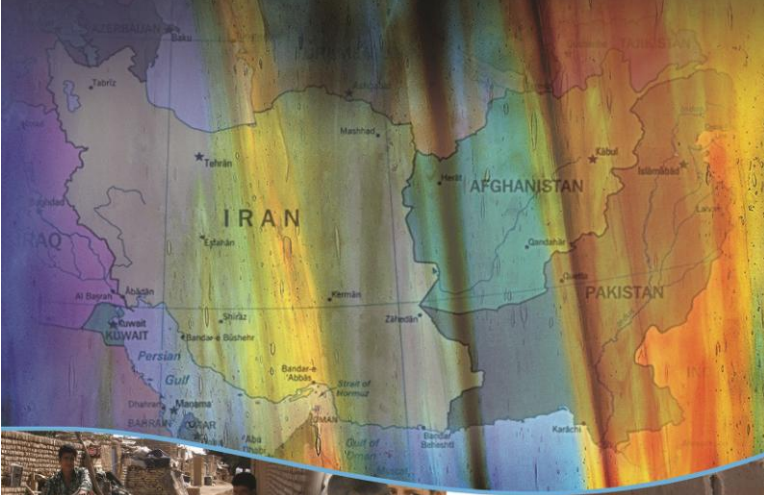




Education & Livelihoods of Afghan Youth to Inform Voluntary Repatriation

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“Afghan Displaced Youth”

A Regional NGO Meeting on Afghan Refugees, Returnees and Durable Solutions

17-18 November 2015

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NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL



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Facilitation and report

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ACRONYMS

AGDM	Age Gender Diversity Mainstreaming
AUP	Aid to Uprooted People
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EU	European Union
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MoRR	Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PPVR	Population Profiling Verification and Response
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

I. Rationale

Afghan Displaced Youth

A Regional NGO Workshop on Afghan Refugees

Held in Tehran, Iran on 17-18 November 2015

1. Why a regional workshop on Afghan refugees?

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan gathered in November 2015 in Tehran for a regional meeting on Afghan refugee issues with a thematic focus on Afghan displaced youth. At a time when displacement in and out of Afghanistan continues to rise, when the number of Afghan asylum seekers grows steadily in Europe and debates on durable solutions for Afghan refugees remain, it is all the more necessary to take stock of the profiles of the millions of Afghan youth outside of their homeland, and those who made, with their families, the decision to return.

2. What is at stake and who is responsible?

The outcome of this workshop is concrete and operational: a set of possible key objectives and indicators that can help guide NGOs in their work with Afghan refugee youth, as well as facilitate improved donor and host government understanding of key issues. The centrality of better data was voiced by all NGOs present, a priority need in Iran and Pakistan, as well as upon return to Afghanistan, to enable tailored programming that support youth's potential and are aligned with their aspirations.

"There is need for regional information collection and sharing to be supported by donors with a widely disseminated platform for this information to be housed. Donors need to think of the road to sustainability pragmatically – the funding coming to displaced Afghans is reducing but there is no exit strategy planned to cope with this. Supporting refugees arriving in Europe should not detract from support to countries of origin – their problems need to be addressed at this root level." (Mercy Corps)

This is the first of three thematic workshops. This workshop is intended to create space for programme information exchange between NGOs, UN agencies, national and regional governments responsible for their protection. The workshop closed on key action points and responsibilities to be shared.

3. Meeting Theme: Displaced Afghan Youth

- At an international level, **the UN calls for the development of youth policies, which address the needs of groups of young people** who are particularly vulnerable as a result of their current circumstances, political conditions, or long histories of social exclusion or discrimination.
- At a regional level, **children below the age of 14 account for half of the 2.45 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran**, while youth make up a significant proportion of the population.
- At a national level, **1 in 6 youth in Kabul was born outside of Afghanistan**. They have experienced forced and voluntary migration, half had refugee status, the other half have migrated irregularly.
- At the time of this workshop, young Afghans are leaving increasingly westwards, joining irregular migration flows to Europe.

Afghan refugees remain one of the largest and longest displaced populations in the world. Three decades of recurrent conflict have led to the education of successive generations of Afghan children being disrupted or discontinued. Today an estimated 2.6 million Afghans remain in exile – generously hosted by the Islamic Republics of Pakistan and Iran. Equivalent numbers of unregistered Afghans are considered to reside in both countries. The Afghan refugee population in both Pakistan and Iran is young, with second and third generations of children having been born into displacement. Children below the age of 14 account for half of the 2.45 million Afghan refugees in both countries, with youth (15-24) also comprise a significant proportion of the population. In Afghanistan, a sizable refugee returnee caseload has placed large pressures on an already strained education system and has adverse implications on the ability of Afghan youth to sustainably reintegrate and limiting national progress in education and development.

FOCUS ON EDUCATION AND LIVELIHOODS

While Pakistan and Iran both allow enrolment of Afghan children in schools, educating more than a million school age refugees is not without its challenges. Enrolment of Afghan children in schools still remains relatively low in some areas and literacy rates extremely poor although in Iran the government has, in 2015, decided to extend access to primary and secondary education to all Afghan refugees, registered and unregistered, which, considering the high number of unregistered refugees in Iran is a noteworthy decision. Because of the protracted nature of the Afghan displacement, second and third generation refugees have become trapped in a cycle of low educational attainment owing to various factors linked to their displacement environment, such as poverty, socio-cultural traditions and institutional reasons. Linked to this challenging education context, where Afghan youth often struggle to access primary and secondary education and quality training, there is a skills deficit that limits the ability of refugee youth to gain vocational opportunities and livelihoods as young adults. Expanding efforts to provide quality education and training options for Afghan youth is also recognised as a proven guarantee of increasing the prospect of a sustainable return should Afghan refugees choose to return to Afghanistan.

The NGO Thematic Regional Meeting explores learning on key protection and programmatic response needs of protracted Afghan refugee populations in Iran and Pakistan, and returnees in Afghanistan with a particular focus on **displaced Afghan youth populations**. In his introduction, NRC Iran Country Director Olivier Vandecasteele focused **on youth as a demographic group that can bring together NGOs to work more effectively**. “Joint assessments are necessary because we have different strengths to highlight in our work as none of us can claim to solve all the issues at hand.”

II. Changing profiles of Afghan youth

The lessons learned from fourteen years of returns show some recurrent obstacles that prevent youth from fully realising their potential in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Certification of education and skills are among the most tangible obstacles discussed during this workshop.

- UN definition: Youth are persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years
- Youth are in the midst of life transitions in very different national contexts:
 - From childhood to adulthood
 - From school to jobs
 - From birth to origins
 - **Youth are not just any adult-in-the-making:** they are the ones born and raised in exile, for whom knowledge of Afghanistan is the **most limited and intangible**. They are the ones who have been giving access to a different life, who may have more options as a result: to stay or leave.
- A position to be strengthened: Youth can act on their **aspirations** as they are:
 - Less sentimental in their discourse than their parents
 - More pragmatic reflection with a focus on jobs, property, rights
 - More idealistic about their desires to rebuild the country

The role of NGOs is to ensure context relevant programming that provides safe choices for youth, out of harm's way. At the time of this workshop Afghans are leaving increasingly westwards, joining irregular migration flows to Europe.

The growing importance of youth in programming is increasingly recognized, with access to education and skills being the gateway to durable solutions, youth empowerment and social inclusion. Anecdotal evidence shows that youth in Iran and Pakistan are hesitant about return to the land of their parents, but interested in knowing how a return could serve them. Programming will need to open up options for youth, through entry in schools, training programs and labor markets. Programming in Iran and Pakistan must be geared to labor markets in Afghanistan, with targeted trainings.

1. A diverse skill set: Three Subgroups of "Afghan youth"

The focus in this 2-day workshop is on Afghan displaced youth with a focus on:

- **EDUCATION**
 - School systems – public/private, formal/informal
 - Out of school children
 - School drop outs
- **SKILLS**
 - Qualification/basic skills
 - Entrepreneurial/Vocational and technical skills
- **PREPAREDNESS**
 - Aspirations
 - Other durable solutions besides return: Local integration and Resettlement
 - Capabilities and Knowledge

Afghan youth find that they either do not have the right skills (e.g. even basic language skills) **or do not know how to make use of their existing skills in their new environment of return.**

IN AFGHANISTAN

Enrolment rates in Afghan schools have risen, with girls' enrolment in primary education rising from less than 40 per cent to over 80 per cent and secondary education rising from 5 per cent to over 34 per cent.

In just five years, literacy among women and girls aged 15 to 24 has increased to 30 per cent nationwide and to 40 per cent among young urban women in Afghanistan. Yet barriers remain, particularly for returnees, including poverty, socio-cultural restrictions upon girls, poor infrastructure and lack of qualified teaching staff, particularly female teachers. In provinces plagued by conflict and instability, as few as one per cent of teachers are female. In Afghanistan an estimated 3.5 million children are still out of school.

Access to education is still a problem for returnees from Iran and Pakistan, male and female alike. 45% of the 13,000 public schools in Afghanistan operate without suitable buildings.

Lack of access to schools

The lack of access to schooling in their immediate area is a big problem for youth. This may account for rising levels of illiteracy in the future, moreover for a difference in literacy levels across genders; especially for Pashtun female youth, as they are prohibited to leave the house due to Pashtun traditions.

An elitist system

The poorest of youth cannot afford to study in schools.

Family pressures

Communities' feedback is that families will prefer their youth to work instead of getting an education, if a choice has to be made. Access to education therefore strongly depends on family attitudes towards education and on economic pressures.

IN IRAN

■ THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

In Iran, 98 per cent of the Iranian population aged 15–24 is literate and 94 per cent of the population complete primary school. Afghan refugees have the right to access Iranian public schools, although fees can be restrictive for some Afghan families. That said, in the 2013–2014 school year, 338,276 refugee children, Afghan and Iraqi, accessed education in Iran, a seven per cent increase on the previous year. The rate of literacy among Afghan refugees has increased from 6% in 1981 to 69% in 2009 (HAMI) – with quasi gender equality in favour of girls: 53% girls, 47% boys. Due to the decree by the Supreme Leader in 2015 access to education for all Afghan national has been granted and therefore the literacy rates are expected to increase even more.

■ AN EDUCATION GAMECHANGER?

Attitudes to education and literacy seems to have changed during exile in Iran with education seen as a possible means to social mobility. Overall, literacy rates and education levels rose after arrival in Iran. These gains were maintained through the creation of informal schools, self-run by Afghan refugees, as a means to bypass the prohibitive fees some were asked to pay in Iranian schools. The combined impact of

the global financial crisis, the economic situation in the region, high inflation and the sanctions has affected the service delivery of various sectors of the Government. Over the past three years, the phasing out of a number of nationwide Government subsidies, including for fuel and some food items, has resulted in a sharp rise in the cost of basic services. For instance, school tuition fees increased by approximately 45 per cent in the 2013-2014 school year. Health treatment charges have likewise seen a 30 per cent rise since 2012, while energy prices have increased several-fold. These price hikes have particularly affected refugees, who are often in a more vulnerable situation than the host population.

From a perspective of NGOs, Afghans are now not returning but leaving Iran: *“With the recent changes in Europe, thousands and thousands are illegally passing the border to Iran and from Iran to Turkey, Greece and so on. In the past three months, merely every month, 10,000 illegal Afghan migrants have travelled to Sweden and Sweden is hosting them in the city halls! Operation Mercy lost over 30% of their clientele and 2 of our self-help groups in the villages were cancelled as the members left Iran. I think that there is so much focus on repatriation on your subgroups and I wonder if you still want it the same (of course this has to go with all the other sessions). Perhaps it is the time to plan and think differently.”* (Operation Mercy)

IN PAKISTAN

■ OBSTACLES TO EDUCATION

While UNHCR and partners provide access to basic healthcare and education in the refugee villages, refugees living outside of these villages encounter more difficulties in accessing essential services due to overstretched resources and financial constraints.

Literacy rates and levels of education of Afghan refugees remain low, particularly amongst women and girls. 80 % of Afghan refugee boys and 90 % of refugee girls drop out before completing grade 3 and only 6 % of boys and 4 % of girls manage to complete primary education.

■ A CHALLENGING NATIONAL EDUCATION CONTEXT

Access to education for Afghan refugees in Pakistan sits within an extremely challenging national education context. Pakistan is faced with the second largest out-of-school population (25 million) after Nigeria, not counting the also relatively large number of out-of-school Afghan refugee children with 80 per cent not being engaged in formal schooling.

Moreover, 80 per cent of Afghan refugee boys and 90 per cent of refugee girls drop out before completing grade 3 and only 6 per cent of boys and 4 per cent of girls manage to complete primary education.

Female literacy among the Afghan refugee population is 7.59 per cent (UNHCR 2015). National and provincial level policy reforms, backed by appropriate resource allocations, could help to enhance the access of refugee children to quality education. Reintegration of Afghan students in the Afghan school system after return is posing further challenges as certification processes of school documents on both sides are overly bureaucratic, expensive and lengthy. The Government of Afghanistan, through relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Education, is committed to facilitating re-entry of children into the national education system in Afghanistan.

In Pakistan, some 80 per cent of the school-age Afghan refugee population is currently out of school (UNHCR 2015), resulting in extremely low literacy among Afghan refugees. Only an estimated 33 per cent of Afghan refugees in Pakistan are able to read and write.

2. An Urban Afghan Youth in Exile and in Return

IN IRAN

The Islamic Republic of Iran is host to one of the world's largest urban refugee population with over 950,000 registered Afghan refugees, according to Government figures. 97 per cent of these refugees reside in urban or semi-urban areas across the country. The majority of Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran originate from central, western and northern provinces of Afghanistan. Based on available statistics from 2011, it is estimated that 57 per cent of Afghan refugees live in the provinces of Tehran, Khorasan Razavi, or Esfahan; another 22 per cent live in Kerman, Fars, or Qom; 8 per cent in Qazvin, South Khorasan, Khuzestan, Gilan, or Mazandaran; and 3 per cent in Alborz, Semnan, or Markazi.

KEY FACTS – IRAN

- 950,000 refugees
- More than 1 million unregistered (est.)
- 97% reside in urban areas
- 3% live in rural settlements

IN PAKISTAN

Since the late 1990s a significant number of Afghan refugees have moved out of refugee villages to (semi-)urban areas. Today, 67 per cent live in urban or rural areas, while the remaining 33 per cent reside in 54 refugee villages. More than half of the Afghan refugee population in Pakistan is under the age of 15, 64 per cent of whom are children between 5 and 14 years. Youth (15-24 years old) make up another 20 per cent of the total Afghan refugee population. (PPVR)

KEY FACTS – PAKISTAN

- 1.5 million refugees
- 1 million unregistered (est.)
- 67% reside in urban areas
- Est. 20% of Afghan refugees are youth
-

IN AFGHANISTAN

According to GIZ, around 1 million young Afghans cannot access TVET courses due to a lack of training opportunities, financial obstacles and the trade-off between short term income generating activities and free training courses, and the misperceptions of what vocational education and training can bring, as an 'added value' to individuals and their families. Samuel Hall research finds 2 additional reasons for a lack of youth's access to skills training:

1. **Urban frontiers:** Kabul's urban geography is marked by economic boundaries that youth are not able to pass on their own.
2. **Reliance on the informal:** Youth do not know of formal opportunities but only of the informal market that provides training. Yet, the informal market rests on strong networks and connections that returnee youth lack.
3. **An education and information gap limits the economic integration of youth:** Youth want training – men and women alike – but are 'in the dark' as to what types of training, which providers – government, UN, NGOs, formal or informal market – focus on training for youth, and for the "uneducated displaced youth", at no cost.

Samuel Hall’s data show the common issue of job insecurity and instability due to:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Absence of contracts | 4. Underpaid jobs |
| 2. Prominence of day jobs | 5. Informal sector |
| 3. Temporary jobs | |

CONCLUSION:

Room for regional initiatives for youth–based assistance and programming

Assistance is almost exclusively received in Afghanistan (96.5%). This carves out a role for more integrated regional programming. Whether refugee youth in Iran or Pakistan, or migrant youth in Europe, there can and should be a link between building skills and facilitating return. Those that return do not showcase a greater set of skills than those who never left. The impact of migration is null or even negative on the ability of migrants to secure jobs upon return. This leaves room for regional initiatives for youth assistance as part of the humanitarian and development response to the needs of Afghan refugees and migrants.

Factors that hinder returns are the perception of the security situation in Afghanistan, the lack of information about educational and work opportunities at home and the identity issues of people who see themselves more as Iranians than Afghans. The work needs to be a two-way endeavour though; activities on both sides of the border need to happen. Security, but also the possibility of sustainable livelihood opportunities need to be there, if not there is less inclination to return.

3. Institutional changes governing Afghan youth: The timing is ripe for programming for Afghan youth in the region

There is a lack of coordination between NGOs, not ill will. There is a growing sense of donor fatigue voiced by all NGOs. Beyond NGOs and donors, are the institutional changes occurring in all three countries. These changes now allow for entry points for programming in education, livelihoods and health.

AFGHANISTAN	IRAN	PAKISTAN
High Commission on Migration set-up by the National Unity Government	Universal education decree for Afghan children regardless of legal status by Supreme Leader	National Refugee Policy
Education visa arrangement with Iran under review	Universal Salamat Insurance (Health) for all Afghan registered refugees	Political changes in border areas and security concerns increasing since the Peshawar school attack of December 2014
Entry point: National TVET Strategy launched in 2014	Entry points: Skills for return and reintegration	Entry points on social services in local communities

Identifying entry points for programming:

NGOs recognise the need to work on public attitudes to refugee populations, to allow refugees to be seen as contributors, social and economic actors coming with social and economic capital for their societies of exile. The key focus is to change perceptions, mentalities and addressing fears.

To do so, NGOs argue for livelihoods trainings and empowering local organisations.

1. LIVELIHOODS TRAINING

The future must be one of integrated TVET programming, done in coordination and streamlined across borders, so that skills taught in Iran can be realistically applied in Afghanistan, and skills built in Pakistan can contribute to the Afghan economy, or simply, that skills in exile can contribute to societies of exile. Bureaucratic issues remain key hurdles, such as the lack of certificates, of social capital and networks to lead to economic capital, and the lack of labour market information. NGOs advocate for an end to conditionalities in training that can create instability and fears of one's future status: help in setting up a business or providing training in Afghanistan should not require the foregoing of one's refugee status in Iran or Pakistan.

2. EMPOWERING LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

To address the current bottlenecks through coordinated needs assessments, information sharing for a realistic picture of return with realistic objectives, and highlighting the need for undocumented refugees to receive support is necessary. Overall, NGOs will have to play a greater role in improving the social acceptance of refugees in host countries. There may now be renewed openness for such policies in the Iranian government, with access to education and primary health as examples.

For instance, the main reasons for out-of-school children in Iran in 2015 remain: the lack of information on terms of enrolment; over-aged refugee students; overpopulation in schools; families' inability to pay schools tuition fees; and invalid documents or vague identification documents. As a result, NGOs in Iran call for more work on:

- Connecting children to schools
- Overcoming the reluctance from some schools to take Afghan refugee children
- Changing attitudes of Iranian families towards refugee children in schools
- Integrating social skills in education to improve communication within society

NGOs in Pakistan discussed working on:

- The lack of capacity, resources, budget
- Registration issue given the little progress on registration of Afghans who are undocumented which means access to formal education is not an option
- The economic obstacles to education as private schools are expensive

NGOs to work in Afghanistan on:

- Budget, infrastructure
- Anti-school campaigns
- Legal registration of parents and families enrolment to school
- Working children challenges
- Accreditation, recognition of certificates upon return

IV. Spotlight on NGOs' lessons learned

1. Cross-border initiatives: Lessons learned

Initiatives from UNHCR/NICCO provide lessons learned on attempts for cross-border training and livelihoods programming. In 2014, eight companies from Afghanistan came to Tehran. UNHCR had a 6-month salary guaranteed for beneficiary youth ready to enrol in a program that would take them from Iran to jobs in Afghanistan. The interest was there among the youth, but the conditionality clause proved the biggest constraint: youth would be required to give away their refugee (Amayesh) card to benefit from the program. Families were against this clause. As a result, some went irregularly to avoid losing their status, but found out that they would not be getting the same package. Out of 100 potential beneficiaries, 16 accepted to return, 10 out of those irregularly.

- **Conditionality** (foregoing of the refugee status as a requisite to job placement) proved to be the reason for the failure of this scheme to connect Afghan refugee youth with labour markets at home.

Job placements are feasible. Operation Mercy, an NGO active in Iran with Afghan youth, placed 120 youth trained in Iran into jobs, in a Sida-funded programme. Yet cross-border internships and job placements are limited: Afghan youth do not want to lose their refugee status for a 6-month job opportunity. This provides an entry point for advocacy with governments on the risks of tying refugee status with possible job opportunities in Afghanistan.

2. Defining skills to learn, and linkages to loans: Lessons learned

NGOs discussed ways to move away from a sole provider to multiple providers of service trainings, and how to best engage with governments. The key obstacle remains the evidence base on future markets, and not just current markets, and on specific sectoral needs. More can be done for NGOs to engage with governments to identify sectoral entry points for refugee populations, to better match demand and supply, and to carve out an economic role for refugees. A “win-win situation”, to benefit countries of exile with an eye to return. Vocational training needs to be completed with **soft skills training** for youth: negotiating with employers, and life skills to keep and maintain jobs. The issue of skill sets was linked closely with a question of loans – informing youth on how to approach banks.

- **Loans for businesses** show different degrees of results in each context
 - In Iran, micro-finance initiatives (led by Operation mercy) have allowed villagers to be self-reliant in rural settings. In Afghanistan, Mercy Corps' experience in Kandahar shows that sharia-based loans have not worked as efficiently as kit distributions.
 - A key to unlocking solutions will be linking people to banks so that they can get a loan
 - Youth cannot be expected to start a business without a loan
 - They should be taught about how to approach banks
 - NGOs may have to play a role in advocacy with banks?

3. Developing urban programmes: Lessons learned

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) shared two successes and one challenge on urban programming:

- The first success is focusing on people with the worst vulnerabilities. Addressing the source of income but also the source of their vulnerability.
- The second best practice is linkage of programmes: to follow up on vocational training with grants for setting up business, to monetize their skills.
- A challenge: NGOs could learn to make more linkages between the people trained and the resources they need. Knowledge of suppliers can lead to alternative routes to businesses, piloting different routes to markets, notably for women.

4. Including parents: Best practices

ILIA, an NGO working in Iran with Afghan refugees, shared its experience of working with parents, and mothers to better target youth, notably on skills and income generation. ILIA spoke of the need to give financial management skills to increase self-reliance among refugee households, beyond individual beneficiaries. “We need to further discuss what kinds of jobs are required, for how long and for what objective”. In these discussions, mothers were seen as a key demographic group and a common ally to engage with in furthering youth programming, especially for females. From here, linking youth, mothers, and money management schemes will build the sustainability of businesses in the long run.

5. Including governments? A tentative exit strategy

Mercy Corps introduced its INVEST programme: a market driven model where students pay a fee, encouraging their motivation and investment in the training, focusing on the sustainability of the activity. The assumption is that young people need to feel a sense of purpose in their community: it is not all just about having jobs to bring stability to their society, but about building a role and a place for themselves, building social assets through this process, and building a sense of greater justice. The work starts with functional literacy and numeracy skills, and builds upward, to a “skills plus” model integrating a breadth of skill sets adapted to markets.

The issue for the NGO becomes one of exit strategy: “if our funds finish, our programmes stop. Who, if not NGOs, can deliver these services?” While monitoring and evaluation activities show an impact of the INVEST programme on economic optimism, through an adapted market-oriented approach, the structural factors will have to be taken into account.

These lessons learned will now need to be more effectively shared with governments to allow for handover and exit strategies – even if not now, building the possibility of an exit strategy in the future is important.

- Where data is available within governments, it should be shared with NGOs.
- Where access to the field is limited by governments, authorisations for assessments will be needed.

III. Building an Indicators Framework

1. Why a common indicators framework for youth programming?

The 2013 *A Global Review – UNHCR’s Engagement with Displaced Youth* reviews where UNHCR stands on its approach to youth programming. Key recommendations include (among others) to:

1. Formalize and agree upon a definition of youth
2. Start collecting baseline data
3. Disseminate guidelines and provide training for staff
4. Transition beyond single issue programming for youth (like HIV/AIDS) to offer a more comprehensive youth strategy.
5. Renew data collection to improve monitoring and evaluation of programmatic responses targeting youth

In a nutshell, what is missing at the moment – and where this group set the way forward is in discussing:

- An indicators framework for youth programming
- A Multi-dimensional framework (not just education or health, but a composite)
- Methods for training and data collection, monitoring and evaluation.

Having a common set of indicators would allow NGOs to build a baseline to measure the impact of return on youth, measure the impact of programs on return outcomes (and compare between programs) and pave the way for regional youth programming – beyond national borders.

A key take-away from the workshop was the **commonly recognized need for more comprehensive needs assessments, using collectively agreed upon tools. All NGOs present agreed to look at a multi-dimensional understand of youth well-being:**

- Young people need to feel more accepted socially
- Young people need to be aware of their rights, and given access to the means to fulfill them
- Young people require psychosocial support to navigate new environments and family contexts
- Programming requires an Age, Gender, Diversity Mainstream (AGDM) approach
- Programming requires to provide youth skills in sectors and markets that they can work in
- Programming needs to be able to follow beneficiaries across borders: requiring a re-conceptualization and operationalization of regional programming, and sufficient training for staff to be able to undertake this challenging task. Above all, political will is necessary to allow for not just regional, but cross border programming.

So what makes a good indicator? Discussions evolved around **tangible indicators**, clear, measureable and time-bound indicators, and **intangible indicators**; indicators supporting youth abilities, strengths and capacities to contribute to activities.

One of the main indicators of wellbeing used to assess of the situation of youth is education. The lack of education is often both a cause and a consequence of poverty cycles, leading populations into an ‘education trap’ where child labour, illiteracy, informal education, lack of or irregular school attendance are the main vulnerabilities transcending generations. The group works went beyond education.

The indicators discussed and thought useful for assessment tools included:

- Economic dimension
 - Access to employment
 - Debt
 - Income
 - Demand-side market linkages
 - Private sector links
- Social dimension
 - Access to services
 - Social assets
 - Network connections
 - No. In civic activities, showcasing leadership roles
 - Feeling of discrimination
- Legal dimension
 - Awareness of rights
 - Access to fulfill rights
- Health dimension
 - Drug, substance abuse
 - Need for psychosocial support
- Support dimension
 - No. of coping mechanisms (positive and negative)
 - Frequency of information sharing, no. of information outlets
 - Stakeholders involved
 - Referral systems

The pre-requisites to measure wellbeing across these dimensions will necessitate a change in the ways NGOs in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan work together so that they can share information on each dimension covering different phases of the lives of youth – pre and post-return.

The requirements to measure the wellbeing of youth will require ensuring the feasibility of NGOs:

- Following beneficiaries across borders
- Training facilitators/staff in youth programming
- Training beneficiaries to collect data on youth
- Updating regular context analyses
- Providing compatible data collection systems
- Engaging in referral systems
- Coordinating across borders

While NGOs are prepared to make these commitments, access and political will is required in all three countries to facilitate the difficult task of operating in three starkly different national and legal contexts.

2. Indicators for a framework on youth-based programming

Possible checklist of baseline indicators to build a youth programme

- % literate
- % secondary education enrolment
- % graduates from secondary education
- % graduates from tertiary education
- % enrolled in / graduated from a TVET programme
- % employed from TVET
- % formal or informal employment
- % self employed
- % own a shelter
- % with a decent nutrition (baseline)
- % have a family structure
- % have medical care access
- % showcase health concerns among the head of household
- % of youth who are heads of household / main breadwinner
- % marriage
- % socially included
- % links abroad
- % plan to return
- % plan further migration
- % mobile phones
- % monitoring
- % tracing mechanism
- % civil documentation
- % have children
- % have proper IDs
- % married to host citizens

Possible checklist of indicators to monitor skills programmes for youth

- % youth who can keep a job for 6 months
- % able to create their own business
- % showcasing soft skills
 - o Self esteem
 - o Confidence
 - o Negotiation skills
 - o Empathy
 - o Body language
 - o Communications skills
 - o Active participant in the community
 - o Ability to manage anger, conflict
- % graduate from tertiary education
- % job status post training
- % of trained beneficiaries
- % change in level of household income
- % of mentoring schemes
- % of improved language skills
- % in increased employer satisfaction
- % intending to migrate abroad

V. Defining programming options

Two common assumptions have framed discussions of durable solutions in the Afghan refugee context. First, the feasibility of reintegration in Afghanistan for those returning from Iran and Pakistan; and second, the feasibility of a regional approach to solving the world's most protracted crisis. These two assumptions were debated at this regional session, openly, with the latest evidence from the field. The questions asked were on:

1. The relevance of **(re-)integration** as a concept for Afghan refugee and returnee youth
2. The feasibility of **cross-border programming** for Afghan refugees.

1. Talking of Integration (and not Reintegration)

If returns are happening voluntarily, reintegration should be part of the returns policy to increase the chances of return leading to a durable solution. But what is really meant by the term reintegration? The prefix 're' suggests that returnees are going back to something known to them but this is often not the case, as shown by all NGOs present. NGOs know that they need to work on information sharing

The NGO groups present agreed that, for youth, the term preferred and to be used should be 'integration', opening up the way to discussing several durable solutions, to avoid an over-focus on returns that is detached from the current reality. Integration locally, but also integration upon return for youth who have, for the most part, never seen or who do not remember Afghanistan. For them, integration means a process whereby they negotiate membership in their place of return – in social, economic, cultural and political terms.

2. Clarifying assumptions on cross-border programming

Governments and donors increasingly ask for cross-border programming: yet, donors hold unrealistic expectations of 'cross-border' and/or regional programming. NGOs ask: in a region where access is limited, where governments do not authorize implementation or monitoring, when offices are not present in all three countries equally, can we effectively speak of cross-border programming?

1. **CROSS BORDER DEFINITION & CONCEPTS**

Cross-border programming is not the same as a multi-country programming or regional programming. It requires minimum standards on the duration of the programme, on the compatibility of a core group of beneficiaries to be traced across borders, and on necessary conditions for monitoring. The minimum standards for cross-border programming could include:

- The same cohort of beneficiaries across borders
- Adapted infrastructure
- Coordination and communication between NGOs for effective referral systems
- Presence of legal services, certificates, and family tracing mechanisms
- Cross-border monitoring as the basis for cross-border programming

The current obstacles to cross-border programming include:

- Conditionality
- Mismatch between national regulations
- Lack of political will to provide multi-year funding and the necessary infrastructure for cross border programming

2. CROSS BORDER MONITORING

Information needs to be shared across borders for those in decision-making positions to have an influence and make the right decisions, to build a more realistic picture of what the Afghan displacement crisis looks like. Cross-border monitoring is essential to identify gaps and opportunities – that is what is missing at the moment: NGOs are focused on their own interventions; the next step is to keep a focus on how to best complement each other, building towards synergies and partnerships.

NGOs can feed in the information that is required, with a set of standard indicators that NGOs can contribute to but one NGO cannot decide on that indicator. NGOs should be part of the conversation but we need someone to bring all of us together, to convene NGOs and to say “this is what you will commit to”. This does not require partnerships at the level of information collection, each NGO can do that alone, but it does require partnerships in order to act on that information and to bring it all together and tie it into something meaningful. **NGOs can have a common set of indicators, but donors need to request that NGOs report on these indicators.**

- **Workshop discussions on indicators serve as a guidance that can be utilised by NGOs in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.**
- One way to coordinate the implementation of indicators would be to have a dedicated body with overarching oversight and a mandate to coordinate this information.

Examples of lessons learned:

- NRC ICLA: we try to share information between our Iran and Afghanistan office, with information about areas they are from or where they are thinking about going back to, to see if they can find a proper job market and other such considerations. Some returnees have pending legal cases, follow up to make sure that when they go back there, they can know that their case has been worked on before.
 - How information can help reduce some of the fears around return?
- Mercy Corps: under the EC funding; we have cross border market assessments using the same tools, for general assessments, but we have not yet gotten to the stage of monitoring people across borders, of introducing participants who have started in one country to Afghanistan. This will be one of the challenges coming up – watch this space!

3. Actors: Building a cross-border NGO network on Afghan refugee issues

NGOs are on the ground with access to other NGOs, the UN might have more clout dealing with governments and that is often – with cross border programming – a very good synergy. There is a pre-existing joint structure for NGO-UN collaboration in the HCT Particularly with cross-border programming, it is very important to work on collaboration between governments because of the MOFA approvals required. **NGOs would welcome the creation of a cross-border NGO network that could support information sharing, programme learning and undertake joint advocacy, and also to work with the private sector.**

V. Programming options to be discussed

Discussions geared at the end of the two-day workshop towards possible avenues for NGO collaboration, introduced during this workshop and requiring more time and investigation.

1. **A common indicators framework and a common mechanism to monitor outcomes of return**
 - A common set of indicators influencing the UNHCR return monitoring questionnaire
 - To analyse the indicators framework data
 - To analyse the socioeconomic conditions of returnee families
2. **An annual handbook on return and integration of Afghan refugee and returnee youth** that could possibly be developed to share information. Yet questions remained as to who would be in charge, to gather and share this information.
3. **Monitoring through new tools** such as using social media, social networks, and returnee monitoring, from entry point to their place of settlement, at specific points in time: after three months, six months, possibly inputting the information and updating the information directly online, at the family level.

This third point is the focus of the following final section. It focuses not only on context analysis and return outcomes, but on **measuring aspirations that Afghan refugee and returnee youth have of their own lives**. Return numbers dropping is an indicator, but much more can be assessed by better understanding motivations, wants and needs of youth. At this given moment none of the organizations have any concrete indicators to measure **the aspiration to return** to Afghanistan. Measuring aspirations could be a potential next time in planning programmes, but would require adequate indicators.

VI. Advocacy and a way forward

NGO participants would find the following next steps helpful

- **A joint assessment of Afghan refugee profiles and youth needs in Iran by NGOs**
 - To be jointly organized with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR
- **Joint advocacy statements by ICRI, ACBAR and PHF**
 - Joint statements by the three coordination bodies to be given at UNHCR NGO Consultation and UNHCR Ex-Com
- **A 2016 joint assessment of Afghan refugee profiles and youth needs in Pakistan**
 - To be jointly organized with the Government of Pakistan
- **A renewed interest in exploring possibilities, synergies, partnerships in cross border programming**
 - Closing the conditionality debate: assistance should not be made conditional on refugee status upon return, to open up assistance for undocumented returnees equally
- **Agreeing on improved reporting, monitoring standards of return**
 - For comparable baseline data across countries: from literacy to social inclusion
 - A multi-dimensional approach to youth wellbeing: for a wellbeing score for youth in each country covering education, livelihoods, health, social inclusion and aspirations
- **Filling in the gaps raised by the UNHCR 2013 report**
 - With an indicators framework
 - Addressing the data gap on youth and taking forward youth-based programming strategy

Why NGOs want the data and how they plan on using it?

- *To make data public*
- *To predict the most adapted durable solution*
- *To work on both return and host country contexts*
- *To improve alternative routes to different markets*
- *To prepare youth with skills adapted to future markets*
- *To strengthen synergies, and integrated approaches*
- *To build referral mechanisms*
- *To integrate monitoring in regional efforts*
- *To advocate with donors for funding on regional initiatives*
- *To support youth in their transition from childhood to adulthood*

At a time of growing interest in Afghan refugees in Europe, of growing insecurity in Afghanistan, NGOs gathered in Iran to agree on upholding their responsibility and commitment to Afghan youth, host and origin governments, to provide a platform to access information, intervene and support youth to transition to stable adulthood and stable societies. Furthermore, NGOs will work side-by-side with UNHCR to develop an indicators framework, address the data gap on youth and develop a comprehensive strategy for Afghan youth refugees and returnees.



PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED 15 NGOs + IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, BAFIA and the EU / ECHO mission

