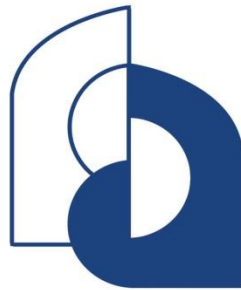


گزارش اولین نشست منطقه ای سازمانهای غیر دولتی
"فرصت ها و چالشهای فراروی پناهندگان و بازگشت کنندگان افغان"
تهران . فروردین ۱۳۹۲

Report of the First NGOs Regional Meeting on
"Afghan Refugees/Returnees: Challenge & Opportunities"
Tehran /April 2013



HAMIA
انجمن حمایت از
زنان و کودکان پناهنده
Association for Protection
of Refugee Women & Children

NGO Regional Meeting

Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

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Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

Preface:

It has been 30 years since a massive influx of refugees and migrants moved out of Afghanistan. Today Afghans make up the largest refugee and migrant community in the world. Despite the overthrow of Afghanistan's political regime in 2002 and paramount international cooperation in restructuring the country, Afghanistan still faces critical barriers to development. Consequently, many barriers still exist to the return of millions of Afghanistan's nationals to their homes and towns.

The first regional meeting of national and international NGOs working in refugee related domains, specifically Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, was held on April 11-12, 2013 in Tehran, Iran. The meeting, entitled "Afghan Refugees/Returnees: Challenges and Opportunities," aimed to allow active NGOs in Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan that play a vital role in strategic planning for Afghan refugees and migrants as well as improving the lives of the vulnerable within Afghanistan to share their experiences and innovative ideas. Through the sharing of information it is hoped that clear strategies and plans can be made to better meet the needs of vulnerable Afghans living both inside and out of Afghanistan.

The meeting aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- 1. Paving the grounds for better regional communication and coordination in order to exchange information and best practices to improve refugee livelihoods in destination countries as well as share strategies to facilitate the sustainable return of Afghan refugees and migrants to Afghanistan.**
- 2. Reviewing national plans and policies related to Afghan migrants, refugees and returnees; identifying their weaknesses and strengths.**
- 3. Professional examination of both the challenges and opportunities facing Afghan refugees and returnees in order to improve the efficiency of suggested solutions.**
- 4. Familiarizing participating organizations with goals and strategic plans suggested in the document *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)*.**

In order to plan for the sustainable return of Afghan refugees and migrants - which has been underway for more than three decades - all social, cultural and economic dimensions must be taken into consideration. Furthermore, it is necessary to define and develop plans targeted at the mental and emotional preparation of the young Afghan refugees in order to maximize their involvement in the socio-political development of Afghanistan. Individual and social empowerment should also be considered in the strategic planning for Afghan refugees and returnees.

Participants in the meeting included over 40 national and international NGOs as well as United Nations agencies from Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Additional notable participants included representatives of the Iranian Government and executive bodies involved in refugee and migrant affairs. Furthermore, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was also present for the meetings and played a significant role in the opening and closing ceremonies.

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Based upon a prior needs analysis by domestic and international participants, specialized working groups were formed to define the meeting's goals and topics of conversation; in which public, private and international participants provided their views and ideas to shape the meeting. The findings and results from each working group appear in the present report.

The present report was made possible through the collaboration of executive organizations and bodies, international organizations and a number of individual volunteers:

1. Department of International - Social Cooperation - Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran
2. Department of Public Diplomacy - Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran
3. Department of Consular Affairs - Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran
4. Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Nationals and Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) – Ministry of Interior of the Islamic Republic of Iran
5. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - Iran
6. Country Office of Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in Iran
7. Country Office of ICRI in Iran
8. Rebirth Society - Iran
9. Experts and Executive Partners from HAMI Association in Tehran and Mashhad
10. All volunteers who helped in executive phases of the meeting.

Finally, we are grateful for the financial assistance provided by UNHCR- Iran, DRC-Iran, and the Welfare Services and Social Cooperation of Tehran Municipality, who's supported covered expenses for different activities of the regional meeting.

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Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

Regional Meeting Itinerary

Thursday, April 11		
Time	Activity	Speakers
9:00-9:30	Check in / collection of conference ID and coffee	
9:30-9:45	Opening Session	
9:45-11:00	Welcome remarks	HAMI chair representative
		Farhad Barilkani (BAFIA)
		Veronica Modey-Ebi (Deputy Resident Representative of UNHCR – Iran)
		Mr. Asadollah Amiri (Afghan Embassy – Iran)
		Ms. Maria Adebahr (The Consul of Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany)
11:00-11:15	Tea/coffee break	
11:15-13:00	Plenary Session: NGO's Report	Fatemah Ashrafi – Iranian NGOs representative
		Arezo Qanib – Afghan NGOs representative
		Rabia Sabri – Pakistan NGOs representative
13:00-14:00	Lunch break	
14:00-15:30	Working Groups 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and local support for refugees and returnees / obstacles and opportunities on the way to voluntary repatriation and re-integration of Afghan refugees • Access to social services necessary for the returnee (opportunities and challenges) • Comprehensive (national and international) cooperation in enhancing access to livelihood, social services and food safety opportunities in host countries for refugees and migrants, particularly for vulnerable groups like women 	Jelvas Musau (UNHCR – Iran)
		Sayed Rahim Satter (Afghanistan)
		Moderators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nazani Kazemai (ICRC) • Nazanin Einolyaghin (Rebirth Society) • Masoud Salianni (HAMI)

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	and children	
15:30-16:00	Tea/coffee break	
16:00-17:30	Follow-up discussion	
18:00-21:00	Milad Tower visit and dinner	

Friday, April 12		
Time	Activity	Speakers
8:30-9:00	Tea/coffee	
9:00-10:00	Plenary Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working groups 	
10:00-11:15	Plenary Session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiation and expanding regional networking among professionals working specifically on the issue of Afghan refugees 	Dr. Gopal Krishna (APRRN)
		Moderators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rabia Sabri (CWS-P/A) • Masoud Saliari (HAMI) • Nazanin Einolyaghin (Rebirth Society)
11:15-11:30	Tea/coffee	
11:30-13:00	Free discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the best innovation and practices on the issue of Afghan refugees 	
13:00-14:00	Lunch break	
14:00-15:30	Plenary Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing Session • Final report and output 	Dr. Masoumeh Ebtekar (Tehran City Council)
		Mr. Sobhani (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

NGO Regional Meeting

Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

Opening Session, 11 April

The First Regional Meeting of NGOs for Finding Opportunities and Challenges Facing Afghan Refugees and Returnees was inaugurated on Thursday 11, April 2013, following a recitation of the Quran, singing of the Islamic Republic of Iran national anthem and observation of a minute of silence in the memory of the victims and people affected during the recent earthquake in Bushehr, South of Iran.



Welcome Remarks

Presentation by meeting plans and objectives by Fatemeh Ashrafi



The first keynote speaker, Fatemeh Ashrafi, Chairwoman of the Association for Protection of Refugee Women and Children (HAMI), presented a summary of plans and objectives of the regional meeting.

“It has been 30 years since the influx of Afghan refugees from their country to different parts of the world, caused by foreign invasion, civil wars, and post-war economic, social and security situations,” she said, “and in spite of various developments in Afghanistan in the recent decades, Afghanistan still has the largest number of refugees across the globe. The main reasons behind this issue are the obstacles on Afghanistan’s path toward development and, subsequently, the sustainable return of millions of Afghan refugees and migrants to their country”.

“Held for the first time, the meeting brings together a number of active role-players from the region that play a part in refugee and immigrants affairs, in order to provide an opportunity for explaining the situation that millions of Afghan refugees and migrants are facing in destination countries. On the other hand, non-sustainable and inadequate conditions that Afghanistan faces in repatriating its nationals is another critical and alarming burden on the shoulders of millions of Afghans who find neither a place nor opportunity for returning, nor can tolerate living in foreign countries in the region any longer.

During the entire planning and preparation stages, the Secretariat of the present meeting has sought to encourage wide-ranging cooperation from all the participants; from related NGOs and international organizations to the UN agencies. We have tried to pave the ground for the exchange of information and best practices by all role-players, in order improve the ties in achieving the goals already set.”

NGO Regional Meeting

Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

Mr. Farhad Barikani, Advisor to BAFIA, Ministry of Interior of the Islamic Republic of Iran

In his opening speech he expressed delight over the meeting and underlined that it is better to focus on the positive opportunities ahead rather than the challenges. He continued:

“Meetings with the experts and practitioners, like the present one, help more than 850,000 Afghan refugees living in Iran to find the best opportunities for return and heal the pain of being away from home. Although Iran has tried its best in accommodating and improving the livelihoods of Afghan refugees, the Islamic Republic of Iran is looking for solutions to allow for the return of the Afghan population in Iran to Afghanistan with minimum human cost while preserving their dignity. Thus, I recommend the following solutions here:

1. Planning, coordinating and organizing the return of Afghan academic graduates living in Iran; providing facilities for the graduates and their families,
2. Planning and coordinating the return of Afghan entrepreneurs to Afghanistan,
3. Planning and coordinating the return of skilled-workers.

All of the above plans should also consider the development of Afghanistan through employing efficient and empowered Afghan human resources.”

Ms. Vernoica Modey-Ebi, Deputy Resident Representative of UNHCR - Iran,



Ms. Modey-Ebi called the meeting an opportunity for introducing activities for Afghan refugees to countries in the region. She then underlined, “Refuge is a global issue that calls for global assistance by other nations to host countries. Nevertheless, the NGOs present in the meeting are able to discuss the problems and challenges they are facing in their plans in order to move towards improving cooperation and sharing experiences or lessons learned.” Ms. Modey-Ebi then provided a short summary of UNHCR activities in Iran:

The latest survey of refugees in Iran which took place in December 2012 shows a total of 868,172 refugees in Iran; of which 824,087 (95%) of are Afghans. This figure does not include the significant number of refugees without ID cards hosted by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The first UNHCR office in Iran opened in 1984. Today offices exist in Tehran, Kerman and Ahwaz. Among the existing options for refugees, return to their home country is the

main priority (possessing the highest probability); after which comes resettlement in a third country. The related arrangements of resettlement are mainly carried out in coordination with BAFIA at the Interior Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran. With the help of international organizations, we are trying to make resettlement in a third country available for the refugees as an alternative.

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Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

“The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees - SSAR was developed in May 2012 by the governments of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan in collaboration with UNHCR in order to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of refugees to Afghanistan, sustainable integration into their country, and providing assistance to the host countries”.

Vernoica Modey-Ebi considered the following efforts as essential to implementing the above mentioned document:

- Providing suitable grounds for the return Afghan refugees by investing in trusted and high-return areas inside Afghanistan
- Development of human capital for Afghan refugees in relation to livelihood chances in Afghanistan to facilitate and ensure a sustainable return
- Preservation of refuge space in destination countries, including more support for hosting societies, temporary housing measures for the remaining population, and resettlement in a third country

On Return, from the beginning of voluntary repatriation in April 2002 to the end of February 2013 a total of 808,071 Afghan refugees returned home with assistance of UNHCR in Iran. The same period saw 3,779,896 refugees returning to Afghanistan from Pakistan with assistance of UNHCR and the Pakistani government. The Commissioner reported more than 15,000 refugees moving from Afghanistan to Iran in 2012.

On Health, UNHCR and Iran collaborate closely in basic healthcare for refugees residing in Iran; including vaccination, pre-natal care, delivery services, and family planning. These services are mainly provided in 15 refugee camps and 24 urban regions accommodating high numbers of Afghan refugees in Iran.

The commissioner and Iranian government are working together on a joint collaboration consisting of a supplementary insurance scheme which began in 2012. This innovative scheme is now in its second year of implementation. Until June 2012, 309,072 refugees took part in the plan. For the second year we aim to cover 158,000 refugees; 80% of which have specific diseases such as hemophilia, thalassemia and renal ailments.

On Education, we collaborate with the Iranian government to maximize official school attendance among the refugees. We also contribute to reconstruction of education facilities and holding literacy development classes for young adolescents and adults in the provinces that host refugees.

On Resettlement, UNHCR has collaborated with different countries since 1998 to make resettlement another viable option for refugees. UNHCR - Iran resettles refugees in seven countries other than the United States; including Australia, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Iceland, France and Netherlands. Emergency resettlement in the U.S. should pass through the related procedures in Armenia and Slovakia.

Supporting the refugees is a grave responsibility. We are all here because supporting refugees and returnees is our concern. This meeting of NGOs active in refugee-related issues of the region is held to

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Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

transfer mechanisms, share emerging problems, experiences and lessons learned to help us in assisting our target population better.

Mr. Assadollah Amiri, Cultural Associate of Afghan Embassy in Iran



Mr. Assadollah Amiri opened his speech with showing gratitude to the Iranian government for giving shelter to Afghan refugees and its caring support; also to HAMI Association for providing opportunities for experts and practitioners to find solutions and discuss the problems and challenges facing returning Afghan refugees. He announced that his government had particular interest in utilizing the services and abilities

obtained by Afghan refugees while abroad.

Mr. Assadollah Amiri brought to attention the high number of graduate and undergraduate individuals who have continued their studies in Afghanistan. According to Amiri, they are among the best and most skilled human and social forces in Afghanistan. He argued that by providing opportunities for Afghan refugees to develop technical and occupational skills it will increase their tendency to return to Afghanistan.

He also highlighted that the media's depiction of Afghanistan as a harsh, pitiable and dangerous country is a major obstacle on Afghans in their decision to return. By mobilizing resources and facilities were to change the public view of Afghanistan, providing transportation facilities for refugees and subsequent permanent settlement in their home country this is likely to increase the sustainable resettlement of Afghans to Afghanistan. Finally, Amiri thanked his government for employing educated young people at administrative and executive levels of the government as well as for constructing settlements for the returnees.

Ms. Maria Adebahr, Consul and Head of the Legal Department of at German Embassy in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Member of National Committee for SSAR in Iran

Ms. Maria Adebahr thanked "Islamic Republic of Iran for their valuable and effective measures for Afghan refugees as well as UNHCR for the incredible work done so far". Then she argued that the particular political situation in Afghanistan has led to political tensions in the region; which in turn obstructs progress of pro-Afghan refugee programs that, in turn, influence Afghanistan. Despite all the obstacles and problems, she highlighted improving livelihood of people living in the region under refugee status as a goal common for all supporting countries and other related governmental, international and non-governmental sectors.

Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

Plenary Session: NGO's Report

In the second part of the program, representatives from Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan NGOs presented their reports on the latest situation of the refugees in their respective countries.

Lecturers:

- Rabia Sabri (Church World Service-Pakistan/Afghanistan) - Representative of Pakistan NGOs
- Arezo Qanih (ECW/ Educational & training Center for poor Women & girls of Afghanistan) - Representative of Afghanistan NGOs
- Fatemeh Ashrafi (HAMI/Association for Protection of Refugee Women and Children) - Representative of Iran NGOs

Rabia Sabri (Church World Service-Pakistan) representing Pakistan NGOs:

Historical Background:

- From 1978-2001 almost 5,000,000 Afghans immigrated to Pakistan (Soviet Invasion)
- From 2002-2007 approximately 3.8 million migrants returned to Afghanistan (relative increase of security and economic opportunities encouraged return)
- Presently, 1.6 million registered Afghan refugees live in Pakistan. This number does not reflect over a million unregistered/undocumented Afghan refugees

Statistical Figures:

- Of the total number of Afghan refugees, 74% were born in Pakistan; while only 26% were born in Afghanistan
- The majority of Afghan refugees are under 30 years old. They are not familiar with the culture of Afghanistan today and have no ties to motivate their return
- A UNHCR survey shows that about 80% of Afghan refugees are not keen to return



Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

- The majority of the refugees moved to Pakistan during the 1992 civil war and 2005 Taliban rule
- UNHCR is facilitating voluntary repatriation program since 2002

Distribution of Afghan Refugees throughout Pakistan in 2012

Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

- Afghan refugees are scattered across Pakistan; with the majority of 62.1% living in Northern areas (KPK) and the rest in Baluchistan (20.3%), Punjab (11%), and Sindh (4.2%)
- A number of camps still exist in Pakistan, a large number were shut down in 2002 and 2003 after a massive exodus of Afghans' returning home

Statistical Report on Return in Comparison with Iran



Source: UNHCR. *The Washington Post*. Published on June 20, 2012, 8:42 p.m.

Pakistan and the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

- Pakistan has not joined the convention yet (Iran is the only member in the region)
- There is no clear legal framework for Afghan refugees in Pakistan as the tripartite agreement expired in December 2012

Tripartite Agreement

- Residence for Afghani refugees in Pakistan was provided by the government of Pakistan officially until December 2012. However, UNHCR along with civil society organizations were able to negotiate with the government to extend this provision until June 2013.
- POR residence cards have been extended to June 2013. The future of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is unknown after this date.
- Pakistani government is no longer able to receive Afghan refugees
- Given the improvements of the situation in Afghanistan, return should progress

Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

Comparing Conditions of Pakistan with Afghanistan

Indicator	Pakistan	Afghanistan
Life Expectancy	66.35	49.72 Years
Unemployment Rate	5.6 %	35 %
Death Rate	6.8 / 1000 population	14.59 / 1000 population
GDP (Per Capita)	\$2.800	\$1.000
Literacy	54.9 %	28.1 %

Source: CIE Fact Book

Conditions for Refugees in Pakistan

- The majority of refugee camps have shut down and the remaining camps are over-crowded
- Lack of necessary services and facilities in camps
- Shortage of necessary funds to support refugees
- Decline in international support from donors for continuation of projects in Pakistan
- Lack of shelter, harsh weather conditions and few learning opportunities for Afghan children
- Less than a quarter of Afghan refugees hold a profession; lack of resources prevents 75% of Afghan children from attending school
- Although educational facilities are equally supplied, deprived households are not able to continue their education and find no support

Protection Issues for Refugees

In the absence of the legal framework protecting Afghan refugees in Pakistan due to its expiration in December 2012, refugees are often subject to protection issues such as:

- Harassment by Police Authorities
- Forceful eviction
- Deportation
- Being arrested for not holding a POR card
- Being bribed

Unregistered Afghan Refugees

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Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

- The last official registration of Afghan refugees was carried out by UNHCR in 2007
- There are almost 1 million unregistered refugees and migrants
- Refugees enter Pakistan to escape domestic battles and to find access to housing; but being unregistered, they become vulnerable and illegal migrants.

Recommendations of the Civil Society for SSAR

- Returning to Afghanistan should be a voluntary act and residence cards should be extended after 2014
- Solution strategy is underfunded; it needs more commitment from donors and countries which pledged resources in the Tokyo conference.
- Increase incentives to return to Afghanistan; such as employment, land, shelter, education, training, income support
- Sustaining commitment of the international community to support Afghan refugees after 2014, particularly in unstable economic and security domains
- Sustaining international aids for the development of Afghanistan
- Protection of registered Afghan refugees and non-documented migrants should be insured
- Scenario and contingency planning in case of refugee influx after ISAF withdrawal in 2014
- Ensuring support for Afghan refugees in Pakistan
- Increasing collaborations of NGOs with UNHCR for consultation purposes and extension of existing measures for the refugees

Arezo Qanih (ECW/Educational & Training Center for Poor Women & girls of Afghanistan); representative of Afghanistan NGOs:



“Thank you to HAMI for organizing the meeting. I hope we can clearly present the views of civil society in the present meeting to influence the policies of our governments and nations in order to enhance the living conditions of Afghan refugees in neighboring countries, as well as returnees and deportees.

Since a new international interest in Afghanistan in 2001, the country has been experiencing a novel situation. The political system and structure has been re-established, economic and social systems have been established, and their social and civil institutions have been defined.

During this time, a lot of public and private schools were reconstructed and public and private universities have flourished. Unfortunately, the influx of migrants returning home has not been met with the expected facilities and infrastructure needed. Afghanistan could not give shelter and land to all of the returnees; nor could it provide adequate occupation and livelihood opportunities for over four million returning migrants. Another major challenge, besides the economic, is security. Security is one of the largest issues for Afghanistan that compels the returnees to

Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

immigrate to other countries once again. All in all, the best solution might be providing facilities for the immigrants.

As an Afghan I request the governments of Iran and Pakistan to provide the necessary information about Afghanistan to the third-generation Afghans who know nothing of their country. If they refuse to return to Afghanistan then receive them and provide them with necessary facilities. Additionally, aid to Afghanistan should change from political and military forms to aid for the improvement of living conditions in Afghanistan. There should be provision of training opportunities for the migrants who want to return, and facilitation of their transportation.

We have public and private universities and facilities that encourage the young to return to their country to study for higher education and young Afghans are beginning to show much interest in university. The 2014 election is our next challenge as they coincide with the departure of international forces. 2014 brings about opportunities and challenges for Afghans. If we can overcome these obstacles, future obstacles will surely be removed. The year 2014 can push Afghanistan towards being a stable, independent country. On the other hand, if we fail in our main problem (i.e. terrorism) we will go back to years of disquieting experiences that will damage all countries of the region.

Fatemeh Ashrafi (Association for Protection of Refugee Women and Children - HAMI), Representing Iran NGOs:

Report on the Situation of Afghan Refugees in Iran:

First Influx: 1970-1980 Military invasion of Afghanistan. Iraq attacks Iran (“Open Doors” policy of Iran)

- Dominance of ideology after the Islamic Revolution and spirit of Islamic brotherhood persuaded the fresh Islamic Republic government to put into practice an unbounded “open doors” policy that welcomed more than 2.5 million Afghan migrants

Second Influx: 1995 Taliban rule in Afghanistan

- The shrinking post-war economy in Iran made for a change of policies which made reconstruction the most urgent priority for the country

Third Influx: 2001 Military operations by the coalition in Afghanistan. Constitution of Afghan National Government

- Iranian government acted in line with international policies for cooperation in reconstructing Afghanistan and facilitating voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees
- Continued violence and insecurity, and unsuccessful reconstruction projects (especially for public and essential services) has fostered a new influx of movement to Iran

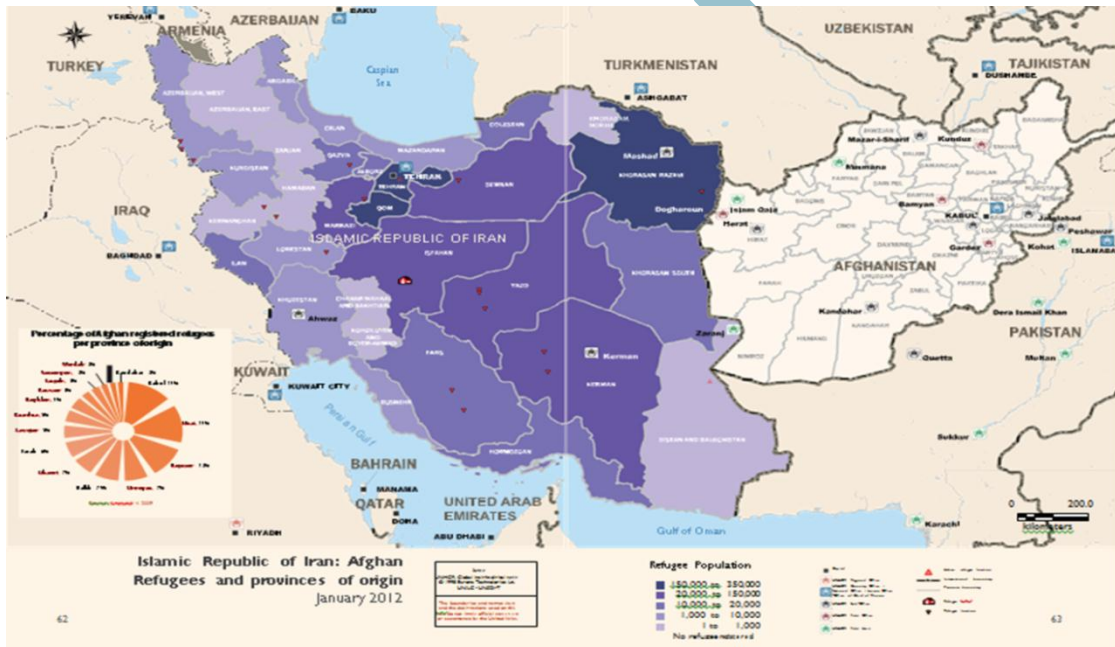
Number and Distribution of Afghans in Iran

- Iran has the second-largest population of refugees in the world

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Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

- Official number of refugees in Iran is 818,910
- Nearly half the refugees are under 18 years of age
- Almost 200,000 vulnerable Afghan refugees have been identified in the country and are under special protection
- It is estimated that 1.5 million to 2 million Afghan refugees in Iran have no residence card
- 97% of the Afghan refugees live in urban areas, while only 3% live in refugee camps (in 18 hosting towns)
- The majority of Afghan refugees reside in central and eastern towns and provinces
- Almost 70% of Afghan refugees in Iran are of Hazara and Tajik descent



Legal Framework Related to the Refugees

- 28 June 1976 - Iran joined 1951 UN Refugees Convention
- 28 June 1976 - Iran joined 1967 Protocol

Educational Activities and Services for Afghan Refugees in Iran

- Only 19% of Afghan refugees arriving in Iran were literate (literate women were even fewer and less than 5%)
- Literacy movements of the first decade after the Islamic Revolution were so inclusive that the majority of Afghan refugees were accepted into literacy and educational programs
- This literacy movement coincided with the collapse of traditional beliefs which hindered literacy, especially for women, and their transformation to an element of faith
- There was increased accessibility of education and higher education for women, as a result of new social safety
- Annual registration of 200,000-300,000 Afghan refugee students in public schools of the country

Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

- NGOs usually cover educational needs of Afghan children without residence documents
- More than 6,000 Afghan refugees have graduated from higher education centers of Iran
- Growth in ratio of Afghan girls to Afghan boys studying in universities and higher education centers of the country

Health Activities and Services for Afghan Refugees in Iran

- High fertility rate and limited information about health (fertility rate for Afghan refugees in Iran was 4.4 in 1980; Afghan refugee population in Iran grows by 42,000 annually)
- Low marriage age in Afghan refugee women
- Resistance to population controlling policies as a result of low literacy rates due to cultural traditions
- Health policies of Iranian government for reducing maternal mortality, child mortality and epidemics are not limited to any nationality or religious faith
- Significant decrease in maternal mortality and child mortality under 5 years of age during the last 30 years as a result of free access to basic healthcare services
- Provision of supplementary healthcare insurance for Afghan refugees since 2011; free insurance coverage for vulnerable households

Audience Discussion:

Veronica Modey-Ebi (Deputy Resident Representative of UNHCR - Iran) noted that Iran is the only country in western Asia to sign the 1951 UN Refugees Convention and the 1976 Convention with 4 reservations. Since that time Iran has resolved some of its reservations, such as the one regarding work permits, whereby refugees can work in Iran and move across provinces almost freely.

Nevertheless, all new cases should pass through Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures of BAFIA. In other words, all entrances prior to 2002 are considered group refugees that have to be re-registered annually by Iranian government via BAFIA after the preparation process.

Working Groups

All governmental, non-governmental, and international participants were consulted to discuss key issues related to the goals defined previously. Before group discussions, related experts for each topic were invited to present their views on the topic in order to provide background and latest updates to the audience. The following were the key topics presented and discussed in the specialized working groups:

1. Social and local support for refugees and returnees / obstacles and opportunities on the way to voluntary repatriation and re-integration of Afghan refugees
2. Access to social services necessary for the returnee (opportunities and challenges)
3. Comprehensive (national and international) cooperation in enhancing access to livelihood opportunities, social services and food safety in destination countries for refugees and migrants, particularly for vulnerable groups like women and children

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Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

Specialized Working Groups Report

Working Group 1:

Social and Local Support for Refugees and Returnees: Obstacles and Opportunities on the Way to Voluntary Repatriation and Re-Integration of Afghan Refugees

Presentation by Expert: Jelvas Musau, Protection Officer (UNHCR – Iran)



“Voluntary repatriation from Iran started in 1989 and continues today. The majority of returns have been voluntary so far. More than 900,000 refugees have left Iran since 2002 that have been supported by UNHCR. Additionally, more than three million Afghan refugees returned home from Pakistan; which has created opportunities and challenges for Afghanistan. Number of returnees from Iran decreased in 2008, before doubling in 2011.

A remarkable point in resettlement plans and programs is the undeniable role of the people in reconstruction and peace-making in Afghanistan. No decision will be successful without considering the problems and issues facing the returnee. Returnees’ destination points have to be seen as locations requiring UN executive programs.

Another point of concern is those refugees who have no access to livelihood supplies and will be unable to provide for their basic needs in Afghanistan. Measures

in this area are being performed through close collaboration with UNHCR - Afghanistan, NGOs and international organizations in the country.

Moreover, number and types of capacity building programs at home and abroad provide another measure of ensuring successful voluntary repatriation. SSAR not only informs the refugees and returnees of them, but also defines them as instruments of developing human capital.”

Audience Discussion:

Mirveis Reza Zadeh (Refugee, Emam Javad Charity, Mashhad)

“The main issue for migrants and refugees is that second and third generation Afghans born in a host country have inadequate knowledge of atmosphere and facilities in Afghanistan.”

Mahmood Rahmani (Razi Social Development Organization, Afghanistan)

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Afghan Refugees and Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities

“In spite of existing opportunities, like economic, social and educational developments, unrealistic and untruthful depictions of Afghanistan have become one of the main factors averting the migrants’ return.”

Azadeh Bahramji (Operation Mercy)



“As men are the main decision-makers of the society, any improvement in migrant households requires awareness-raising programs for men. Another challenge is the cultural and traditional divide between second and third generation Afghan refugees. Presenting Afghanistan correctly will be inadequate for the young and teenage Afghans whose relationships have been Iran-ized

and who have enjoyed higher levels of freedom and social rights in Iran than they could have in Afghanistan. Therefore, sustainable return needs planning for and attention to this issue in order to enable the young to adapt to cultural norms of their country, particularly in smaller towns.

Yet another obstacle for resettlement is incompatibility of abilities and skills of the migrants with existing needs in Afghanistan. Most of the migrants lack specialized skills. Interest only exists for training courses that lead to immediate income in Iran; while educational courses that try to answer the needs of Afghan markets hardly attract anybody.”

Akhlaghi (Refugee, Baran Charity)

“Despite the mentioned obstacles for returning, still many educated young refugees and migrants are interested in returning to Afghanistan. However, they will need capabilities required to live in Afghanistan, as mental support and essential livelihood support are not supplied where they return to.”

Jelvas Musau (UNHCR, Iran)

“The Afghan government, UNHCR and NGOs have provided sites for local integration of the returnees. At the moment there are 14 sites in various provinces. Main obstacles for sustainable return include social, economic and cultural issues, unemployment, problems specific to second and third generation refugees and deficiencies in infrastructures such as land and housing.”

Sayed Rahim Sattar (APWO- Afghanistan)

“After years of working with returnees in Afghanistan and being responsible for one of the 14 return sites, I assure you that none of the returnees actually return to the sites for lack of basic schooling,

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healthcare and security. A very limited number of the estimated 600,000 returnees have settled in these sites.”

Rabia Sabri (Church World Service-Pakistan/Afghanistan)

“A similar example is a return site in Nangarhar where only a few houses exist and they are without minimum infrastructure or welfare facilities. The returnees see no motivation to resettle in these sites. Why should people return to start a life from scratch?”

Hassina Sherjan (Aid Afghanistan for Education)

“The issue of Afghanistan is very much a political one, where neighboring countries not only have not helped, but have used the insecurity to their benefit. Return programs will naturally remain fruitless unless the security issues are solved.”

Mohammad Hassan Zadeh (Refugee, Seyed ol Shohada Charity, Mashhad)

“Motivation for return is impossible without better living conditions compared to those existing in Iran. The Afghan government should work to provide at least the minimum necessary conditions - such as land and employment - to make return possible for both the working and educated classes.”

Amjad Ahmad Safi (Union Aid for Afghan Refugees, Pakistan)

“Security and access to basic services, like healthcare, education and particularly housing, are the most important obstacles for return. The education system in Afghanistan does not recognize students graduating abroad. This poses a dire challenge for international students and their families.”

Minoo Arezoomandi (ILIA- Iranian Life Quality Improvement Association, Iran)

“Another reason for not returning to Afghanistan is limited special support for particular refugees who suffer addiction or multiple diseases and therefore are unwilling to return.”

Fazal Ghani Kakar (NECDO, Noor Educational and Capacity Development Organization, Afghanistan)

“All problems are linked to what goes on inside Afghanistan, especially in terms of security. Economic corruption deprives people of their rights and discourages them to return to their country. In addition, corruption impairs the Afghani government’s capacity to provide housing for the growing number of displaced peoples.”

Zahra Jafari (Refugee, Iran)

“Young Afghan refugees know nothing of the situation and opportunities in Afghanistan so they cannot select a field of study tailored to needs of Afghanistan. Other young Afghans are concerned of unacceptance on returning to Afghanistan. This is particularly true for girls. Furthermore, some simply do not have enough money to return.”

Nematollah Panahi (Refugee, Iran)

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“Prioritizing ethnicity over nationality hampers the development of Afghanistan and fades national identity. This issue calls for awareness-raising in Afghan society.”

Hassina Sherjan (Aid Afghanistan for Education)

“Another point of concern is the economic situation. Afghanistan’s economy is a fabricated with high living expenses which discourages the return of refugees. Making the issue even more complicated is the crucial role international community plays in economy of Afghanistan.”

Summary: Specialized Working Group 1

After initial speeches, audience views and specialized working groups were completed, the audience continued discussing the topics in more detail. Below is a summary of the discussion:

Summary and Key Points of Discussions in the Specialized Working Group	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of transportation to country of origin• Concerns about regression after return• Improper image of Afghanistan (violence/war/poverty)• Disintegration of cultural ties with Afghanistan• Not accepting the experts in Afghanistan• Lack of efficient organized links amongst migrants• Persistence of ethnic identity, instead of national identity• Insistence on existing conditions and aversion to change• Lack of healthcare facilities in Afghanistan• High costs of education• Emphasis on sustainability on both sides of Pakistani borders• Restriction of returnees to workers; experts have no tendency to return• Lack of basic living needs, such as water, hygiene, housing, etc.• Political treatment of the migrants• Consideration of cultural differences between source and destination countries• Scarcity of professional migrants• Incapability in problem-solving after return to Afghanistan• Arrangements for return and supplying related costs• Lack of knowledge regarding ways of accessing economic/social/cultural resources
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Utilizing unique capacities in Afghanistan• Communication networks for dissemination of information among migrant communities• Patriotism• International support for reconstruction of Afghanistan• Remarkable number of educated youths or academic graduates among Afghan

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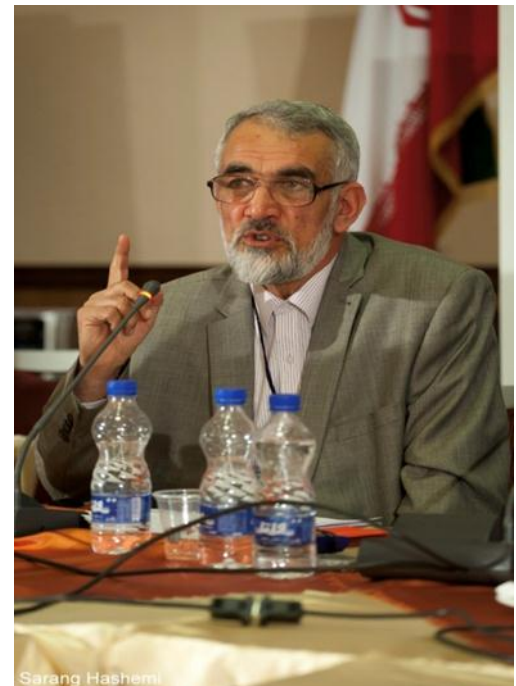
	migrants
Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Familiarizing second and third generation refugees with general conditions and culture of Afghanistan• Exhibitions and conferences for creating a new image of Afghanistan• NGOs active in child refugee work emphasize awareness-raising measures• Training for fast income jobs, in collaboration with politicians of destination countries• Socially compatible solutions• Focus on men in creating culture, given their decision-making role in families• Paying attention to returnees in the country• Continued support of destination countries• Developing positive image and positive reports of conditions in Afghanistan• Utilizing existing capacities among the migrants for awareness-raising• Understanding social support as a single organic system• Necessity of considering heads of households in various aspects of educational capacity-building• Purging clichés in empowerment• Emphasis on role of Afghan government in enhancing conditions in Afghanistan• Emphasis on pragmatism• Concentrating aids to certain geographical locations while the rest remain deprived• Identifying needs of Afghanistan and directing practical training towards them

Working Group 2: Access to Social Services Necessary for the Returnee

Sayed Rahim Sattar (Afghan Public Welfare Organization (APWO), Afghanistan)

“Based on my experience in working with the refugees, several provinces now have shelters for the returnees; but, obviously, all problems are not confined to these shelters. Many returnees come back only to see their land or house otherwise occupied. The weak judicial system has failed to solve this problem for the returnees. Inaccessibility of water, employment and other social services disrupts the lives of almost 60% of the returnees. Yet another issue is the attitude of the foreign media regarding the departure of coalition forces in 2014. They are covering the issue as if Afghanistan will cease to exist after 2014.

The fundamental question here is why Afghan people are living in these conditions when 44 countries are present in Afghanistan



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and trillions of dollars have been spent on reconstructing the country? Where was the money spent in? Clearly, the money has remained fruitless for the Afghans and the returnees. For example, three daily flights to Delhi transport countless sick people to Indian hospitals. I would wish that we could have at least one hospital to treat the people in our country. In Pakistan, almost 80% of the patients in Pashtun hospitals are Afghans.

We are not ready for Western democracy. What will democracy mean to us when we have no water, no food, and no jobs?

I invite civil society organizations to share the knowledge and experiences we have had. Global politics is a hurricane which moves from country to country and victimizes nations. Afghanistan is the victim now. So we should help to establish a stable system in Afghanistan. Let us have more meetings like this to share what we have; to tell the truth without political preservations and to talk of humanity.”

Audience Views:

Irfan Mufti (South Asia Partnership, Pakistan)

“Dialogues with politically influential people toward an ideal society are one of the opportunities for Afghan civil society inside and outside of the country. We should try to harmonize the voices of Afghan refugees and migrants to enable them to influence decision-making and policy-making inside Afghanistan. Afghan refugees and migrants possess higher capabilities than residents of Afghanistan as they are able to negotiate with policy-makers as a strong social and political factor of change.”

Arezo Qanih (ECW/ Educational & training Center for poor Women & girls of Afghanistan)

“All issues are important in Afghanistan, a country reviving after 30-40 years of war. Most of the huge sums of money transferred to Afghanistan were spent for military purposes. Since 2002, Afghan people have been shouting their disappointment with military aids. If the international community used the money for social issues and developing infrastructure needed for employment, none of the existing challenges would baffle the world and Afghans would be living in much better conditions.”



Mahmood Rahmani (Razi Social Development Organization, Afghanistan)

“Foreign interventions and disagreements between countries working in Afghanistan play an undeniable role in disorder in the country and even disagreement amongst Afghans.”

Fatemeh Ashrafi (HAMI, Iran)

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“Although progress of Afghanistan in recent years cannot be doubted, is this progress enough for return of the refugees? Problems like lack of suitable administrative and judicial procedures for settling land disputes, refusing returning graduates for cultural and social differences, change of social status after immigration, concentration of reconstructions and facilities, and other problems significantly slow down the process of returning.”

Summary and Key Points of Discussions in the Specialized Working Group 2	
Challenges and Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of standard shelters• Lack of access to drinking water• Lack of adequate occupational background• Migration to Kabul from smaller towns and villages, for lack of adequate facilities in small towns and rural areas• Severe shortage of healthcare services and hospitals, leading to international patient transfer• Lack of employment opportunities for Afghans graduating in Iran• Non-existent social justice system in Afghanistan• International aides spent on military equipment rather than people• Disagreement amongst countries working in Afghanistan• Allotment of significant shares of funds to Kabul and large cities• Lack of monitoring in project execution and expenditures
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public hospitals• Public schools covering more than 8,000,000 Afghans• Public universities, providing free education to young Afghan students• Privileges for government employees• Higher accessibility of social services compared to the previous decade: healthcare services (basic level), communication services (internet), public and private universities• Higher education is more accessible in Afghanistan than Iran or Pakistan• Construction infrastructure – economic and cultural structures established in the last 10 years

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Working Group 3:

Enhancing Access to Livelihood, Social Services and Food Safety Opportunities in Host Countries for Refugees and Migrants, Particularly For Vulnerable Groups (Women and Children)

Maryam Marashi (Zanjireh Omid Charity, Iran)

“Healthcare problems are a crucial concern in supporting the refugees. Heart diseases are common among Afghan refugee children. Hope Chain, as an international organization, will be operating a hospital in Kabul (Mother and Child) to provide follow-up treatment and services to returnees and their children.”



Mirveis Reza Zadeh (Refugee, Emam Javad Charity, Mashhad)

“Supporting women who are heads of households has become a main objective for charities working for the refugees in Iran. Training and empowerment programs help these women to achieve employment and financial autonomy. Daycare services and pre-schooling are available for their children.

Arezo Qanih (ECW/ Educational & training Center for poor Women & girls of Afghanistan)

“Afghanistan does need graduates today and the returnees will surely be welcomed by their community, families and different organizations. Graduates who return from Iran, Pakistan and other countries become university professors or top-ranking employees.”

Hassina Sherjan (Aid Afghanistan for Education, Afghanistan)

“Afghan Ministry of Education offers education only for Afghans who left school during the war and refugees returning from Iran and Pakistan. As schools inside refugee camps are not registered, the Afghan government does not recognize their diplomas. On the other hand, the Ministry of Education examines the returnees before allowing them to enter public schools. Finally, a few private schools in Afghanistan follow Pakistani educational programs which the Afghan government had decided to close last year.”

Nematollah Panahi (Refugee, Iran)

“A comparative study of Iran and Afghanistan showed that young residents of Afghanistan are more motivated to continue their studies because of the relevant occupational opportunities in Afghanistan. In Iran, many educated Afghans have no access to jobs related to their field of study, so they do not follow their studies at higher levels. Developing jobs for graduate refugees encourages them for higher education and, eventually, leads to investments in immigrant human resources.”

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Minoo Arezoomandi (ILIA- Iranian Life Quality Improvement Association, Iran)

“The provision of social services, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities contribute to solving refugees’ livelihood problems. It should be added that there are adequate support measures for vulnerable refugees in Iran.”

Hassina Sherjan (Aid Afghanistan for Education, Afghanistan)

“Our education system submits educational logs to the Afghan Embassy for approval. The students can then receive their logs and scores to facilitate transfer to the schools in Afghanistan. Differences in educational level usually lead to admission into one or two higher grades in Afghanistan.”

Amjad Ahmad Safi (Union Aid for Afghan Refugees, Pakistan)

“Camps inside Pakistan do not allow schools to work without registration with the Ministry of Education. The curriculum is based on the educational system in Afghanistan. However, recent changes in workbooks have made some problems for teachers that have had no training necessary for teaching the new books.”



Summary and Key Points of Discussions in the Specialized Working Group 3

- **Emphasis on practical skill learning education**
- **Legal assistance/focus on target community in collaboration with the community of Afghan migrants**
- **Considering positive aspects of immigration**
- **Higher tendency of Afghan residents to reach higher education in comparison to Afghans in Iran and Pakistan**
- **Limited knowledge of teachers in public schools about culture and traditions of migrant students**
- **Changing the priorities to improve conditions**
- **Iranian NGOs should provide equal social services, including education and healthcare, for all migrants**

Final Conclusions: Specialized Working Groups

- Voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Afghan refugees was the most important point in the discussions; followed by security in Afghanistan and issues surrounding sustainable reintegration.

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- Importance of media in introducing a proper image of Afghanistan in order to familiarize the young and encourage them to return.
- Preparing and building the capacity of young residents in destination countries, targeting actual needs inside Afghanistan
- Better understanding of challenges and obstacles paves the way to opportunities
- Training of adults and/or heads of households is a necessity; for they are the main decision-makers of each family
- Existing facilities are not adequate for existing needs
- Facilitating migrants' movement to prepare for return
- Facilities and reconstruction operations are restricted to Kabul and large cities, limiting reconstruction in other provinces.
- Excessive spending of reconstruction funds for military purposes
- Higher propensity of the young for higher education in public and private centers, compared to that of refugees living abroad
- Afghan children attend public schools in Iran while schooling for Afghan children in Pakistan is below average
- Establishment of a strong local communication network might provide better communication and activity for the Afghan people, both inside and outside Afghanistan.

Initiation and Expanding Regional Networking NGOs in the Region, April 12, 2013

Enhancement of regional relations and cooperation among NGOs should be considered carefully in order to define frameworks for cooperation and consider obstacles and challenges facing this social movement beforehand.

To begin the discussion, **Dr. Gopal Krishna**, chair of Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (the most important network of organizations active in the field of refugees in Asia Pacific) shared his experience in developing a communication network in Asia Pacific.

Overview of the Region (Asia Pacific)

A considerable number of the total 10.5 million refugees of the world live in Asia Pacific (30%). In 2012 the highest numbers of refugees, voluntary repatriation and departures for resettlement were located in this region. Asia Pacific has experienced various types of immigration, moving across sea borders, refugee influxes, economic immigration, and victims of



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human trafficking.

Other topics for discussion in the region include lack of a clear support framework for refugees; increasing xenophobia and policies that consider immigration as an issue of security (particularly after the 9/11 attacks); and supportive attitude based on traditions, hospitality and magnanimity.

Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)

Comprising of 140 members of the civil societies in South East Asia and Australia, APRRN was formed in a short time (one and a half years) with the goal of using voluntarism, commitment and action for enhancing the refugees' legal status. The network also provides a fast method of sharing information, experience, and emergencies.

Members of the network include a wide range of human rights groups, humanitarian organizations, support groups, research organizations, legal organizations and refugee associations. Participation of these groups/organizations brings positive outcomes for the refugees in the region.

Outcomes of APRRN's Activities and Arrangements:

- Changes in some refugee-related policies in Korea, Taiwan and India (national regulations now support refugees after contributions of the civil society)
- Resettlement support for Pakistani refugees in Thailand
- Support for the Rohingya in Burma
- Joining Regional Cooperation Framework (RFC) for regulating migration trends in the region

Geographical and Thematic Division of the Working Groups

Geographical working groups of APRRN are divided to three working groups of South Asia (8 members), South East Asia, East Asia/Pacific and Australia. Thematic divisions are active in the following topics: illegal detention of the migrants, legal support and defense, at risk women and children, mental health, and stateless persons.

Activities Related to Defending Refugee's Rights

- Persuading governments to join the 1951 Refugees Convention
- Encouraging national regulations to support refugees
- Finding alternatives to detention of migrants and refugees
- Special support for women, girls and at-risk children

“Finally, I am glad that HAMI, as a member of the regional network, has made such a remarkable advance in West Asia - a region with the highest number of refugees and asylum-seekers in the world. I hope this effort provides an opportunity for development of humanitarian activities towards the improvement of refugees' situation in this part of Asia.”

Audience Views

Fatemeh Ashrafi (HAMI, Iran)

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“Given the size of the refugee population in West Asia, particularly in Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and, recently, Syria, it is expected of the network to increase its activities in the region. However, as the large number of refugees in Iran demand different social services, more NGOs have been involved in providing services to the refugee community in the last 20 years. On the other hand, productive relations have been established with government authorities relating to refugee affairs. The most remarkable achievement in this respect was Iranian NGOs joining the National SSAR Committee.”

Gopal Krishna (APRRN)

“I will transfer these positive, strong and reliable forces to the network when I arrive home”; and he thanked the audience.



Plenary Session: Working Groups

Then, the participants were divided to smaller groups to answer the following three questions to continue to the next goal of the meeting: development of relations and a network of organizations active in Afghan refugee areas.



1. What are the indicators of a working, practical network?
2. What opportunities and challenges are involved in establishing a support network for Afghan refugees?
3. What are your suggestions for developing regional cooperation?

Conclusions: The Indicators of a Working Practical Regional Network

Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who manages the network and how?• Time frame: 2-years term for each country• A coordinator to coordinate organizations and activities by country and region
Membership and Cooperation Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restricted to organizations (legal entities); not individual, but organizational• Members should be legal in their countries (an indicator of sustainability for the network is official registration of member organizations in their countries)

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members should be committed to the network, rather than merely participate in the meeting and pay membership fees • Allocating tasks to different organizations • Permanent/Temporary membership (guest members and project members)
<p>Funds</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Method of financial provision • Method of expenditure
<p>Legal Status</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal entity • Definite schedule • Statute • Defined goals and divisions • Defined relationship between members and divisions • Clear prioritization of means to achieve goals • Clear organizational chart • Policies for supporting the refugees should be determined • Permanent communication with the members • Decision-making and management committee • A website for the network • Clear monthly or bimonthly schedule for the meetings and (video) conferences • Attracting local governments support • Accurate implementation
<p>Goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An opportunity for sharing information and discussing expectations • Preventing redundant activities and mistakes • Bringing change to national and regional policies • To involve other beneficiaries and experts in refugees area • Collecting and maintaining a database of related information
<p>Coordination and Publicity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessity of a national and regional coordinator • Adequate publicity • Accessible information on organizations and their goals and activities • Definition of goals and recommended solutions • Network accessibility • Close relationship with the target group (refugees), for spreading their views and filling the gap between them and the government and other organizations

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Target Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly determined target group • Categorization of the target group with targeted access to different levels • Network audience should be linked together through the network • Feedback from target community
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A common goal for member organizations • Specialization and shared knowledge • Cohesion among different divisions
Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparent reporting at all organizational levels • Reporting to the governments
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent communication of divisions • Ease of communication (e.g. shared webpage or e-mail group)

Conclusions: Opportunities and Challenges in Establishing Refugees Regional Support Network

Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative and bureaucratic obstacles specific to each country • Time limit (e.g. 2014) • Limited knowledge of national and regional capacities • Limited information on capacities in each organization for joining and future of the program • Political and governmental limitations • Weak infrastructure (concrete and abstract) • Lack of funds for paying membership fees • Incoherence and inconsistency among different NGOs • Mistrust amongst the network, between the governments and the target group, and donors (in direct relation to transparency and accessibility of information) • Differences in needs and problems of refugees in various societies • Geographical distance between member organization (a regional network limits the number of meetings) • Limited financial resources • Instable conditions inside Afghanistan • Weaknesses in publicity and dissemination of information (no database; no knowledge of different divisions) • Illegal refugees and related problems • Redundant activities
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Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potentials of increasing collaboration with donors (collaborative plans; national, international and regional cooperation) and co-supplying financial needs through the network• Establishment of an unofficial network covering all beneficiaries in the region• Informing destination countries of the target group's situation• Communication and knowledge transfer between different refugee related organizations• Filling the communication gap between NGOs of the region• Updating information about activities of the NGOs, to be published in network database• Encouraging governments and NGOs to improve cooperation• Similar meetings for sharing knowledge and experience
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Conclusions: Suggested Programs for Development of Regional Collaborations

- **Developing an e-mail group in three months (initially, HAMI will be the responsible organization)**
- **Clear planning for regular meetings in the future (every 6 months)**
- **Intra-network referrals (to avoid parallel actions)**
- **Information transfer (updating organizational information) and sharing lessons learned (experiences)**
- **Applications for registering the network should comply to national regulations of each country**
- **Determination of membership fees**
- **Specialized (thematic and country) working groups in the network**
- **Collecting information from and sharing information with the refugees in the working groups**
- **A committee for coordination purposes**
- **Preparation and development of internal regulations**
- **Selecting a directing organization for a defined period of time**
- **Positive interaction with the governments to achieve goals**
- **Adequately sharing news and information on Afghanistan, using photography, videos and news from news outlets active in Afghanistan; in order to influence and enhance views of refugees living in neighbor countries**

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Closing Ceremony

The closing ceremony for NGOs regional meeting was held after meetings of specialized working groups were completed. The closing ceremony was attended by special guests including a member of Tehran City Council and officials from West Asia and Afghanistan boards of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Masoumeh Ebtekar (Tehran City Council)



Mazoumeh Ebtekar expressed her gratitude for the services that NGOs provide for vulnerable refugee groups, saying their efforts fill the executive and administrative gaps in the official system of Iran.

She recalled a recent visit to southern areas of Tehran, where the largest population of refugees and migrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India live without any residence permit. Although they face various social, cultural, economic and educational problems, they live in safety and their children enjoy educational facilities that are mostly provided by Iranian

NGOs working for extremely vulnerable groups.

“Living in a politically unstable region we have to prepare areas of collaboration and cooperation for NGOs to enable them to take action against challenging issues of the future and to act in accordance to human values. Finally, monitoring mechanisms should be developed and reinforced to prevent any damage to the body of this network.”

Sobhani (Deputy of West Asia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Sobhani shared that “the meeting was a necessity in the development of international cooperation for Afghanistan. On the other hand, Ministry of Foreign Affairs plans to improve international cooperation with Afghanistan this year. Supporting Afghan children and women in Iran and Afghanistan will certainly be an element of the plan, progress of which might be accelerated by the influential role that NGOs will play.

Today, plans for returning refugees must reflect the situation and capacities in Afghanistan. Without minimum facilities and services voluntary repatriation will never happen and illegal movements to Western and Eastern countries will increase in occurrence. The number of illegal entrances over eastern borders of Iran is already increasing. Therefore, stability and improvements in Afghanistan should be supported in order to succeed in return programs for Afghan refugees and migrants. Educational programs can be a central suggestion as they enable the people to increase their occupational capacities in their countries. We are prepared to collaborate with Afghanistan and other countries concerned for

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Afghanistan in any joint educational program for enhancing human capital of Afghanistan. On another note, increasing militarization in Afghanistan adds to military and security expenses instead of providing infrastructure and social services.”

Qaderi (Chief of Staff for Reconstruction of Afghanistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs)



After thanking the NGOs for their constant commitment to activities for refugees and migrants, Mr. Qaderi discussed the returnees’ situation *after* returning to Afghanistan. Social spaces for growth and development in Iran provide Afghan refugees with chances of becoming influential people in social, educational, sports and economic areas in Afghanistan. In many cases, Afghan refugees and migrants returning from Iran have gone to play central roles in providing services for and reconstructing of their country.

Nevertheless, as a major host of refugees, Islamic Republic of Iran still continues its welcoming policies. Afghan refugees are actively involved in academic and social areas of Iran today. At least 5 million Afghan migrants and refugees live in Iran. When compared to the total population of Afghanistan this shows that 12-15% of the population of Afghanistan lives in Iran. Islamic Republic of Iran still desires to help its neighbor in order to prepare general conditions for Afghan refugees and migrants to return to their country. Consequently, we have done our best in reconstructing economic, technical and educational structures in Afghanistan. We do believe that today’s Afghanistan is a different Afghanistan that is developing at several fronts and that it is prepared to reintegrate migrants and provide basic requirements of returning.

Audience Views

Sayed Rahim Sattar (APWO, Afghanistan)

“Iranian authorities should remember the destruction of capacities in Afghanistan. Despite the 44 countries working in Afghanistan, we still suffer from scarcity of facilities; for funds are spent on military purposes instead of social affairs. Our conditions would have been much better if we received water well equipment or tractors and shovels instead of military tanks.”

Nazanin Kazemi (ICRI- International Consortium for Refugees in Iran)

“ICRI opened in 1991 after the request of Islamic republic of Iran, to provide information about the refugee’s situation, attract foreign NGOs and international funds to work in refugee related domains in Iran, and finally to coordinate governmental and non-governmental organization, particularly international and local NGOs.

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Capacity building was later added to our statute. Our work in Iran has gone through much rise and fall in the last 21 years, mainly caused by misunderstanding the statements in our statute. Anyway, I'd like to ask the audience, especially officials from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to give us more spiritual support in our activities for attracting international organizations and their funds to Iran. Time-consuming administrative procedures often hinder non-governmental projects - projects in which much effort was made in their planning and financial provision stages. Government officials working in different sectors can cooperate much more in solving this issue."



Sobhani (Deputy of West Asia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

"Iran is the closest country to Afghanistan in terms of ethnicity, religion and culture. However, what Afghanistan has experienced in the last 30 years has ruined the country to the extent that even 44 foreign countries cannot make any significant progress with their enormous amounts of money; since process of reconstruction has transformed to a militarizing process."

Fazel Ghani Kakar (NECDO, Noor Educational and Capacity Development Organization, Afghanistan)

"I should express our thanks to the brave believing people of Islamic Republic of Iran for their welcoming reception and support of migrants for three decades, regardless of their own problems. Their support is not confined to Afghan migrants in Iran - they have executed efficient plans in Afghanistan too.



Unfortunately, the people of Afghanistan are kidnapped; once by direct intervention of the Red Army of the Soviet Union that led to invasion of Afghanistan, martyrdom of more than 1.5 million people, injuring and mutilating hundreds of thousands, millions of displaced people scattered around the world, and hundreds of thousands widows. All these costs were not for protecting Afghanistan only; rather the regional security was at stake.

In any case we expect you not to deprive us of your support. I thank you again for being there for us in the 30 years of war and migration. We thank you for your efforts and for your faithful fulfillment of tasks based on Islamic values. God's grace be upon you."

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Fatemeh Ashrafi (HAMI, Iran)

“To conclude the ceremony, I express my gratitude to all participants for their maximum participation in discussion and specialized groups. I am so happy to see a successful close to a meeting that, after 30 years of migration and refuge, succeeded in bringing together different players in this human issue. I am glad to see the field being prepared for efficient collaborations between local and international NGOs, governmental bodies and United Nations agencies in order to facilitate improvements in the lives of Afghan people who live inside Afghanistan or are refugees/migrants in neighbor countries. Continuation of such meetings and conferences for regional collaboration is a major necessity for ensuring the realization of conclusions made here as well as strengthening the relations between NGOs who are the main service providers for the refugee communities.



Once again I express my gratitude to colleagues coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan to represent their organization; the chief of APRRN; officials and experts from Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Welfare, Tehran Municipality, Tehran City Council, High Commissioner for Refugees in Iran, UNICEF, Danish and Norwegian Refugee Centers, country office of ICRI in Iran, Global Immigration Organization in Iran, country office of UNAMA-Iran, country office of International Red Cross Organization in Iran, Iranian Refugee NGOs and all other individuals who helped us in holding this meeting despite the complications.”

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Annex 1: Final Statement

The First Regional Conference of the NGOs to examine the challenges and opportunities ahead for Afghan Refugees and Returnees held from April 12-13, 2013 in Tehran was a chance for the local, regional and international NGOs active in Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan to discuss the phenomenon of refuge and migration from Afghanistan. It also provided a forum, for the first time, to tackle the challenges that Afghan refugees may face if they choose to return to their country in a sustainable and effective way.

In the end of the two-day conference, the most serious concerns raised by the participants were the following:

1. The participants in Tehran's regional conference believe that the trend of Afghanistan's reconstruction and that the slow development of administrative, economic, social, educational and health infrastructure is worrying. Peace negotiations have not been fruitful and military threats have increased. The society will be affected by increasing costs of militarization while hope for improvement and positive changes in this country will fade away. All these have affected trends of returnees to Afghanistan and sustainable reintegration of the Afghan refugees to society. An additional problem to address is the huge gap in accessing welfare, social facilities and services inside Afghanistan as compared to what refugees receive in the countries where they reside at present.
2. Furthermore, the constant changes in regional and international arenas cause international organizations to shift their attention to other priorities; hence, millions of Afghan refugees face many challenges, and insecure and unstable situations without hope for improvement in the host countries. Therefore, the participants of the Tehran Conference believe that lack of security and stability in Afghanistan along with the lack basic services are the two major causes of discouraged return to Afghanistan by the refugees. This is in spite of the huge funds allocated to the reconstruction of Afghanistan in the last decade, which have sadly been used to develop military bases and pay for security costs.
3. Creating and developing essential infrastructure such as shelter, health facilities, clean water systems and schools by the Afghan Government with the support of the international community can all pave the way for the sustainable return of refugees and migrants to Afghanistan. Therefore, it is vital that until relative improvement of the situation in Afghanistan is realized that the global community remains focused on Afghanistan and priorities of Afghan refugees. At the same time, international organizations and global players that have undertaken commitments to reconstruct Afghanistan must remember their responsibilities in terms of supporting the host countries. Despite their own challenges and social-economic restrictions, host countries have held the additional burden of hosting Afghan refugees for over three decades.
4. According to the findings of the Human Development Report (HDR) from 2005-2011, human displacement can create impact, whether positive or negative, on the development of both the host and source countries. Hence, the participants in Tehran Conference believe that taking care of the burning and long-term issues of refugee communities cannot be confined within the national responsibilities of the host countries. It is vital that international role-players such as

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international organizations and donor countries note their responsibilities in supporting host countries. Amidst these, a number of political and economic restrictions imposed upon some of the host countries have left tremendous direct negative impacts upon the refugee communities. For instance, international sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran have imposed huge pressures on this vulnerable community which in certain areas cannot be compensated due to the level and broadness of the services and the number of the people impacted.

5. The participants underline the importance of creating dialogue and developing collaborations among local, regional and international NGOs, and country/regional offices of UNHCR in order to develop the prospect of providing services to refugee communities, with a special attention to the needs of refugee women and children. They call all responsible parties to keep focusing on the mid/long-term plans for formal education and vocational training opportunities to further empower the refugee communities and prepare for reintegration into Afghan society.
6. The participants believe that the national and international NGOs have had a major role in improving programs and local strategies to development conditions for Afghan refugees and returnees. Their precious experience in improving the lives and social status of Afghan refugees in the host countries, safeguarding the self-esteem and dignity of these vulnerable communities and helping them achieve their basic rights cannot be overlooked. Due to the natural structure, these NGOs have had close interactions and ongoing collaboration with local Afghan communities both inside and out of Afghanistan. Thus, it is required that the ground would be paved for their further participation so that they could voice out their views and present practical steps/solutions in line with the policy making and planning for refugee communities.
7. Given the above, the following must be accomplished:
 - a) Identification and creation of required mechanisms in order to increase chances for regional collaboration among local and international NGOs active in the field of Afghan refugees and returnees both in host countries and also inside Afghanistan;
 - b) Turning the existing data and experiences into applied knowledge in line with the voluntary repatriation of refugees and the sustainable reintegration of Afghan refugees and migrants to Afghan society;
 - c) Capacity building for local NGOs through increasing constructive collaboration with other regional and international organizations.

Suggested measures to be taken:

- Forming a consolidated and targeted communications network among local, regional and international NGOs participating in Tehran Conference and developing it with the presence of other potential role-players in source and target countries. This network will be developed in order to better exchange information and field practices, to work towards joint cooperation, and help to present practical solutions for improving the situation of vulnerable groups within refugee communities in host countries and amongst returnees in Afghanistan;
- Developing communication with other specialized networks in the Asia and Pacific, including APRRN, in order to benefit from their lessons learned and past experience. This can work to raise potential and actual capacities in order to support bigger numbers of Afghan refugees in the region;

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- To perform a needs analysis and hold training courses to build the capacity of local NGOs inside Afghanistan and in host countries. This will boost the level of services provided for Afghan refugees and returnees;
- Holding periodic regional conferences in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan which will be attended by the members and other role-players from the government and international organizations in order to study trends related to the set targets.

The participants of Tehran Conference hope that by relying on the cooperation of other local, regional and international role-players, they could take small but firm steps towards coordinating the collective measures in creating positive developments in the lives of millions of Afghan citizens who have been subject to 30 years of suffering and hardship. They also hope to pave the ground for Afghan refugees and returnees to have access to a higher quality of life in their own country. In going through this sensitive process, the participants wish to maintain the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) signed on May 12, 2012 by the governments of the IRR, Afghanistan, Pakistan and UNHCR as the means to move forward. They hope that SSAR would be able to shed light on their efforts in improving the situation of the Afghan refugees and help them achieve sustainable reintegration with their homeland.

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Annex 2: List of Participants

International Participants			
	Name	Position	Organization
1	Gopal Krishna Siwakoti	Chair	Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)
2	Sayed Rahim Sattar	Director	Afghan Public Welfare Organization (APWO)
3	Arezo d/o Mohamd Yasin Qanih	Executive Director	Educational & Training Center for Poor Women & Girls of Afghanistan (ECW)
4	Mohamed Hamed Sarwary	Program Manager	Hagar International
5	Inayatullah Kakar	Director	Idraak Organization Afghanistan
6	Pascal Arthaud	Asia Regional Program Director	Relief International
7	Fazal Ghani Kakar	Program Coordinator	Noor Educational and Capacity Development Organization (NECDO)
8	Hassina Sherjan	President/Founder	Aid Afghanistan for Education
9	Mahmood Rahmani	CEO	Razi Social Development Organization - RSDO
10	Rabia Sabri	Associate Director	Church World Service – Pakistan/Afghanistan
11	Zartasha Khan	Program Manager	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
12	Amjad Ahmad Safi	Executive Director	Union Aid for Afghan Refugees
13	Irfan Mufti	Program Manager	South Asia Partnership Pakistan

Local Participants			
	Name	Position	Organization
1	Arjang Abdolahi	Team Leader	Norwegian Refugee Council

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2	Nooshin Moghadam	Information, Counseling And Legal Assistance	Norwegian Refugee Council
3	Zahra Khedri	Senior Education and Food Security Assistant	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
4	Kenneth Grant	Country Representative	Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
5	Leila Onsori	Field Manager	Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
6	Homa Maddah	Field Officer	Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
7	Bahar Sadreghazi	Field Officer	Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
8	Nazanin Kazemi	Country Representative	International Consortium for Refugees in Iran (ICRI)
9	Veronica Modey-Ebi	Deputy Representative of UNHCR	UNHCR-Iran
10	Jelvas Musau	Protection Officer	UNHCR - Iran
11	Hoda Jaberian	Associate Program Officer	UNHCR - Iran
12	Mandana Amiri	Legal Counselor	UNHCR - Iran
13	Samar Maleki	Assistant External Relations Officer	UNHCR - Iran
14	Babak Askarian	Education Officer	UNICEF - Iran
15	Pavel Ershov	UNAMA Representative in Iran	UNAMA - Iran
16	Kamran Khaki	Cooperation Program Manager	ICRC
17	Afshin Amini	ICRC Field Officer in Mashhad	ICRC
18	Azadeh Bahramji	Program Manager	Operation Mercy – Iran
19	Nafiseh Mozaffar	Program Assistant	Operation Mercy - Iran
20	Azadeh Hasani	Program Manager	Relief International - Iran
21	Siyavash Jarrahi	Coordinator Officer	Relief International - Iran
22	Fouad Shahrestani	Director	Iraqi Refugee Aid Council (IRAC)

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23	Anna Hussein	Assistant Director	Iraqi Refugee Aid Council (IRAC)
24	Negar Ghaderi	Project Officer	NICCO
25	Yusuke Mori	Program Manager	NICCO
26	Kyoko Okano	Program Manager	NICCO
27	Mariko Yagi	Project Coordinator	NICCO
28	Mojghan Azimi	Project Coordinator	NICCO
29	Sayaka Tsutsui	Project Formulation Advisor	Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
30	Leila Enayati	Director of Education Department	Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV)
31	Hamideh Aboutorabi	Director of Public Relations Department	Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV)
32	Nazanin Einolyaghin	International Affairs Manager	Rebirth Society
33	Zarin Eizadyar	Program Assistant	Rebirth Society
34	Maryam Marashi	Executive Director	Zanjireh Omid Charity
35	Nasibeh Shadravan	Project Officer	ZanjirehOmid Charity
36	Hamid Ghaffari	Executive Director	Behbood Yaftegan
37	Khojaste Hoseinipour	Founder & Chairman of the Board	The Society for Protection of Working and Street Children (SPWSC)
38	Mino Madani	Chairman of the Board	SPWSC
39	Abdol Reza Samad Zadeh	Head of Office	IOM - Iran
40	Mehran Razmi Far	Program Manager	IOM - Iran
41	Sadaf Vakili	Executive Director	Association for the Protection of Child Laborers (APCL)
42	Mahbobeh Jelokhani	Program Assistant	World Relief Foundation
43	Adel Dehashti	Program Assistant	World Relief Foundation

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44	Ehsan Ghasemi	International Affair Manager	World Relief Foundation
45	Safieh Shahriyari	Chair	Family Planning Organization
46	Firoozeh Kooshe	Program Assistant	Family Planning Organization
47	Farideh Akhlaghi	Executive Director	Baran Charity
48	Fatemeh Barbari	Project Officer	Baran Charity
49	Mohamad Mohammadi	Founder & Director	Seyed ol Shohada Charity
50	Hassan Zadeh	Field Officer in Tehran	Seyed ol Shohada Charity
51	Zahra Jafari		Afghan Refugee in Iran
52	Raheleh Mirzaee		Afghan Refugee in Iran
53	Nemat Panahi		Afghan Refugee in Iran
54	Moham Reza Khavari		Afghan Refugee in Iran
55	Minoo Arezoomandi	Executive Director	Iranian Life Quality Improvement Association (ILIA)
56	Hasan Vali Zadeh	Executive Director	Emam Bagher Charity
57	Mirveis Reza Zadeh	Executive Director	Emam Javad Charity
58	Behrooz Rahimi	Executive Director	Emam Ali Charity

Donor Country Representatives

	Name	Country	Position
1	Asaddolah Amiri	Afghanistan	Cultural Associate of Afghan Embassy
2	Martha Suda	Austria	Council
3	Maria Adebahr	Germany	Legal and Consular Section
4	Saskia Peukert	Germany	Legal and Consular Section

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5	Tomohiko Sakamoto	Japan	Second Secretary
6	Trygve Vold	Norway	Second Secretary
7	Kevin Magron	France	First Secretary/Press Advisor

Academics		
	Name	University
1	Dr. Reza Eslami Somee	Shahid Beheshti University

Government Representatives		
	Name	Organization
1	Ms. Ebtekar	Tehran City Council
2	Mr. Sobhani	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (West Asia)
3	Mr. Qaderi	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Reconstruction of Afghanistan)
4	Mr. Karimi	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
5	Ms. Mohammadian	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
6	Mr. Hatami	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
7	Mr. Jafari	BAFIA
8	Mr. Barikani	BAFIA
9	Mr. Asgari	BAFIA
10	Mr. Javid	BAFIA
11	Mr. Ghorbanpoor	BAFIA