villages they came from while in the city the only assistance they received was from vaccinators.

Nearby clinics are seen as inadequate and women lack the transport fees or the permission to go to better inner-city facilities. Only half of all male respondents said that women were allowed to leave the house to see treatment. Almost half of female interviewees reported being unable to afford treatment for illness the last time somebody was sick in their family.

We have a clinic nearby where you should, firstly, wait in the line for a long time and, secondly, doctors give you low quality medicine that won't have any effect. We cannot go to modern hospitals because this needs plenty of money and we don't have it.¹⁰³

When we get ill we have to stand in line ... doctors are few and patients are many.¹⁰⁴

There is one clinic which provides some medicines free, but we have to spend a half day in order to get our turn. ¹⁰⁵

We are often ill but we cannot afford medicine or the doctor's fees. This is life. If you don't have money, people will even refuse to greet you. ¹⁰⁶

They write us prescriptions to buy in the bazaar, but who can afford to buy the medicine, so we come back home without them. ¹⁰⁷

Several pointed out that the men have little regard for their health and/or sufferings and were reluctant to take them a clinic or provide them money to go, often dismissing their suffering as minor.

My nephew who was orphan died due to cough sickness in the winter, I don't know who will die this winter due to sickness. May the Almighty help us. ¹⁰⁸

LACK OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Education is often heralded as one of the success stories in Afghanistan, with more and more children attending school. The most recent NRVA observed small improvements in access to education and literacy for girls and women, especially in urban areas. ¹⁰⁹ However, findings from this study confirm those from other research in informal settlements that IDPs have considerably less access to education than other urban populations. ¹¹⁰

Among young female interviewees 71 per cent said they had never attended school. In the Kabul settlement not a single girl interviewed had attended school. Only a third of informants said girls were entitled to receive schooling. Compounding this prejudice is the fact

that Informal settlement sites lack adequate school facilities, especially for girls.

In Helmand we had schools and mosques at least, but now there's a tent where only first grade lessons are taught, and for girls there's not even that facility. ¹¹¹

When it comes to the education of the children, I feel very helpless. There is a tent where the children study, but it fails to provide proper education. It is just sort of time passing. ¹¹²

Here we have a tent which is supposed to be school but it teaches on one condition: that from every three houses only one child will be taught. ¹¹³

When asked what the biggest obstacles were for attending school, having to help their family or work was noted by 56 per cent of respondents. A second key reason was families not allowing daughters to go to school. The pressure against girl's education can come directly from the family or from within the wider community.

Girls aren't allowed to study or to work, even if they let us study it's up to third 3rd grade then they say don't study because it's a shame for all of us ... all of this is because of illiteracy and stupidity and we cannot convince them. ¹¹⁴

Whenever I see other girls going to school in the morning I get disappointed and I suffer because I also want to go to school, get educated, work and guarantee my future. ¹¹⁵

*Young girls always face problems. They are not allowed to go to school. We want all the fathers to let their daughters study. When they don't let us go to school, all our dreams are shattered. We want to have a free life.*¹¹⁶

*Yesterday, my brother told me that you are getting married. You don't need school and education.*¹¹⁷

*My daughter is six years old. My husband was told by the neighbors that he should not allow my daughter to go to school otherwise we would be evicted.*¹¹⁸

*Our girls aren't allowed to go out so we need women teachers in our houses so that we can study and get rid of illiteracy.*¹¹⁹

Insecurity is another factor preventing girls from receiving schooling.

*The illiterate and jobless boys harass the women on their way to schools. If they remain jobless, they will drive the society crazy.*¹²⁰

*I had to leave my education because of insecurity.*¹²¹

PSYCHOSOCIAL PROBLEMS

I cannot talk properly because I just want to cry right now. Yesterday my three year-old son passed away because of the cold weather. If we had had a place to live in and heaters to keep ourselves warm, my son wouldn't have died. No one let us burry him. I cried and asked for some land to bury him but unfortunately the government paved that land for a road and my son's grave was destroyed by a bulldozer. I'm a very unlucky mother. Both poverty and my child's death are troubling me a lot.

23 year-old woman from Kandahar, Bagrami, Kabul, 7 October 2013

An alarming high number of the urban displaced young women and girls interviewed appear to be suffering from severe depression, often speaking of preferring death to their current life. The desperation of some of the young women spoken to was palatable, with many crying during or after the interview. One reflected the views of many when she said.

*I can't tell you my problems because it will make me cry.*¹²²

*If you ask another question I will start crying. I thought you are here to help us, but you are just filling you papers.*¹²³

I wish you would help us and not just ask questions and then leave.¹²⁴

I am suffering psychological problems. Please help us.¹²⁵

Clearly, trauma can be re-lived when discussing problems. This raises ethical issues for doing such research without follow-up offers of counselling, but also is indicative of the broader lack of expertise amongst humanitarian service providers to help identify and address the mental health needs of young IDP women and girls. Some IDPs specifically mentioned the lack of mental health assistance, with no individual or organisation that chronically depressed people could turn to.

We are deep in unpleasant thoughts night and day. We are homeless, sick, hungry with no food, no potable water, no proper clothes, no one to help us. Previously a number of organisations and individuals used to help us, but no one visits the camp nowadays. We need lots of things, everything, everything. The children ask for food that we do not have. I cry with my crying children at times.¹²⁶

Many spoke of the wish to never have been born, to have been killed in conflict or to die.

If I had the choice I wouldn't have opened my eyes and wouldn't have come to this world.¹²⁷

I have two children, my husband is an addict ... As I am uneducated nobody counts me as a human being. Neither the government nor the people care about us. Sometimes I wish I had not been born.¹²⁸

The grave is better than this home.¹²⁹





CONCLUSION

Common assumptions would support a belief that urban women and girls should generally be more able to access services and social opportunities compared to their pre-displacement rural place of origin, owing to more progressive urban attitudes and the wider availability of education services (and service providers) in the main, more secure, urban centres. The findings of this research, however, suggests otherwise.

Displaced young women and girls in urban settlements across Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad were revealed to face significantly more and qualitatively different challenges in terms of access to education, health and employment than their male counterparts; most striking was the significant loss of freedom and social capital, and extreme marginalisation experienced by them.

Displaced young women and girls are often kept in seclusion and are frequently not allowed to venture far or often outside the house; this drastically reduces access to education, health care and livelihood opportunities. A majority of all young women (71 per cent) reported never having attended school. During interviews, only 40 per cent of respondents said women and girls could gain permission to leave the house in order to visit friends. At least one third said that they had to be in the company of a male family member to venture out at all. Cultural obstacles appeared to be a driving factor in this marginalisation and isolation, with conservative norms seemingly deeply entrenched in the urban informal settlements.

Since women are not permitted to venture outside their homes, they cannot seek assistance from others. Young women frequently lamented their inability to share their burdens with other women in their neighbourhood and community, or to build networks within their informal settlement communities. The controlling tendency of their male kin, and their propensity to violence, compounds the marginalisation and isolation of many young IDP women and girls.

With a lack of livelihood or vocational opportunities entrenching their poverty a number of urban displaced young women and girls appear to be suffering from severe depression and often speak of preferring death to their current life. Some IDPs appear to be experiencing high levels of psychological trauma and many mentioned the lack of mental health assistance

facilities available, with no individual or organisation they could turn to.

Many young women and girls highlighted their feelings of shame at being displaced and frequently compared their present plight with the more comfortable lives they led in their rural home towns and villages. The over-riding feeling is one of oppression, lack of opportunity and inability to find a way out.

The young women interviewed had relatively modest aspirations. Frequent requests included adequate and secure shelter, better access to food, education and health care. Many hoped for jobs for their male relatives. In Kabul especially, many wished for assistance for the winter in term of wood, clothing and better housing. Many had hopes their government would support them better.

RESPONDING TO WOMEN AND GIRLS DISPLACED TO URBAN AFGHANISTAN

At this time of the uncertainties of transition it is ever more important for coordination and advocacy for IDPs in urban settings to be intensified. This requires systematic profiling of urban IDP populations and their needs and the establishment of referral and response mechanisms.

To better address the specific vulnerabilities of young women and girls in urban settings, it is important that:

- non-specialised humanitarian staff, including local staff, must be sensitised and trained to identify mental health care issues and understand how to refer cases appropriately
- gender analysis be mainstreamed into assessments and response strategies for informal settlements
- all IDP assessments include a component on mental health needs and fast track referrals for those populations at heightened risk
- advocacy for community-based psychosocial support are included in

programming implementation and planning.

- women and girls are targeted for a mixed package of assistance, from specialised psychosocial support services, increased community and family support through to provision of basic services. Humanitarian actors should explore how to restart formal or informal education provision as early in the displacement cycle as possible, perhaps through home-based vocational training and livelihood-support activities.





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APPENDIX I: METHODOLOGY

Despite the fact that some were IDPs and some returned into secondary displacement, the origin of residents in the settlements surveyed for this study tended to come from the same provinces, showing clustering per region of origin—something also called enclave building. Just under a third of all respondents (30 per cent) also acknowledged that the city was a secondary choice because they were unable or unwilling to leave Afghanistan.

SURVEYS

For this study, primary data collection consisted of 240 structured surveys with displaced youth (50 per cent young women); 181 urban youth in 30 focus group discussions (53 per cent young women, 81 per cent with a displacement background and 19 per cent with longer-term residency); and 25 stakeholder interviews (all but six with a non-displacement background, and all but 2 with men).

RESEARCH METHODS

- **A quantitative survey in Dari and Pashtu of 240 young displaced individuals in all three sites (80 in each, 50 per cent young men, 50 per cent young women)** collecting information on in three general categories (50 questions total): background profile (e.g., demographics, displacement history); access to key services; housing/shelter; livelihoods situation, security/problems; social fabric; documents/information and thoughts on return and other durable solutions.
- **Focus group discussion (FGDs) with both displaced and longer term resident youth in all three locations, including a total of 181 individuals (85 young men and 96 young women —47 and 53 per cent respectively)** of different ages geared at gaining more context information on six key themes for both displaced and other urban youth: key problems faced, access to key services, current livelihood/

employment situation; relationship with non-displaced community; coping mechanisms and existing support networks (family, community and peers); as well as youth hopes and aspirations.

- **Semi-structured interviews with community leaders and other stakeholders in all three cities of informal settlement (25 in total; all but two men)** including community leaders both from the general non-displaced or host community (6) and IDP community (4), NGO workers (4), businessmen/shopkeepers (4), teaching professionals (3), government officials (3), and youth leadership (1). These interviews were conducted in order to understand the profile of the displaced and non-displaced community in the area (where did they come from, what made them go there?), their respective situation in terms of access to services (incl. differences between both), the relationship between both communities including conflicts, relationship of each community with government representative, especially security forces, leadership and problem-solving in both communities, specific situation/problems of youth in both communities (both young men and young women), coping mechanisms youth use to deal with their situation, access to information by youth, assistance received, durable solutions and future plans of the community, and youth in particular.

TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH URBAN YOUTH IN THREE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

LOCATION	More recently displaced youth			Longer-term resident youth			Total		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
KABUL	21	21	42	5	5	10	26	26	52
JALALABAD	27	28	55	6	7	13	33	35	68
KANDAHAR	22	28	50	4	7	11	26	35	61
TOTAL	70	77	147	15	19	34	85	96	181

RESPONDENTS WERE CHOSEN THROUGH A NON-RANDOM AND NON-PROBABILITY SAMPLING FOR SEVERAL REASONS:

- Given the lack of in existing data, there is no knowledge of the ultimate population, hence a lack of variables that could guide the selection of a random sample.
- Secondly, the nature of questions requires access to those willing to be interviewed, which is unlikely achieved when randomly selecting individuals. Given the demographics to be interviewed, however, prior permission from elders and adults of the informal settlements needed to be obtained.
- Girls are hard to select randomly, as they needed to trust the research team, hence likely a form of introduction /permission from male family members (where present).

Thus, TLO first gained access to the study population by introducing themselves to the local leadership (meaning the researchers approached first the IDP informal settlement leadership and community leaders of surrounding settlements) to introduce the research,

both in informal settlements and the surrounding population. Then a call for individuals to participate in the study was made, working onwards from focus-group discussions to the structured interviews. The main criteria for participation were residence in the study site and belonging to the 15-14 age group.

Research in the sites was conducted by individuals from the area, speaking the same language and belonging to the same ethnic group as those interviewed. Focus group discussions and Stakeholder interviews were conducted by focal points and structured surveys by young students from the surrounding area. Men interviewed young men and women young women. The report author made some triangulation interviews with stakeholders and debriefed Afghan researchers after research to gauge any possible biases.

An element of caution should be exercised when interpreting some of the survey responses from youth, as there are several limitations that need to be kept in mind:

The focus on three informal settlements in three cities (a small fraction of the entire population in Afghanistan), and the fact that the sample was a non-random one, only allows for a snapshot of urban-affected displaced youth in Afghanistan, but by no means a complete picture. The selection of the three informal settlements included in this study was done

purposely focussing on sites that were understudied, small enough to be manageable for the relatively short research period, and accessible to the researchers. This selection was done jointly with the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Even though TLO took care in how interviews were conducted, identifying respondents through trusted focal points and working on a comfortable interview environment, there are several biases that might influence responses given. Chief among these is a sensitivity bias, given some of the questions were rather personal for the Afghan context, especially when pertaining to issues concerning women. Secondly there is a high likelihood of what is considered a mood bias, given the overall volatile and insecurity that

is part of the daily lives of respondents likely which influenced how they felt about some of the questions asked (for example about their leisure time). There might also be a level of social acceptance bias, whereby respondents provide an answer they feel or think is acceptable to the interviewers, again leading to partial truths. This might especially be the case in the focus group discussion, as in general, people want to conform to the opinions within their peer group. That being said, responses do show a certain level of frankness, even though not often the desired detail or nuances anticipated. This suggests that TLO researchers were indeed able to build the necessary trust to answer difficult questions, if not always able to delve into details that were considered to private for the respondents.



ENDNOTES

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49 24 year old, IDP woman, Bagrami, Kabul, 7 October 2013

50 21 year-old woman from Kunar, Jalalabad, 7 November 2013

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- 51** 24 year-old IDP woman from Helmand, Bagrami, Kabul, 2 November 2013
- 52** 24 year-old woman, Arghandab district, Kandahar, focus group discussion, Mirza Mohammad Khan Kalacha, Haji Muhammad Gul Mosque, Kandahar City, 2 November 2013
- 53** 25 year-old woman, Kabul Province, focus group discussion informal settlement, First district, Jalalabad, 20 October 2013
- 54** 25 year-old woman, Surkhroad district, Nangarhar, focus group discussion informal settlement, First district, Jalalabad, 20 October 2013
- 55** 24 year-old woman, Arghandab district, Kandahar, focus group discussion, Mirza Mohammad Khan Kalacha, Haji Muhammad Gul Mosque, Kandahar City, 2 November 2013
- 56** 21 year-old woman, Jalalabad City, focus group discussion Host Community Women, Jalalabad, Nangarhar, First District Camps, 12 October 2013
- 57** 25 year-old woman, Watapoor District, Kunar, focus group discussion, informal settlement, First district, Jalalabad, 7 November 2013
- 58** Female Youth IDP, 25 year-old, focus group discussion, Bagrami, Kabul, 7 October 2013
- 59** Female representative, Kandahar City, 2 December 2013
- 60** 24 year-old woman, Helmand Province, focus group discussion, Mirza Mohammad Khan Kalacha, Kandahar City, 10 November 2013
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- 65** 19 year-old woman, Arghandab district, Kandahar, focus group discussion, Mirza Mohammad Khan Kalacha, Alokozo Mena, Kandahar City, 27 October 2013
- 66** Female youth IDP, 24 year-old, focus group discussion, Mirza Mohamad Khan Kalacha, Kandahar City, 27 October 2013; Female Focal Point, Kandahar City, 2 December 2013
- 67** 18 year-old woman, Grishk district, Helmand, focus group discussion, Bagrami, Kart e Naw Sare Tapa, opposite textile factor, Kabul, 2 November 2013
- 68** 19 year old IDP woman Zahri district, Kandahar, Focus Group Discussion, Mirza Mohammad Khan Kalacha, Haji Muhammad Gul Mosque, Kandahar City, 9 November 2013
- 69** 25 year-old woman, Helmand Province, focus group discussion, Bagrami, opposite Nasaji Factory, Kabul, 07 October 2013
- 70** 25 year-old woman, Grishk district, Helmand, focus group discussion, Bagrami, Kart e Naw, opposite textile factory, Kabul, 2 November 2013

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- 71** 19 year-old woman, Arghandab district, Kandahar, focus group discussion, Bagrami, Kart e Naw Sare Tapa, opposite textile factor, Kabul, 2 November 2013
- 72** 24 year-old woman, Jalalabad City, focus group discussion Host Community Women, Jalalabad, Nangarhar, First District Camps, 12 October 2013
- 73** 21 year-old woman, Qargjauuee district, Laghman, focus group discussion, Jalalabad, Nangarhar, First District Camps, 11 November 2013
- 74** Young woman, Helmand Province, focus group discussion, Bagrami, Opposite of Nasaji Factory, Kabul, 07 October 2013
- 75** 25 year-old woman, Watapoor District, Kunar, focus group discussion, Informal Settlement, First district, Jalalabad, 07 November 2013
- 76** 25 year-old woman, Chighilsry District, Kunar, focus group discussion, Informal Settlement, First district, Jalalabad, 07 November 2013
- 77** 22 year-old woman, Panjwayi district, Kandahar, focus group discussion, Mirza Mohammad Khan Kalacha, Alokozo Mena, Kandahar City, 27 October 2013
- 78** 25 year-old woman, Panjwayi district, Kandahar, focus group discussion, Mirza Mohammad Khan Kalacha, Alokozo Mena, Kandahar City, 27 October 2013
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- 81** 23 year-old woman, Pechdara district, Kunar, focus group discussion, informal settlement, First district, Jalalabad, 11 November 2013
- 82** 25 year-old woman, Watapoor District, Kunar, focus group discussion, informal settlement, First district, Jalalabad, 07 November 2013
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- 95** 25 year-old woman, Sawky district, Kunar, focus group discussion, Informal Settlement, First district, Jalalabad, 11 November 2013
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- 100** 23 year-old IDP woman, Bagrami, Kabul, 9 October 2013
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- 104** 25 year-old woman, Ali Sher district, Khost, focus group discussion, Bagrami, Kart e Naw, opposite Tapa e Nasaji and Helmand IDP Camp, Kabul, 09 October 2013
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- 106** 25 year-old woman, Lashkargha district, Helmand, focus group discussion, Bagrami, Kart e Naw Sare Tapa, opposite textile factor, Kabul, 2 November 2013
- 107** 18 year-old woman, Panjwayi district, Kandahar, focus group discussion, Mirza Mohammad Khan Kalacha, Alokozo Mena, Kandahar City, 27 October 2013
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Camps, 12 October 2013

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