



An Afghan returnee shows the only documentation he has, a 60 year old national identity document belonging to his father. Photo: NRC/Enayatullah Azad

# About ADSP

## Introduction

*The Asia Displacement Solutions Platform is a joint initiative launched by the Danish Refugee Council, International Rescue Committee, Norwegian Refugee Council and Relief International, which aims to contribute to the development of comprehensive solutions for displaced persons across the Afghan and Rohingya displacement axes.*

Welcome to the September 2020 newsletter from the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform. These newsletters are intended to shine a spotlight on the work done by ADSP members to improve outcomes for persons affected by displacement, and also to provide updates on global or regional processes which may otherwise go unexplored.

Each newsletter will contain articles from members in ADSP focus countries, exploring interesting programme developments and regional migration trends. Forthcoming editions will likely revolve around areas of thematic focus, and we encourage you to share ideas or information.

The newsletter relies upon content created by member organisations, and everyone is welcome to contribute. If you have an idea for an article, on any subject, please feel free to contact me to discuss. We would love to publish overviews of your activities, interviews with staff, and photos which give an idea of the work being carried out in the field.

These newsletters are intended to improve information-sharing between ADSP member organisations, and to highlight the work of the platform more publicly.

## ADSP Welcomes New Coordinator:

*By Asia Displacement Solutions Platform*

Since 2018, the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP) has been coordinated under the stewardship of Anna Stein. Anna was integral to the development and foundation-setting of the platform, creating the structures needed for the ADSP to succeed and for members to be able to work more closely together. In addition, she played a key role in the transition of the ADSP from the Afghan Displacement Solutions Platform to the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform in 2019. Anna concluded her role with the ADSP in June 2020. We wish Anna her well in her future endeavours and thank her for her incredible contribution to the ADSP over the years.



In August 2020, Evan Jones commenced his role as the Coordinator of the ADSP. Based in Kabul, Evan will oversee the daily operations of the platform. In addition to facilitating information sharing and best practice dissemination, Evan will work closely with all members and external stakeholders to identify possible areas of joint advocacy, support research priorities, and develop cohesive approaches to programming.

Evan comes to the ADSP with nearly ten years of experience within the Asia region working on issues of refugee protection. He has worked in across the region on advocacy, developing relationships with governments, and creating partnerships between national civil society actors. He also currently serves on a number of not-for-profit boards, supporting international and regional NGOs in their work related to refugee protection.

Evan very much looks forward to working with all members throughout the region to support and facilitate existing initiatives and innovative approaches to our work. He can be contacted at [Evan.Jones@adsp.ngo](mailto:Evan.Jones@adsp.ngo) so please do feel free to reach out at any stage.

## No Time to Lose: An Urgent Call for Access to Quality Education for Rohingya Children in Cox's Bazar

By Stephen Katende, IRC Bangladesh Senior Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy Advisor



Rohingya children participating in the IRC 'Pop-Up' learning pilot in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Maruf Hasan/IRC

Despite the fact that more than three years have passed since the Rohingya exodus from Myanmar to Bangladesh, access to education remains an acute concern for the refugee population in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. At present, it is estimated that more than 325,000 Rohingya children, adolescents and youth do not have access to education and over 6,000 informal learning institutions have been forced to shutter their doors due to COVID-19. Compounding the situation is the reality that for over a year Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar had no cellular internet access. At a time when much of the world turned to the internet for distance learning platforms or for up-to-date information on Covid-19, a government decree in effect since September 2019 limited cellular internet in the Rohingya camps. However, by early September 2020, the Government of Bangladesh finally announced that the internet<sup>1</sup> ban will

be lifted, citing extensive advocacy efforts of local and international organizations. While this shift is a major relief, many barriers to quality education for Rohingya children, adolescents and youth remain.

These barriers to education are highlighted in a new IRC report, launched on 24 August 2020, entitled "*No Time to Lose: An Urgent Call for Access to Quality Education for Rohingya Children in Cox's Bazar*". This report comes at a crucial time, as COVID-19 has resulted in the imposition of additional restrictions on access to education. As more than half of all refugees living in Cox's Bazar are children, it is essential that this be addressed as a matter of absolute urgency. Without education, these children – many of whom were already unable to access education in Myanmar – will be condemned to a life of even greater hardship and inequality. Moreover, without the ability to acquire skills and knowledge through formal or informal education, the ability for refugee children to engage in activities of self-reliance later in life will be severely hampered. In certain situations, this may lead to increased risk of trafficking, child labor, and child marriage – with additional vulnerabilities for girls.

With no immediate durable solutions on the horizon for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, education must be seen as a priority both for the Bangladesh Government, and the international community. Given the necessary precautions as a result of COVID-19, this could be pursued through alternative digital learning technology, making education more accessible to all refugees. Now, thanks to the Government's decision, Rohingya children can finally have access to online classes and learning materials, as well as models like the IRC's Pop-Up Learning, a home-based digital education platform. As a secondary benefit, access to internet has allow for greater access to information regarding COVID-19, ensuring that the refugee population is informed and able to practice necessary hygiene procedures to combat the global pandemic.

The report "*No Time to Lose: An Urgent Call for Access to Quality Education for Rohingya Children in Cox's Bazar*" explores a number of the current barriers to informal education such as short-term funding, complex approval processes and sub-standard teaching methods. In addition, it addresses the need for the pursuit of certified educational programmes, as a prerequisite for Rohingya youth to genuinely access self-determination and self-reliance. Furthermore, it also outlines the effects of COVID-19 and the need for an expansion of education programming in Cox's Bazar.

Finally, the report provides a number of recommendations for government, INGO and international stakeholders, each aimed at improving education opportunities for Rohingya youth in the camps. They are:

- UNICEF and UNESCO should identify and pilot alternative digital learning technology using the Myanmar curriculum.
- Humanitarian agencies and partners should expand the pilot of the Myanmar curriculum across all ages and grades.
- Ensure all refugees have consistent access to internet services and phone connection across all camps.
- Humanitarian agencies and partners should work to improve education sector coordination and quality assurance with active engagement of the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh.
- The Bangladesh Government should work towards creating a conducive policy environment that allows planning, coordination & funding for a whole of society approach to education, benefitting both refugees & host communities.



Adela D/o Ali Attah engaging with the DRC TVET training. Photo: DRC Afghanistan

## CASE STUDY

Danish Refugee Council, Afghanistan

*Case Study: Miss Adela, a Computer Class Graduate of the Taalim Project*

Adela D/o Ali Attah is a 25-year woman from the Ghaghory district of Ghazni province. She comes from a family of nine (four men and five women) and is currently an IDP in Onchi Baghbanan PD-13 Kabul. Adela has been living in poverty due to her family's low economic standing as well as lack of opportunities for education. Adela and her siblings were not able to complete their formal education and has been working to support the needs of the family from a young age. Adela came to Kabul in the hopes of continuing her education including taking vocational trainings (VT).

When she came to Kabul, she lived with her relatives in Afshar PD-5 Kabul and was able to contact the community representative of Afshar who then introduced her to DRC. In 2018, Adela joined the VT under the EU funded Taalim project.

She enrolled in a 6-month computer software class as a trainee and successfully graduated on 16 April 2019. After Adela's graduation, DRC provided one computer and related accessories. She also received a toolkit and permit to work from the Ministry of Labour & Social Affairs. In December 2019, Adela was hired as an Administrative Assistance in the Marshal Fahim Army Academy of Defence Ministry. She receives a monthly wage of 12,000 AFN which is considered a big support to her family.

*Adela is thankful to DRC as she gained many benefits from being a VT Graduate:*

- Improved her family's economic condition including her relatives
- Familiarity with different technologies which is useful for future opportunities
- Developed good communication skills when interacting with different people
- Continued her education funded from her own savings where she recently graduated from Donyaa University
- Support of other relatives, family and pay school fees for one female member of their family.

## There's a better way forward than sending Afghans home to conflict

*By Evan Jones, Coordinator at the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform*

**Many Afghans displaced outside their country are stuck in a state of perennial limbo, with no prospects for a genuine, safe return on the horizon. Yet the European Union and Afghanistan are negotiating the extension of a divisive agreement that repatriates failed asylum seekers to a country still at war.**



Photo: Enayatullah Azad/NRC

The EU and Afghanistan signed the Joint Way Forward agreement (JWF) in 2016, in response to the so-called “refugee and migrant crisis”, when people from countries including Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq sought shelter and better livelihoods in Europe. This deal was seen by many as an attempt by the EU to shy away from their protection responsibilities, and instead, facilitate the return of thousands of Afghan nationals. Set to expire next week, on 6 October 2020, the EU is currently negotiating a further two-year extension of this agreement.

While the JWF ostensibly offers a straightforward resolution to addressing the issue of irregular migration of Afghans to Europe, the deal fails to acknowledge two

crucial factors: the impact of ongoing conflict, and the unequal burden Afghanistan's neighbours have shouldered for years.

Contrary to common belief, the vast majority of Afghan refugees do not live in western nations. Four decades of insecurity and conflict have pushed millions of people out of Afghanistan. For many, this has meant countless years away from their homeland, creating one of the world's largest and most protracted refugee crises.

Most are hosted in neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey. At present, there are an estimated 1.4 million registered and 500,000 unregistered Afghan refugees in Pakistan, between 1.5 and two million refugees in Iran, and a further 170,000 registered Afghan refugees in Turkey.

By comparison, approximately 250,000 Afghans made their way to Europe in search of security and safety from 2015 to 2016 – the height of a “crisis” that garnered widespread international press coverage and political scrutiny. Most troublingly, the EU's JWF agreement does not adequately acknowledge the fact that Afghanistan to this day is mired in conflict and faces other pressing challenges – despite ongoing peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

In 2019 alone, conflict and violence displaced an estimated 461,000 people in 32 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. At least 158,000 more have been displaced this year, even as Taliban and Afghan government officials discussed moving forward with the peace talks. These numbers are on top of frequent displacements from floods, drought, and other disasters, which are expected to worsen as the impacts of climate change build.

There are currently more than 2.9 million internally displaced persons in Afghanistan, according to the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Meanwhile, the majority of Afghans claiming asylum in Europe are granted protection: According to the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), approximately 58 percent of asylum claimants from Afghanistan were given refugee status in EU countries in June 2020. These figures are a stark reminder that conditions inside Afghanistan are clearly not conducive for return, and therefore call into question the fundamental premise of the Joint Way Forward agreement.

As a country marred by violence, poverty, and insecurity, it is simply untenable to suggest that the situation in Afghanistan can support returns. Instead of returning to safety, those coming back from Europe may very well face immediate displacement, either within Afghanistan or into a neighbouring country. Afghan displacement is complex and multi-faceted. If the international community is serious about finding lasting solutions, then it will require a comprehensive approach. Responsibility sharing is key.

As endorsed in the Global Compact for Refugees, the international community should focus on exploring options to open pathways for resettlement of Afghan refugees in Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan, as well as supporting these host countries with continued humanitarian and development assistance. As nations that are trying to improve their own healthcare systems and general infrastructure, host countries must also receive predictable and ongoing development support.

Finally, governments and donors should recognise the tremendous heavy lifting being done by Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran. These nations have shouldered primary responsibility for Afghan refugees over the past four decades, and have done so with limited – often simply monetary – support from the international community.

While Afghans in neighbouring countries have also faced pressure to return in recent years, these countries are still the main host actors in the region. For example, in Iran, there have been significant investments in healthcare and education opportunities for both registered and unregistered Afghan refugees. In Pakistan, the government has provided some refugees with permits to stay, and allowed some to open bank accounts.

But goodwill alone will not sustain such positive developments. Instead, the international community must acknowledge this good practice, and proactively support these countries. It is essential that nations like Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey receive financial and technical support, renewed partnerships, and targeted investments. Durable solutions for Afghan refugees will only materialise through international solidarity and the genuine pursuit of shared responsibility. It is myopic to address the issue of Afghan displacement solely through arrangements premised around return.

*The full article can also be viewed on the New Humanitarian website [here](#).*

## On the Brink: Displacement-affected communities in Afghanistan during the Covid-19 pandemic

*Eileen McCarthy, Advocacy Manager, Norwegian Refugee Council Afghanistan*

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in Afghanistan threatens to push it to the brink. Vulnerable displacement-affected communities, already at high risk for the rapid spread of Covid-19, are struggling to cope. For humanitarian organizations, this means that humanitarian access and the timely and targeted delivery of assistance is even more critical to those most in need. As the international community comes together in Geneva next month to make commitments for Afghanistan's future, it will be imperative to ensure that displaced populations aren't left behind.

In August 2020, NRC conducted a survey of more than 1,400 refugees, IDPs and host communities in eight countries, including Afghanistan, to understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on income, work and coping mechanisms and what further impact this would have on food security, housing and education.

Downward Spiral: the economic impact of Covid-19 on refugees and displaced people documents the devastating economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic that is tipping many displaced and conflict-affected people into a hunger, homelessness and education crisis.

### *Covid-19 in Afghanistan*



"In the past, we could work and make a little money, but now that the Covid-19 crisis has hit us, we are forced to stay home," says Mohammad Alam.  
Photo: Enayatullah Azad/NRC

In Afghanistan, where decades of war have left a fragile health system, developing economy and vulnerable population, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugee returnees, and host communities have been hard hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.

More than six months into the crisis, these displacement-affected communities, already at high risk for the rapid spread of Covid-19, are struggling to cope. As disruptions of the pandemic – a national lockdown and other accompanying public health measures, severely disrupted trade and commerce, limited access to humanitarian assistance and services, and the knock-on effects of a global economic crash – continue to ripple through society, the very future of Afghanistan's already fragile economy and its most vulnerable

citizens is at stake.

### *Lost livelihoods, mounting debts, interrupted education*

In Afghanistan, over 80 per cent of the population live on less than the internationally applied poverty line and the vulnerability of IDPs, returnees, and host communities has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Lockdown measures earlier in the crisis significantly decreased daily labour opportunities, reducing household purchasing power and access to food. This compounded an already dire food security and nutrition situation, leaving some 12.4 million people facing acute food insecurity, including 4 million at 'emergency levels.' As a result of lost livelihoods and higher food prices, vulnerable Afghans have been forced to cut the number of meals they eat each day and rely on less nutritious foods.

Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, the ever-present dangers of escalating conflict and natural disasters present ongoing challenges and magnify the risks that families face. More than 130,000 people have been displaced by conflict and nearly 50,000 affected by natural disasters since early March, in addition to the 4.1 million people displaced since 2012 who remain in some form of protracted displacement across the country. The economic impact of the crisis has left these vulnerable displacement-affected families to use up their savings and take on debt – amongst some of the most vulnerable displaced populations, over 80% of families have reported debts to cover food, education, or rent. For many this has led to difficulties in paying rent or other basic housing and threats of eviction, especially among women. As these multiple crises continue, protection issues are likely to worsen as families adopt negative coping strategies, including child labour and early marriage.

In addition, children have missed out on more than six months of school and getting them back may be even more difficult. Family incomes are further strained as a result of the pandemic, and caregivers have reported to NRC losing interest in education and having to send their children to work. Some students, including boys previously attending NRC Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) classes, have reportedly had to travel abroad for work while other families seek alternatives, including sending their children to religious schools or private language courses outside of their villages. In the meantime, dozens of schools have been attacked or burnt down in the past six months and 400 schools remain closed due to conflict and fighting across the country.

### Surging needs



NRC's camp management center on the outskirts of Kabul, Afghanistan, where our staff provides masks, guidance on preventative measures, and training on how to reduce the spread of Covid-19.  
Photo: Enayatullah Azad/NRC

The Covid-19 pandemic has only further strained Afghanistan's already struggling public services and displacement-affected communities face additional barriers in accessing government services. The long-term effects of the pandemic will require concerted and coordinated support from the international community, yet the 2020 Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan remains only 33% funded more than three-quarters of the way through the year.

It is critical that humanitarian actors support urgently needed food security and nutrition assistance as well as livelihoods support to small, medium and micro businesses and utilize cash interventions, including cash for rent and protection, so that families are able to cover food and medical expenses and pay their rent.

Donors should provide additional humanitarian funding that is flexible to ensure organizations are able to deliver support where needs are greatest, as well as advocate for greater humanitarian access to enable to delivery of assistance that is independent, impartial, timely and effective.

In addition, at the 2020 Afghanistan Conference, the Government of Afghanistan and international community must consider and address the challenges for displacement-affected communities and improve the prospects for durable solutions by including IDPs, returnees, and host communities in government and donor development initiatives, and strengthening linkages between humanitarian and development funding streams.



# REGIONAL UPDATES

## Mixed Migration Monitoring Initiative (4Mi)

As part of the MMC global network, MMC Asia works towards the objectives of the MMC by engaging in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. MMC Asia's main activity to date has been 4Mi data collection among Afghans on the move in Afghanistan, Europe and South/Southeast Asia. 4Mi has expanded more recently to include data collection on the movements of other groups of migrants and refugees across Southeast Asia. 4Mi data collection is currently taking place in Afghanistan, India, Indonesia and Malaysia.

MMC's Q2 Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers Southern and Southeast Asia. The core countries of focus are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand and Australia. The QMMUs offer a quarterly update on new trends and dynamics related to mixed migration and relevant policy developments in the region. These updates are based on a compilation of a wide range of secondary (data) sources, brought together within a regional framework and applying a mixed migration analytical lens. Similar QMMUs are available for all MMC regions. The issues covered in this edition includes:

- Rising concerns over COVID-19 cases in refugee camps, shelters, and immigration detention facilities across the region
- Experiences of rising xenophobia against Afghans in Iran
- Returning migrant workers facing discrimination and unsafe quarantine conditions
- Fears border closures could increase instances of exploitation and trafficking
- Immigration crackdowns in Malaysia
- Continued concerns over immigration detention conditions in Australia

The Mixed Migration Centre is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. For more information on the MMC, the QMMUs from other regions and contact details of regional MMC teams, visit [mixedmigration.org](https://mixedmigration.org) and follow them at [@Mixed\\_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)