



POLICY BRIEF

**Afghan Authorities' Policies and Plans
for Durable Solutions:**
Approaches to Return and Reintegration

J u n e 2 0 2 6

List of Acronyms

ADSP	Asia Displacement Solutions Platform
ALASP	Afghanistan Land Administration System Project
ANDMA	Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
DoRR	Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DSWG	Durable Solutions Working Group
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IVR	Interactive Voice Response
KII	Key Informant Interview
MoEC	Ministry of Economy
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MoRR	Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MUDL	Ministry of Urban Development and Land
NCCSAP	National Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan
NEPA	National Environmental Protection Agency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSIA	National Statistics and Information Authority
PARR	Priority Area for Return and Reintegration
RCHC	United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan
REHA	Resilience, Environment and Humanitarian Aid
SSAR	Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview
STFA	Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WLO	Women-Led Organisation

Introduction

Why this Brief?

The Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP) is a joint initiative of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), which works to contribute to the development of comprehensive solutions for displaced populations in Asia. Established in 2018, ADSP works to build an evidence base, facilitate joint advocacy and a common understanding of durable solutions. Since 2022, Samuel Hall, a research organisation founded and based in Kabul since 2010, has been the research and learning partner of ADSP on durable solutions in Afghanistan. For this brief, Samuel Hall partnered with REHA (Resilience, Environment and Humanitarian Aid) a non-governmental organisation (NGO) with deep expertise in environmental governance and public sector engagement.

This brief outlines areas for cooperation among national and international stakeholders on durable solutions in 2026. It maps Afghan authorities' current policies, practices, and perceptions related to durable solutions for the period 2021–2025 and looking forward to priority interventions in 2026. It identifies gaps between policy frameworks and community realities, and generates recommendations for ADSP, the Durable Solutions Working Group (DSWG), donors and relevant authorities.

Key messages

Afghanistan has multiple policy instruments, decrees, institutional mechanisms and sectoral plans relevant to return and reintegration, but no updated, comprehensive and operational reintegration framework that connects border reception with longer-term solutions in areas of return.

Earlier frameworks continue to influence practice selectively, while newer instruments often provide high-level direction without sufficient operational guidance on eligibility, sequencing, institutional roles, safeguards or accountability.

Findings from the urban and peri-urban Herat case study in this publication are illustrative and are not representative. Community-level evidence from the case study shows that gaps in documentation, housing, livelihoods, water access and gender-sensitive protection are not only material constraints but may also create protection risks that can undermine durable solutions.

The most practical entry points are clearer operational guidance, stronger municipal engagement, protection-sensitive data-sharing, civil documentation access, climate- and water-sensitive settlement planning, and financing that links emergency reception with reintegration outcomes.

Context

As of December 2025, almost 6 million Afghans have returned to Afghanistan¹ as Iran and Pakistan have accelerated their policy on returns.² Although the authorities and host communities have shown solidarity in welcoming returnees, the influx is straining overstretched services in areas where returns are concentrated.

According to the 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HRNP), nearly half of Afghanistan's population – or 22 million people – will require humanitarian assistance in 2026, reflecting the protracted nature of this crisis.³ As of late May 2026, the HRNP was just 16% funded.⁴ With continued socioeconomic and environmental pressures and an expected increase in returns, well-defined policies are essential to guide effective interventions. The lack of strategic continuity and clarity between pre- and post-2021 policies has led to inconsistent implementation across provinces. Although the authorities in Afghanistan have issued policy directives, such as the Policy and Response for Afghan Returnees (2023), further details are often not written out in law or policies.

Since this research was conducted prior to the escalation of regional conflict involving Iran in 2026, the findings do not capture its potential impact. These dynamics may affect Afghan returnees from Iran by accelerating return movements and further straining already limited reintegration capacities. This underscores the need for continuous monitoring of regional dynamics and flexible policy responses that can adapt to sudden geopolitical shifts.

Additionally, in Afghanistan, climate-induced hazards and environmental degradation are a major driver of displacement, further complicating efforts toward durable solutions. Recurrent droughts, flooding, land degradation, and water scarcity – combined with sudden-onset disasters such as earthquakes – have eroded livelihoods, reduced agricultural productivity, and disrupted access to services in areas of origin and return. In provinces such as Badghis, rainfall declined by 49% in 2025.⁵ Since 70% of Afghans rely on agriculture and livestock for their livelihoods, this deficit has had a severe impact. As a result, many households have been forced to

1 IOM, *Flow Monitoring Dashboard: DTM Afghanistan – 2025*, February 2026.

2 UNHCR Operational Data Portal, *Total Returns to Afghanistan in 2025*, November 2025.

3 Humanitarian Action, *2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan: Afghanistan*, December 2025.

4 [Humanitarian Action website](#) [Consulted in June 2026].

5 Siyar Sirat in Amu, *Report: 40% rainfall drop, rising heat deepen Afghanistan food crisis*, May 2025.

deprioritize health, education, and other essential needs.⁶ Many returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are returning to communities that are more exposed to climate risks than before.⁷ At the same time, reductions in funding have limited the supply-side capacity of authorities and service providers, restricting the resources and support available to reintegration efforts.⁸ In the absence of mainstreaming climate-responsive policies and adaptation measures, displacement dynamics risk becoming cyclical rather than transitional, undermining the sustainability of reintegration.

Recurrent displacement is likely to persist.⁹ IDPs and returnees continue to face overlapping challenges, including limited livelihood opportunities, restricted access to land and documentation, and competition over resources. Gender-based restrictions remain severe: 52% of the population is marginalised, with women largely prohibited from working, continuing education, or participating fully in community life.¹⁰ Food insecurity is also worsening, with 10% of the population falling into the food-insecure category during 2025.¹¹

These interconnected barriers underscore the need for a coherent and long-term strategy that supports sustainable reintegration. Yet, beyond immediate reception at borders and reliance on decrees, there is no articulated and evidence-based reintegration framework to guide durable solutions. The absence of a comprehensive framework is a central finding of this brief and shapes the analysis of gaps between policy and practice. The brief contributes to this effort by (1) mapping authorities' policies and practices on reintegration, (2) capturing local perceptions and experiences of these policies, and (3) identifying gaps and entry points to align policy, practice, and community needs.

Research Methodology

This brief is based on data collected in 2025 through: a desk review; 21 key informant interviews (KIIs)¹² with provincial and local authorities, United Nations (UN) agencies, as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and women-led organisations, which are recognised as durable solutions actors in their own right at border and community level, particularly in the current context of restricted international access; 10 semi-structured interviews with community leaders, elders, shura representatives (including IDPs, returnees, and host community members), and women's representatives; and six focus group discussions with returnees, with an equal split across gender groups. Women's perspectives were deliberately included through women's representatives in the semi-structured interviews and through focus group discussions.

Data collection was conducted primarily in Herat and Kabul. Kabul was selected as the centre of national policy-making and institutional engagement, while Herat was selected as a high-return urban and peri-urban case-study location, building on earlier ADSP/Samuel Hall research and allowing examination of policy implementation at community level. The community consultations were conducted in Herat; institutional interviews were conducted in Herat and Kabul. Women represented 3 of the 21 KII participants.

On 18 December 2025, a roundtable was organised with 21 Afghan institutions in Kabul¹³ to discuss the role of line ministries and departments for returnees and IDPs, and to further map policies, strategies and action plans, as well as priorities, for the coordination of durable solutions. This roundtable with authorities served as a validation of the findings presented here.

This methodology – anchored both at the level of authorities (Parts I and II) and communities (Part III) – grounds discussions on durable solutions in local realities and lived experiences. At the same time, this brief has important limitations. It does not provide a formal legal or policy analysis; rather, it maps ongoing discussions, stated commitments, operational practices, and emerging plans related to durable solutions. As these policies and approaches continue to evolve, the brief should be understood as a basis for discussion and engagement with all relevant stakeholders. Herat is used as an illustrative case study rather than as a representative sample of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. Community-level findings should therefore be read as context-specific evidence that may inform, but cannot by itself establish, nationwide conclusions about policy implementation or community experience.

6 Najia Alizada in Ground Truth Solutions, *Women on the frontlines of Afghanistan's climate crisis*, August 2025.

7 UNHCR / Samuel Hall (2025), *Climate Impacts: Return and Displacement in Afghanistan*, Research brief, August 2025.

8 Vibhu Mishra in UN News, *Afghanistan's crisis deepens as human rights recede and aid funding falls*, December 2025.

9 Ibid.

10 IOM DTM, *Mobility Dynamics at Afghanistan's Borders: Flow Monitoring Report (October - December 2025)*, January 2026.

11 UNICEF, *UNICEF Afghanistan Humanitarian Situation Report 1 – 31 May 2025*, June 2025.

12 Of the 21 interviews conducted, 3 (14.3%) were with women and 18 (85.7%) were with men.

13 Key informants interviewed represent the following organisations: International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Agency for Rehabilitation and Energy Conservation in Afghanistan (ARAA), Free Girls' Association (FGA), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), World Vision, Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR), National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), Administrative Office of the President, General Directorate for Coordination of Municipal Affairs, Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA), Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), Ministry of Economy and Commerce (MoEC), Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSA), Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW), Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), and Ministry of Finance (MoF), Ministry of Borders, Tribes and Tribal Affairs.

I. Plans

Policies on Return and Reintegration

Since August 2021, the authorities in Afghanistan have faced unprecedented challenges in managing large-scale population movements, including the return and reintegration of millions of Afghans from neighbouring countries, and of IDPs.¹⁴ In some cases, the authorities' policies and regulations have created additional constraints, particularly affecting service provision for women. This section examines the authorities' stated priorities, coordination mechanisms, and approaches to returnees and IDPs at border points and in areas of return post-2021.

National Institutional Structure

The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) remains the primary official institutional body responsible for internally displaced persons and returnee management and coordination. The ministry has stated its commitment to voluntary, gradual, secure, and dignified returns.¹⁵ Following the death of Minister Khalil Haqqani in December 2024, Maulawi Abdul Kabir assumed the position and continued engagement with international partners, including meetings with the EU Special Representative for Afghanistan.¹⁶

In May 2022, the authorities established the High Commission for the Return and Communications with Former Afghan Officials and Political Figures, led by Abdul Salam Hanafi. The Commission includes one secretariat and 12 working committees mandated to address the needs of returnees and IDPs.¹⁷ While this reflects institutional intent to encourage returns, no finalized policy framework has been issued to regulate the Commission's work. Qualitative data indicates that some individuals associated with the previous regime may have faced social or legal obstacles, and in certain cases departed again after a few months, suggesting that practical and protection concerns remain despite formal encouragement.¹⁸

At border points such as Spin Boldak (Kandahar), Torkham (Nangarhar), Islam Qala (Herat), and Zaranj (Nimroz), reception mechanisms have been established in coordination with humanitarian actors.¹⁹ These services remain limited relative to the scale of returns. Public statements by officials, including calls for "dignified" returns and joint mechanisms with host countries, indicate political intent and coordination priorities, but do not in themselves constitute finalized policy frameworks.²⁰

As of late 2025, several sectoral ministries have highlighted priorities—such as integrating returnees into education, health, and water programmes—but many of these remain at the level of proposed strategies or draft guidelines pending approval.²¹ The forthcoming MoRR 5-year plan and accompanying guidelines for returnees and IDPs are still under review and have not yet been published or made publicly available.

In contrast, several earlier frameworks continue to provide reference points for practice: the 2013 National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons, the 2017 Policy Framework for Returnees and IDPs, and the 2017 Land Management Law remain influential in shaping institutional approaches, even if their formal status under current authorities is unclear. More recent instruments, such as the 2023 Decree on Land Non-Transferability, the 2023 Policy and Response for Afghan Returnees, and the 2023 Decree on Support for Returning Refugees, provide high-level parameters but lack operational detail. The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (2025–2030) sets reintegration priorities within broader development goals but is aspirational rather than actionable. Overall, while institutional structures are in place, the absence of policy frameworks limits predictability and accountability. Clarifying which policies are formally adopted, and ensuring their consistent implementation, remains a priority for strengthening durable solutions.

14 OHCHR, *Afghanistan: Returns of Afghans creating multi-layered human rights crisis*, July 2025.

15 MoRR, *Draft Policy on Internally displaced Persons*, Objectives (p.1) and Vision (p.4), Department of Policy Development, Kabul, 11 March 2026

16 MoRR, [Press release](#) on a meeting with the European Union Special Representative for Afghanistan, October 2025

17 The Commission's committees include: Registration and Reception committee, Health and Services committee, Finance Committee, Transport Committee, Temporary Housing Committee, Permanent Housing Committee.

18 EUAA, *Country of Origin Information report: Afghanistan*, 1.4 Treatment of persons returning from abroad, Afghanistan Country Focus, February 2026

19 United Nations and NGO partners, [2026 Response Plan for Afghan Returnees](#), border response and (re-)integration response in areas of return, May 2026; IOM [post arrival assistance](#), IOM website.

20 Samuel Hall/REHA, *discussions held at an in-person Workshop on Durable Solutions with representatives of Afghan ministries*, Kabul, December, 2025.

21 Samuel Hall/REHA, *discussions held at an in-person Workshop on Durable Solutions with representatives of Afghan ministries*, Kabul, December, 2025.

Policy Mapping

While the formal legal status of several pre-2021 frameworks remains unclear, key informants described institutional practice as fluctuating, particularly where operational guidance remains useful. This points to selective continuity rather than a policy vacuum, with earlier laws and strategies shaping implementation despite ambiguity around their formal status. This section outlines existing policies and presents key informants' perspectives on whether and how these policies are being used to guide interventions. The assessment of policies has been organised using a colour-coded system to indicate their relevance and use in guiding interventions. Policies marked in **green** are actively applied by the authorities and serve as direct guidance for ongoing return and reintegration efforts. Those coded **yellow** are considered partially relevant: they were acknowledged by the authorities' representatives as important but are not consistently or widely used in practice. Policies designated **red** were not mentioned by respondents and, therefore, appear to have little or no influence on current interventions. All mentioned policies below – bar the forthcoming Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation's 5-year plan – have been independently read and reviewed by the research team.

Policy, Year, and Description [chronological order]	Perspectives from Key Informants	Assessment
National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (2013): Afghanistan's National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (2013) provides the overarching framework for identifying, assisting, and protecting IDPs across the country. The policy emphasises preventing forced evictions, recognising informal settlements, and supporting vulnerable populations, particularly women, children, and the elderly. ²²	The National IDP Policy continues to inform aspects of institutional practice . Officials, particularly from the MoRR / Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR), emphasised that internal procedures, strategic directions, and protection activities – such as preventing forced evictions – are still shaped by the principles laid out in the policy. ²³ The Ministry of Economy (MoEC) was specifically mentioned as prioritising alignment with the policy. ²⁴ In February 2026, a new draft policy was circulated by the authorities in Afghanistan for comments signalling a replacement of the 2013 IDP policy. No timeline has been confirmed.	●
National Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2015): Afghanistan's primary framework for addressing climate change outlines priorities for adaptation, mitigation, resilience building, and climate governance. The strategy identifies vulnerable populations, including IDPs and returnees. It references actions such as strengthening water resource management, rehabilitating irrigation systems, improving early warning systems, and promoting climate-resilient livelihoods. The strategy does not explicitly integrate returnee settlement planning or population increases. ²⁵	The National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), through its Climate Change Directorate, operates under the National Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (NCCSAP) . ²⁶ This strategy explicitly identifies IDPs as one of the groups most vulnerable to climate-related hazards due to their exposure and limited coping capacity.	●
Policy Framework for Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (2017): This policy provides a unified approach to support IDPs and returnees, aiming to ensure safe, equitable, and durable reintegration. The framework sets out institutional responsibilities at national and local levels and encourages a shift from short-term humanitarian aid to long-term solutions. ²⁷	A central document guiding both national and partner interventions . ²⁸ For instance, UNHCR programming is aligned with the 2017 Framework, most notably through the selection and development of Priority Areas for Return and Reintegration (PARRs). These areas operationalize the framework's emphasis on area-based, multi-sectoral support.	●
Law on Land Acquisition (2017): This law replaces the Law on Land Expropriation (2009) in providing the legal basis for land acquisition and compensation. It provides a framework to ensure that displaced populations or returnees affected by land acquisition are compensated fairly and resettled. Articles on resettlement (38–41) and compensation timing (36–37) are particularly important for IDPs/returnees who may have lost property during displacement. ²⁹	Key informants referenced these laws but noted that they are not being implemented.	●
Land Management Law (2017) establishes a legally binding and unified land management system creating standardised procedures for land titling, subdivision, and registration; preventing illegal acquisition or distribution of land; ensuring access to land for eligible individuals; and defining the conditions under which land can be appropriated. ³⁰		

22 Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, *Afghanistan: The National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons*, November 2013.

23 Key informant interviews conducted with Herat Municipality representatives in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

24 Key informant interview conducted with a Ministry of Economy representative in Kabul, Afghanistan, November 2025.

25 Essman, T. in *Adapting to Climate Change, Summary of Afghanistan's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan*, April 2022.

26 Key informant interview conducted with a National Environmental Protection Agency representative in Kabul, Afghanistan, November 2025.

27 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Policy Framework for Returnees and IDPs*, March 2017.

28 Key informant interviews conducted with NGOs and Authorities' Representatives, including MoRR and the General Directorate for Coordination Affairs, in Kabul, Afghanistan, November 2025.

29 The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – Ministry of Justice, *The Law on Expropriation (Unofficial English Translation)*, May 2017.

30 Ministry of Urban Development and Land (MUDL), *Afghanistan Land Administration System Project (ALASP)*, February 2019.

Policy, Year, and Description [chronological order]	Perspectives from Key Informants	Assessment
Decree on the Non-Transferability of Land Ownership without the Permission of the Leadership (2023) provides legal protection for the property rights of displaced Afghans, including those who sought refuge abroad or lived outside areas previously controlled by the Taliban, by prohibiting the seizure of their private land or estates. In principle, this framework enables returnees to reclaim their homes and property and signals official recognition of their rights.	This decree provides high-level parameters for allocation, specifying plot sizes based on household composition. For example, households of approximately seven members are entitled to around 4 <i>biswa</i> (roughly 500 m ²), with larger families receiving 6 to 10 <i>biswa</i> . ³¹ The decree does not explain the process through which land will be allocated , nor does it define eligibility criteria, selection mechanisms, or the extent of coverage. It remains uncertain whether land allocation will apply universally or be restricted. ³²	●
Policy and Response for Afghan Returnees (2023) presents USD 28 million investment in emergency services and aid for returnees coming from Pakistan, distributed as cash, food, and mobile health clinics. In this policy, the authorities have outlined the following priorities: ³³ • Dignified return and settlement of the returnees in the country; • Prosperous life and a dignified livelihood; • Opportunity for the returnees to participate in the country's development.	While the policy outlines comprehensive measures for registration, humanitarian assistance, livelihoods, housing, and security, key informants had limited awareness of this policy's implementation plan beyond the border.	●
Decree on Support for Returning Afghan Refugees (2023) establishes a High Commission mandated to address the needs of returning Afghan refugees. It sets out an eight-chapter, 31-article framework governing key aspects of the return process, including temporary accommodation, identification, transportation, and access to basic and health services. The Commission, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs and composed of senior ministry representatives, is tasked with facilitating support for returning business owners. ³⁴	Identified by one key informant; however, secondary sources indicate that this commission lacks participation from MoRR , the principal ministerial stakeholder on return and reintegration.	●
Afghanistan National Development Strategy (2025-2030) reflects the authorities' reintegration priorities, within urban and rural development goals. ANDS emphasizes housing expansion, urban infrastructure upgrades, cadastral modernisation, municipal service improvements, and the formalization of informal settlements. It links reintegration to national development, rural livelihoods, road networks, construction industries, and disaster risk reduction. ³⁵	MoEC stated that the ministry uses the ANDS as a reference point to guide the approval and prioritisation of humanitarian and development projects. ³⁶ The strategy lacks operational detail for border management, returnee screening, or targeted support, making reintegration objectives more aspirational than actionable.	●
Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation – 5-year plan (forthcoming) : MoRR's strategy for the provision of services to returnees and IDPs. In addition, a specific guideline for returnees and IDPs has been developed by MoRR with an inter-ministerial meeting in December 2025 to approve the guidelines. The guidelines are pending approval for wider dissemination.	The research team is awaiting receipt of this plan.	●
Ministry of Labour's registry for skilled labourers including returnees , supported by the Ministry of Justice regulations to provide benefits for returning industrial workers .	160,000+ individuals with higher education, religious schools, skilled or semi-skilled workers have been registered in this system to be connected for employment. In Herat, 10,000 were provided opportunities in industrial parks. The Ministry of Justice has finalised regulations to support the return of industrial workers.	●

31 Key informant interview conducted with a NGO representative in Kabul, Afghanistan, December 2025.

32 Ibid.

33 Authorities in Afghanistan, *Policy and Response for Afghan Returnees*, 2023 (Internal Translation, Samuel Hall).

34 Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, *As per the Decree of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Emirate, a High Commission Established to Solve the Problems of the Afghan Refugees*, October 2023.

35 Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan National Development Strategy*, 2025.

36 Key informant interview conducted with a Ministry of Economy representative in Kabul, Afghanistan, November 2025.

II. Practices

Engagement and Interventions

Evolution of Afghan Authorities' Engagement (2021-2025)

The authorities' approach to durable solutions has evolved since August 2021, moving through distinct phases:

- **During the first year after regime change (2021-2022), authorities prioritised internal displacement**, with stated intentions to return IDPs to their places of origin or relocate them to other areas rather than allowing them to remain in informal settlements. Informants also noted that in many cases, these returns and relocations were not always conducted in a fully voluntary or dignified manner.³⁷ The planned five-year strategy seemed to intend to reduce internal displacement to zero. During this period, MoRR maintained regular interactions with humanitarian partners, including frequent meetings and active participation in policy discussions. However, humanitarian actors raised protection concerns regarding plans to dismantle settlements, characterising such actions as forced evictions. After concerns were voiced, regular invitations to policy forums ceased.³⁸ This marked a turning point in relations between authorities and humanitarian actors regarding internal displacement policy, with discussions on the planned five-year strategy stalling midway through the process.
- **From 2023 onward (2023-2025), a more centralised, multi-ministerial coordination approach was put in place.** Facing massive influxes of returnees and deportees from Iran and Pakistan, the authorities shifted priorities toward managing cross-border returns. Their leadership established committees for returnees, coordinating across multiple ministries, including the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH).³⁹
- **Since the 2024 leadership transition at MoRR, high-level strategic coordination has reportedly become less predictable.**⁴⁰ According to key informants, the leadership retains authority over decision-making and document approvals but is absent from day-to-day ministry operations. This has created difficulties for ministry staff and partners seeking to engage or collaborate on returnee and IDP issues.⁴¹ While a preliminary meeting was held between the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan (RCHC) and MoRR representatives in April 2025,⁴² during which it was agreed to establish monthly discussions, key informants reported that sustained high-level follow-up has remained limited.⁴³

Despite these challenges, **at the operational level, coordination between implementing partners and the ministries – as well as cross-ministerial coordination – has generally improved in Herat over 2025.**⁴⁴ In April 2025, it was announced that nearly 60 agreements had been signed with international organisations to facilitate the delivery of USD 231 million in food, cash, non-food items (NFIs), and shelter assistance to approximately 1.2 million individuals affected by displacement.⁴⁵ In April 2025, MoRR announced several memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with international organisations to support returnees and IDPs through food distribution, shelter construction, vocational training, and water projects. These agreements benefited thousands of families across multiple provinces. However, engagement remains complex: NGOs report being in continuous negotiation with authorities to safeguard principled programming, particularly ensuring assistance for women and with women's participation.

Intended Interventions

In 2026, in a context of repeated natural hazards and shocks, the authorities reportedly **intend to accelerate plans for the settlement and relocation of returnees and IDPs and emergency response capacities.**

Strategic Priorities

The priorities below were identified through a triangulated analysis of policy documents, key informant interviews, community-level qualitative research, and a multi-stakeholder roundtable with Afghan authorities.

37 Key informant interview conducted with a NGO representative in Kabul, Afghanistan, December 2025.

38 Ibid.

39 Radio Television Afghanistan, *Secretariat of the High Commission for Addressing Returnees' Issues*, December 2025.

40 Middle East Institute, *Taliban Leadership Tracker: Mawlawi Abdul Kabir (a.k.a. Mohammad Jan; Abdul Qahir Osmani)*, n.d.

41 Key informant interview conducted with a NGO representative in Kabul, Afghanistan, December 2025.

42 Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, *MoRR in collaboration with UNAMA convened a technical meeting*, April 2025.

43 Key informant interview conducted with a NGO representative in Kabul, Afghanistan, December 2025.

44 Key informant interviews conducted with Humanitarian Actors' representatives in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025; Samuel Hall/REHA, Roundtable with Afghan Authorities on Return and Reintegration, internal roundtable transcript, Kabul, December 2025; *Omid Radio* High Commission for addressing migrant problems hold meeting (February 2024)

45 Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, *د مهاجرينو او راستنېدونکو چارو وزارت*, November 2025.

1. **Towards a climate-sensitive approach to durable solutions.** Addressing drought and water scarcity offers a practical entry point for more climate-sensitive durable solutions in Afghanistan. Financing water supply, small-scale water infrastructure and climate adaptation measures could also strengthen cooperation around reintegration planning. Key actors are the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) that plays a key role by incorporating actions related to IDPs and returnees into its strategic plan, including by transitioning to longer term solutions through the provision of shelter; similarly the Ministry of Energy and Water reiterated the need to focus on the returns response through the provision of water supply networks in border areas and water as a key to reintegration, and to preventing further migration.⁴⁶
2. **Strengthening return response in border areas:** as mentioned at the December 2025 roundtable, the leadership in Afghanistan has approved one billion Afghanis for the Ministry of Borders, Tribes and Tribal affairs to implement development projects in border districts and districts adjacent to the Afghanistan–Pakistan border. In border provinces, these projects are being implemented under the supervision of respective deputy governors and priority is given to providing employment to returnees and basic living needs for newly returned Afghans, through townships and land allocation in these areas.⁴⁷
3. **Enhancing coordination:** The roundtable discussions highlighted the need for stronger coordination for:
 - a. **Accurate data and surveys:** Afghan authorities have voiced interest in strengthening coordination on best practices with relevant institutions and organisations, but also to focus on providing consistent data. The National Statistics and Information Authority is working with MoRR to standardise and harmonise data collection and prevent duplication in registrations.⁴⁸
 - b. **Accelerated construction of returnee townships and the development of master plans:** Between 2021 and 2025, the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing prepared 35 plans across the country with coordination of relevant departments and municipal authorities. The Ministry's priorities for 2026 include developing master plans for each province, and strategic plans for districts, to facilitate housing projects.
 - c. **Plan for Urban Solutions and City Involvement** to reduce housing shortages and rising rental prices that have occurred in 2025 due to returns from both Iran and Pakistan. In Kabul, 31 sites have been identified for housing projects in coordination with other ministries, including through topographical surveys and detailed resettlement plans being prepared with municipal authorities.
4. **Engaging with private Afghan donors and the diaspora in supporting durable solutions:** Members of the High Commission voiced the aim to involve wealthy Afghans from inside and outside the country to contribute to the assistance provided. As part of this strategy, the Ministry of Information and Culture will prioritise in 2026 more media coverage to document situations and attract the attention of international media.
5. **Facilitating legal and regulatory matters to ensure a strong linkage between emergency and durable solutions approach, as well as between borders and areas of return.** A key concern is to make assistance sustainable, through the centrality of shelter assistance, and the bridge needed between emergency assistance, disaster management, and longer-term solutions. Both ANDMA and the Ministry of Borders, Tribes and Tribal Affairs expressed that they will be working on developing policies to address the needs of returnees.⁴⁹

Climate and water management feature as central entry points. This creates opportunities for climate-sensitive reintegration but also risks narrowing durable solutions to infrastructure and environmental planning unless social, protection and rights-based considerations are integrated from the outset.⁵⁰ Attention to data harmonisation, master planning, and regulatory frameworks point to a reliance on centralised systems and formal planning tools. The inclusion of private Afghan donors and the diaspora as partners signals an effort to expand financing mechanisms while retaining institutional oversight.

DoRR operates with distinct mandates at border points vs. return areas. At border points, DoRR focuses on registration, identifying urgent needs, and coordinating immediate assistance, including food, temporary shelter, and medical care, with UN agencies, NGOs, and Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA). DoRR is also responsible for ensuring families obtain proper documentation to access services,⁵¹ though this does not occur for everyone, with women and especially widows facing disproportionately low access⁵² and returnees reporting major barriers due to cost, limited information, and lengthy processes.⁵³ In return areas, DoRR asserts that the priority is to help families with shelter, access to basic services, and links with local authorities.⁵⁴ However returnees report these services remain largely inaccessible, with communities relying instead on UNHCR and local NGOs to fill gaps, or develop workarounds like community guarantors and vaccine cards because official DoRR documentation support fails to materialise.⁵⁵

46 *Alimia, Sanaa (2024), Expert Analysis: Water, climate and refugee across Afghanistan and the sub-region, ADSP and Samuel Hall, October 2024.*

47 Samuel Hall/REHA, Roundtable with Afghan Authorities on Return and Reintegration, internal roundtable transcript, Kabul, December 2025.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 For more details please read: *Alimia, Sanaa (2024), Expert Analysis: Water, climate and refugee across Afghanistan and the sub-region, ADSP and Samuel Hall, October 2024.*

51 Key informant interview conducted with DoRR representative in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

52 Semi-structured interview conducted with Health Sector representatives in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

53 Focus group discussions conducted with Returnees in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

54 Key informant interview conducted with DoRR representative in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

55 Key informant and semi-structured interviews with Community Leaders, UN and NGO Representatives in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

III. Perceptions

Experiences and Expectations

Experiences

The following section draws on qualitative data collected with returnees, IDPs, and host community members in Herat, including semi-structured interviews with community leaders and women's representatives, as well as focus group discussions with returnees.⁵⁶ While the findings reflect experiences specific to Herat as a high-return urban centre, they provide insight into how national policies are understood and experienced at the community level in return-affected areas.

A central finding is that returnees and host community members do not consistently experience the safety and protection measures outlined in policy frameworks in their daily lives. While provisions exist on paper across physical, material, and legal domains, they are not always visible or tangible at the community level. According to UNHCR's 2025 Post-Return Monitoring findings, 49% of surveyed returnees (out of which 21% were female) reported psychological distress affecting their daily functioning.⁵⁷ This gap between policy intent and lived experience suggests that returns are unfolding alongside significant mental health strain, with implications for reintegration and access to services. The sections that follow identify where implementation gaps persist and where stronger translation of policy into locally felt action could improve protection outcomes.

In addition, community members highlighted that reintegration challenges translate into significant protection risks that are often deprioritised in policy discussions on solutions. Barriers to civil documentation expose returnees to exclusion and denial of rights; housing insecurity increases the risk of forced evictions and exploitation; and gender-based restrictions heighten vulnerabilities to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and other forms of abuse. Recognising these challenges as protection risks is essential to ensuring that durable solutions safeguard not only material needs but also fundamental rights. Addressing them requires policies that go beyond assistance to include legal safeguards, housing security, and gender-sensitive programming.

Physical Safety

Women face particularly acute safety and protection challenges. Severe mobility restrictions on women create additional risks, with women without male guardians experiencing heightened daily vulnerability and economic disadvantage. The 2024 Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) formalises behavioural and gender-related restrictions that shape women's presence in public life, with implications for mobility, employment, and access to services.⁵⁸ Domestic violence against women and children remains an ongoing concern. In addition to physical safety, returnee women also experience psychological harm through stigmatisation and discriminatory labelling, with one female returnee describing being viewed as having "escaped" or "fled," complicating reintegration.⁵⁹

Protection mechanisms exist primarily through international agencies rather than official policies, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) prevention and response services, protection monitoring, community engagement, and feedback mechanisms like hotlines and focus groups.⁶⁰ Relocation is used only as a last resort when safety requires it, as authorities recognise it creates additional challenges for both families and host communities.⁶¹ In cases of forced return, particularly where individuals may face ongoing protection risks, the analysis indicates limited guidance within existing policies on how such risks are assessed or addressed after return, with protection support shaped by international mechanisms.

56 10 semi-structured interviews with community leaders, elders, *shura* representatives (including IDPs, returnees, and host community members), and women's representatives; and six focus group discussions with returnees.

57 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Afghanistan Post-Return Monitoring Survey Report*, 30 December 2025, Data & Statistics, Reports and Assessments, Situation Reports/Updates, accessed 17 February 2026.

58 Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, *Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice*, 2024, English translation published by Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2024.

59 Semi-structured interviews and group discussions with Returnees and Host Community in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

60 Key informant interview conducted with Humanitarian Actor representative in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

61 Key informant interviews with DoRR and Municipal Affairs representatives in Herat and Kabul, Afghanistan, November 2025.

Perceptions: Physical Safety and Policy Compliance: The National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (2013) emphasises eviction prevention and protection of vulnerable groups. Key informants indicated that aspects of this policy continue to inform practice, although the formal status of pre-2021 frameworks remains unclear. In practice, however, protection services are largely delivered by international actors rather than through structured state-led mechanisms. While the Policy and Response for Afghan Returnees (2023) outlines commitments to dignified return and livelihoods, it was not referenced by key informants when describing current operations, suggesting limited translation of policy commitments into community-level implementation.

Material Safety

Communities in Herat report severe deterioration in material safety conditions following the returnee influx, with **increased costs of living and strained resources** affecting both returnees and host communities. The cost of essential goods has risen significantly, with gas prices increasing from 50 to 60 AFN per kilogram,⁶² and housing rents escalating dramatically, creating fears of further increases or eviction.⁶³ Food insecurity driven by poverty forces vulnerable populations, particularly women without guardians, to adopt negative coping strategies, including reducing meal frequency, borrowing at high interest, and sending children to work.⁶⁴ Water scarcity has become critical, exacerbated by climate change and population growth. Well depths have increased from 23-24 meters to 40-45 meters due to overconsumption, affecting both returnees and host communities equally.⁶⁵

Healthcare access remains limited. In one example, a community member provided limited relief: a female doctor offered discounted or free care to some returnees. This example illustrates a local coping response, not a systematic mechanism for filling healthcare gaps. **Educational access faces multiple barriers.** Host communities report returnees not enrolling children in school, while the government ban on girls' education beyond grade six severely restricts opportunities. Schools face overcrowding in high-return areas, and families experience economic pressure, which eventually leads to dropouts.⁶⁶ The Ministry of Education claims to provide temporary enrolment while documentation is processed, though actual uptake appears limited. Some communities have established informal learning centers using personal contributions to circumvent restrictions, but women and girls remain largely deprived of formal education due to government restrictions or family decisions.⁶⁷

Overall, returnees face **major barriers to obtaining essential civil documents, including *tazkiras*, marriage certificates, and school papers**, due to cost, limited information, lengthy processes, and expired or missing documents, hindering their ability to access services and enrol children in school.

Unemployment remains high, with wages in casual labour reportedly falling (e.g., tile work rates from 200 to 60 AFN per meter).⁶⁸ Participants attributed this decline partly to increased labour supply following returns, alongside broader economic contraction. **Women, children, widows, and the elderly face heightened challenges**, with women's employment described as extremely limited despite having skills in carpet weaving, and knitting. Youth and teenagers experience difficulties due to a lack of work opportunities. Even skilled returnees, such as mobile repair technicians and carpenters, struggle to access employment due to a lack of tools, high costs, stagnant markets, and low salaries.⁶⁹

Housing challenges are severe, with rents too high for both host communities and returnees. Single-room houses rent for 3,000-4,000 AFN monthly, and returnees face requirements for written guarantees at high cost. Due to high land and rent prices, returnees report overcrowded shared housing, with many living in tents. Participants reported sharp increases of land prices on arrival, making housing unaffordable for many. Property ownership challenges are widespread, with returnees facing unclear ownership, lack of documentation, and lengthy, costly processes to reclaim property.⁷⁰

Women face marked barriers to legal rights and land allocation and are **unable to publicly claim property ownership or register land in their names despite policies existing on paper**. Some returnees find their homes occupied or land claimed upon return, requiring mediation through DoRR, municipal authorities, local *shuras*, and community leaders.⁷¹ One community leader stated that usurpation occurs where inherited land is sold to newcomers, leaving original inhabitants in tents.⁷²

62 Converting to \$0.76 - \$0.91 USD on 30 December 2025.

63 Semi-structured interviews and group discussions with Returnees and Host Community in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

64 Focus group discussions with Returnees and Host Community in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

65 Semi-structured interviews with Returnees and Host Community in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

66 Semi-structured interviews and group discussions with Returnees and Host Community in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

67 Semi-structured interview with Community Leader in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

68 Converting to \$3.05 (200 AFN) to \$0.91 (60) USD on 30 December 2025; Focus group discussions with Returnees and Host Community in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

69 Converting to \$91.61 USD on 30 December 2025; Focus group discussions with Returnees and Host Community in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

70 Key informant interviews and group discussions with Returnees and Host Community in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

71 Key informant interviews with DoRR and Humanitarian Actor Representatives in Kabul and Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

72 Semi-structured interview with Community Leader in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

Perceptions: Material Safety and Policy Compliance: The Policy Framework for Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (2017) aims to shift from short-term humanitarian aid to long-term solutions and ensure equitable reintegration, yet communities report catastrophic failures in material safety across all dimensions. The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (2025/2026 – 2029/2030) emphasises housing expansion, urban infrastructure upgrades, and the formalisation of informal settlements, yet returnees face housing rents of 3,000-4,000 AFN⁷³ monthly and land prices reportedly doubling since their arrival. Key informants emphasised that the Decree on the Non-Transferability of Land Ownership without the Permission of the Leadership (2023) lacks clarity on allocation processes, eligibility criteria, and implementation modalities (● assessment). The Policy and Response for Afghan Returnees (2023) promises dignified livelihoods and participation in development, but communities report high unemployment and wages dropping to unsustainable levels, with no awareness of this policy among key informants (● assessment).

Legal Safety

Communities primarily access informal justice structures for dispute resolution – including elders, Ulama shuras, and local councils – **though these do not always work in favour of returnees.** Conflicts are typically first addressed within families, then through these community-based mechanisms, and finally through formal complaints to district authorities if necessary. Community leaders observe that the justice system has become less corrupt since 2021, noting that during the previous Republic period bribery was common and cases could be manipulated, whereas now cases are re-examined and outcomes perceived as more consistent.⁷⁴

Access to documentation presents severe barriers for returnees. A lack of *tazkiras* bars returnees from employment rights, services, and education, with spillover effects in housing, land, and property, education, mobility, and livelihoods. Women face disproportionately low access. Communities have developed workarounds, with members stepping in as guarantors or using vaccine cards (as substitutes of IDs) when returnees lack documentation.⁷⁵

Most respondents recognise the essential role of passports and *tazkiras* for identity and mobility, but report long waiting periods – in some cases up to two months for replacement – as well as high associated costs and complex paperwork requirements.⁷⁶ Age restrictions, incomplete family documentation, and the need for guarantors further complicate access, resulting in partial coverage within households.

Family reunification is facilitated through multiple channels, with UN-led border and camp support playing a central role in tracing and reuniting families. The UN operates at the border, keeping separated children until families are found through questioning and assistance, then reuniting them once located. Afghan authorities also facilitate reunification by using, for instance, WhatsApp groups to share information about children, including their details for reunification with parents. Some returnees seek help from local elders (*arbab*).⁷⁷

Perceptions: Legal Safety and Policy Compliance: The National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (2013) and Policy Framework for Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (2017) emphasise institutional responsibilities and durable solutions, yet legal safety mechanisms remain largely informal and community-based rather than systematically implemented by the authorities. While communities have developed effective informal justice structures through elders and local councils, this reflects community resilience rather than policy implementation. The Law on Land Acquisition (2017) and Land Management Law (2017) establish frameworks for land titling, registration, and preventing illegal acquisition, but returnees face lengthy and costly processes to obtain documentation, with unclear property ownership. Key informants note that land decrees provide only high-level parameters with no explanation of allocation processes, eligibility criteria, or selection mechanisms (●), and ministries have limited clarity on implementation. Community members show no awareness of existing laws.

73 Converting to \$45.72 - \$60.96 USD on 30 December 2025.

74 Semi-structured interview with Community Leader in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

75 Semi-structured interviews with Community Leader, Doctor, and Teacher in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

76 Focus group discussions with Returnees and Host Community in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

77 Semi-structured interviews and group discussions with Returnees and Host Community in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

IV. Gaps

Between Policy and Practice

Capacity and Resource Constraints

- **Lack of a Comprehensive Reintegration Framework:** Beyond immediate reception at borders and the authorities' reliance on 'ruling by decree',⁷⁸ there is no updated, articulated and evidence-based return and reintegration framework that links border reception, settlement planning and longer-term durable solutions.
- **Scale Overwhelms Programs:** Large-scale returns have created pressures that policy frameworks struggle to accommodate. While strategic documents outline broad goals for return and reintegration, operational elements such as clear timelines, geographic priorities, beneficiary selection processes and mechanisms are lacking.
- **Stalled Documentation and Policy Processes:** Several documentation and policy development processes within MoRR remain incomplete or inconsistently applied across provinces. These include efforts to formalise return and reintegration planning frameworks, clarify operational guidelines for land allocation, and standardise documentation procedures. Key informants noted that earlier draft policies and procedural documents were not finalised or are no longer centrally accessible, limiting their usability for planning and coordination.
 - Institutional turnover, centralisation of decision-making, limited technical capacity, and dependence on external funding have contributed to delays in advancing these processes. Advancing them would require renewed technical support, clearer mandates, systematic archiving of policy documents, and structured coordination with the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) and relevant line ministries.
- **Dependence on External Funding:** Interventions such as those related to shelter and housing exist, but their scale and reach are entirely dependent on donor funding channels such as the Global Appeal and Shelter Cluster appeals. Funding delays or shortfalls create immediate service gaps, even when policies exist.⁷⁹

Coordination and Duplication Challenges

- **Overlapping Geographical Targeting and Duplication of Efforts:** Actors frequently focus on the same communities or districts, resulting in multiple organisations delivering similar assistance, such as cash support, legal aid, and livelihood projects, without fully aligning their plans. While coordination clusters contribute to reducing overlap, their reach and effectiveness are inconsistent. Participation is uneven, and information shared through these platforms often does not trickle down to operational or field teams.⁸⁰ Key informants emphasised the sub-district level as the area where coordination is the weakest, as field teams tend to work in isolation, limiting situational awareness.
- **Limited Municipal Engagement in Durable Solutions:** Municipalities do not appear to be engaged in returnee support or broader durable solutions processes. Municipalities are informed only when specific issues arise, such as eviction cases in urban centres like Kabul or major cities, rather than being included in planning or coordination.⁸¹

Access to Civil Documentation

- **Documentation Barriers for Vulnerable Groups:** Although procedures allow displaced populations to apply for civil documentation, in practice, returnees may encounter administrative and procedural obstacle that could limit access. These include repeated in-person visits, guarantor requirements, inter-provincial verification processes, and associated costs. Many returnees lack *tazkiras*, birth certificates, school records, or property documentation. Without civil documentation, families face barriers to accessing services, enrolling children in school, claiming land or property, and receiving assistance.
 - NSIA, responsible for civil registration and documentation, has indicated plans to expand *tazkira* issuance to border communities near Pakistan. However, operational clarity on processing timelines, fee structures, mobile registration mechanisms, and safeguards for vulnerable groups remains limited, constraining the effectiveness of this expansion.⁸²
- **Documentation Creating School Enrolment Barriers:** Returnees from Iran report that children who attended private schools abroad cannot enrol in Afghan schools due to documentation issues.

78 Hamzah in Heinrich Böll Foundation, *Afghanistan: Ruling by Decree*, April 2024.

79 Key informant interview conducted with Humanitarian Actor representative in Kabul, Afghanistan, November 2025.

80 Ibid.

81 Key informant interview conducted with a NGO representative in Kabul, Afghanistan, December 2025.

82 Key informant interview conducted with a National Statistics and Information Authority representative in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

Gender-Based Discrimination in Implementation

- **Weak Policy Implementation on Gender:** While existing policy frameworks mention women's rights to documentation and employment, these provisions are often not applied in practice. In rural areas, women face barriers in obtaining essential documents, such as *tazkiras*, which limit their access to services and opportunities.⁸³
- **Restrictions on Female Staff and Beneficiaries:** Limits on female staff and beneficiaries make it harder to reach women and girls. Female staff have been generally barred from working at border points, except for health workers, which makes services inaccessible to women and girls.

Data and Information

- **Lack of Accurate Data and Joint Analysis:** The lack of accurate and up-to-date information on the locations, needs, and vulnerabilities of displaced people inhibits accurate policy planning. The collaboration between the NSIA and humanitarian actors needs to be more efficient and effective.⁸⁴
- **Limited Data Protection Safeguards:** Unclear data confidentiality standards and information-sharing practices may discourage vulnerable individuals, including those with prior affiliations, from engaging with official systems.

Illustrative Mapping of Barriers and Responsibilities		
Population Group	Key Barriers (from brief data)	Responsible Institutions
Returnees / IDPs	Lack of recognition of foreign-issued documents; difficulties in re-registration; loss of documents during displacement	Afghan authorities, Civil Registry, Border Authorities, Local Authorities
Women	Gender-based restrictions in accessing documentation; limited ability to register independently; bureaucratic hurdles	Civil Registry, Ministry of Justice, Local Authorities
Children	Lack of birth registration; difficulties in school enrolment and service access due to missing documents	Civil Registry, Ministry of Education, Local Authorities
Individuals with heightened sensitivities	Concerns about confidentiality, data-sharing and engagement with official systems; risk of exclusion from assistance or avoidance of registration	NSIA, MoRR, humanitarian protection actors, local authorities
Local NGOs / WLOs	Restricted operational space, limited recognition in planning, and barriers to sustained funding despite proximity to affected communities	DSWG, donors, MoEC/MoRR coordination platforms, international partners

83 Key informant interviews conducted with Humanitarian Actors' representatives in Herat, Afghanistan, November 2025.

84 Key informant interview conducted with Humanitarian Actor representative in Kabul, Afghanistan, November 2025.

V. Alignment

Conclusion and Moving Forward

While the authorities' decrees support investments in durable solutions, there is no updated framework. Such a framework would benefit from operational guidance, clear procedures and structured cooperation with municipalities, national authorities, international partners and local civil society actors. The following section outlines key recommendations.

Recommendations for the Afghan Authorities

Policy Updating

1. **Update and align policy frameworks to reflect current realities.** Existing policies, developed before the 2023 mass returns, do not adequately address the scale and complexity of current displacement challenges. Policy frameworks should be revised to incorporate lessons learned and provide operational guidance. Specific actions include:
 - a. Develop an operational guide with clear procedures, roles, and responsibilities;
 - b. Set up a process to periodically update policies based on evolving needs and emerging challenges.

Coordination and Planning

2. **Integrate municipalities in durable solutions planning.** Municipalities play an important operational role in service delivery and possess local knowledge of urban development plans, areas under expansion, service availability, infrastructure capacity, and settlement patterns. Structured engagement would enable inclusive urban solutions: prioritisation of urban planning based on returnee inflows; alignment of city development plans with reintegration needs; identification of suitable locations for services, housing, and community support; and prevention of forced evictions. Specific actions include:
 - a. Formally include municipalities in coordination platforms and map municipal knowledge and resources;
 - b. Incorporate returnee inflows and settlement trends (*municipal data*) into urban/rural development plans.
3. **Integrate the needs of returnees and IDPs into national water and energy programmes.** The Ministry of Water and Energy's calls for more resources should be supported through the national budget to ensure that water provision, construction of small reservoirs and water supply networks can accommodate for returns in urban settings, returnee townships, rural areas of return and at border points.⁸⁵
4. **Reduce duplication through data and information sharing.** There is a need to strengthen information and data sharing to improve planning for services. Specific actions include:
 - a. Providing access to the data recorded in the Afghanistan Returnee Information System (ARIS);
 - b. Organise regular joint planning sessions at both the high and operational levels;
 - c. Regularly update maps and activity logs to identify overlaps and gaps in service delivery.

Documentation and Legal Rights

5. **Expand and accelerate civil documentation for displaced populations.** Implement NSIA's planned expansion of *tazkira* access to border communities and progressively extend access nationwide, with specific measures to reach women, female-headed households, children and returnees lacking prior documentation. Specific actions include:
 - a. Simplify verification and approval steps by reducing repeated in-person visits, clarifying guarantor requirements, standardising inter-provincial transfers of records, and introducing clear, time-bound processing standards;
 - b. Develop and implement a procedure to reconcile cases where returnees used different names abroad;
 - c. Remove administrative barriers that prevent women from obtaining documentation independently.

85 Samuel Hall/REHA, *Roundtable with Afghan Authorities on Return and Reintegration*, internal roundtable transcript, Kabul, December 2025.

6. **Clarify and strengthen land allocation processes.** While current land decrees establish administrative structures and broad eligibility categories, operational elements remain unclear. Specific actions include:
 - a. Develop clear, step-by-step operational guidelines covering application, review, prioritisation, allocation, and documentation procedures;
 - b. Standardise and publicly communicate eligibility criteria and prioritisation mechanisms;
 - c. Clarify institutional roles across central, provincial, and municipal levels, and establish transparent appeals or complaints mechanisms to strengthen accountability and reduce protection risks.
7. **Strengthen implementation of women's housing, land, and property (HLP) rights.** Afghanistan's legal frameworks – including the Constitution, Civil Code, Land Management Law, and Presidential Decree 305 – recognise women's rights to own, inherit, lease, and jointly hold land. However, implementation gaps persist. Specific actions include:
 - a. Promote joint titling and documented recognition of women's ownership or occupancy in land allocation and settlement schemes;
 - b. Clarify post-allocation tenure documentation procedures to ensure women's names are formally recorded on title or occupancy documents;
 - c. Support awareness and referral mechanisms enabling women to assert inheritance, *mahr*, and property rights under existing legal provisions;
 - d. Establish accessible complaints and dispute resolution mechanisms that enable women to challenge exclusion from HLP processes.
8. **Include the needs of specific groups experiencing protection risks: women, children, female-headed households, and individuals with heightened sensitivities.** Specific actions include:
 - a. Develop standardised, protection-sensitive data collection tools to be used across provinces;
 - b. Enhance collaboration with NSIA and humanitarian actors by establishing formal partnerships that include safeguards for data protection and responsible information-sharing;
 - c. Develop a strategy to improve school and educational facilities in return areas to integrate boys and girls through access to education upon return;
 - d. Establish a strategy to ensure that the educational and professional qualifications of returnees – men and women included – can be used to reinforce relevant institutions and service provision in areas of return, and response to protection risks of affected populations.

Recommendations for the Durable Solutions Working Group (DSWG), Donors, and Partners

Strengthen joint strategic coordination on durable solutions

1. **Durable solutions efforts would benefit from more consistent alignment** between national priorities, partner programming, and sub-national implementation. Specific actions include:
 - a. Use the DSWG as a platform to align partner interventions with durable solutions and geographic priorities;
 - b. Facilitate regular exchanges between authorities and implementing partners to support shared planning.

Strengthen shared data systems and joint analysis

2. **The lack of accurate, up-to-date, and disaggregated data** (by gender, age, location, and vulnerability) limits effective planning and risks exclusion of specific groups from assistance. Specific actions include:
 - a. Develop standardised, protection-sensitive data collection tools to be used across provinces;
 - b. Establish formal data-sharing partnerships between NSIA, MoRR, and operational actors with clear data protection safeguards;
 - c. Use shared evidence to inform DSWG discussions, prioritisation, and programme adjustments.

Support financing models that link emergency response with longer-term reintegration outcomes

- 3. Sustained reintegration requires multi-year funding approaches** that span border reception, onward movement, settlement, service access and livelihoods in areas of return. Specific actions include:
 - a.** Support investments across the full return pathway, from border reception to settlement and service access;
 - b.** Finance municipal capacity, infrastructure, and service expansion in high-return areas;
 - c.** Structure engagement with private Afghan donors and the diaspora around transparent, coordinated plans, with safeguards to avoid duplication and ensure support reaches priority areas and groups.

Embed climate and water considerations into durable solutions programming

- 4. Climate stress and water scarcity are shaping displacement and reintegration patterns.** Specific actions include:
 - a.** Integrate climate risk, drought, and water management into area-based durable solutions strategies;
 - b.** Strengthen coordination with relevant ministries on climate-sensitive settlement planning;
 - c.** Mobilise international climate adaptation and resilience financing aligned with durable solutions priorities in high-return areas.

These recommendations align with the regional objectives of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), particularly its focus on voluntary return, reintegration support, and burden-sharing across countries of origin and asylum. They also reinforce the need to treat reintegration as a protection-sensitive, area-based and climate-informed process rather than a sequence of short-term return assistance activities.

Annex 1. List of Tables

Table 1. Research Questions

PLANS	PRACTICES	PERCEPTIONS	GAPS	ALIGNMENT
1. What are the current authorities' priorities and plans for returnees – at both border points and in areas of return – and their reintegration?	2. What interventions are being implemented by authorities? Which sectors are prioritised, and who are the main partners?	3. How are these plans and practices perceived and experienced? What expectations do the different actors have of each other?	4. What are the key gaps in policies and practices according to authorities, communities, and humanitarian / NGOs?	5. To what extent do current policy frameworks reflect community needs, and how effectively are they being put into practice?

Table 2. National Committees by Location (December 2025)⁸⁶

Committee	Kabul	Kandahar	Nangarhar	Herat	Nimroz	Helmand
Registration, Verification, & Reception Committee		X	X	X	X	X
Financial Affairs Management Committee		X	X	X	X	X
Transport & Transfer Committee	X		X			X
Services & Health Affairs Committee		X	X		X	
Information & Public Awareness Committee	X					

Table 3. Afghan authorities' Responsibilities in relation to Returnees and IDPs

Ministry / Agency	Primary Mandate	Key Activities
Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation	Lead coordination body for returnees and IDPs	- Border registration and documentation - Initial assistance (transport, referrals) - Housing, land allocation coordination - Reintegration strategy oversight
Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation	Provincial operations under MoRR	- At borders: Registration, urgent needs identification, immediate assistance coordination - In return areas: Settlement support, service access facilitation, linking to local authorities
High Commission for Returnees	Township development and refugee settlement	- Master planning (35 townships in 25 provinces) - Land allocation - Infrastructure provision (housing, schools, health, WASH, electricity, mosques, agriculture plots)
Ministry of Public Health	Health service access in displacement/return areas	- Mobile health teams - Border health posts - Vaccination campaigns - Maternal/child health - Nutrition services - Mental health support
Ministry of Urban Development and Housing	Urban planning, housing, land management	- Identifying land allocation plans for townships - Housing and land management - Formalising informal settlements - Standard housing provision - Public service delivery - Land titling and registration
Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development	Rural community integration	- Community-based shelter programs - NFI distribution - Drinking water and infrastructure - Rural roads, dams, water networks
Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs	Border response	- Temporary reception camps at all border points - Provision of cash (10,000 Afghanistan) - Transportation using government vehicles

⁸⁶ *Secretariat of the High Commission for Addressing Returnees' Issues*, RTA, 7 December 2025.

Ministry / Agency	Primary Mandate	Key Activities
Ministry of Education	Education access for displaced children	• School enrolment • Temporary enrolment for undocumented children (including immediate response through emergency and mobile schools in camps) • Recording of academic records into the MoE database • Facility rehabilitation • Catch-up/accelerated learning • Teacher training, learning materials
Ministry of Higher Education	Ensuring access to Higher Education	• Fair access to higher education for returnees/IDPs • Accreditation, equivalency and recognition of academic qualifications • Support for Displaced Professors and Academic Staff
Ministry of Economy	Project oversight and alignment with national priorities	• Project approval and monitoring • Alignment with the National Development Plan, the National IDP Policy • Employment gap assessment • Livelihoods coordination
Ministry of Finance	Lead on the Finance Committee for the Returnee Response	• Ensuring resources for border response, cash assistance and transfer to designated locations • Agreement with the World Bank to expand financing of small loans across the country • Budget allocations for returnees within the national budget confirmed (details are confidential)
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	Employment and social welfare	• Employment matching (database of returnees) • Vocational training expansion • Social protection programs • Residential camp support • Tracing of missing children, family reunification
Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock	Rural livelihoods and climate resilience	• Agricultural inputs (seeds, saplings (small trees)) • Small-scale irrigation restoration • Livestock vaccinations • Poultry distribution
Ministry of Industry and Commerce	Job creation and private sector development	• SME establishment support • Business licensing for returnees • Vocational/entrepreneurship opportunities • Market connections • Investment attraction
Ministry of Energy and Water	Sustainable water and energy access	• Implementation of drinking water/irrigation projects • Solar systems and renewable energy development • Surface and groundwater management • Construction of small and medium sized water dams
National Environmental Protection Agency	Environmental protection and climate resilience	• Climate vulnerability assessments • Environmental hazard screening • Land, water, and forest monitoring • Climate-safe settlement planning
Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority	Disaster preparedness and emergency response	• Disaster management planning • Early-warning systems • Emergency assistance • Shelter repair • Hazard mitigation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Diplomatic engagement on refugee protection	• Negotiations with Pakistan/Iran • Bilateral/multilateral repatriation agreements • Advocacy for Afghan refugees abroad • Mobilising international support
Ministry of Justice	Legal protection and access to justice	• Legal aid centers • Review land distribution procedures • Community-based dispute resolution • HLP dispute coordination • Legal awareness campaigns • Civil documentation support
Ministry of Interior Affairs	Security and rule of law	• Returnee biometric registration process • Security provision in displacement/return areas • Crime prevention • Stability for voluntary return

Ministry / Agency	Primary Mandate	Key Activities
Ministry of Information and Culture	Awareness raising and information sharing	- Organise media coverage - Attract international media - Disseminate information with relevant institutions
Ministry of Communications and Information Technology	Access to information and communications facilities	- Provision of SIM cards to returnees to ensure adequate access to telecommunication services and the internet - Registration of SIM cards to ensure proper records - Internet provision at border crossing points (Torkham – Nangarhar (East) and Islam Qala – Herat (west)) - Coordination with Telecommunications companies
Municipalities	Local urban services and integration	- Settlement pattern mapping - Land allocation coordination - Service delivery adaptation - Market/business licensing - Eviction prevention (Herat example)

Table 4. Expectations by Actor⁸⁷

Action Pair	What Actor A expects from Actor B and Vice Versa	Coordination Mechanisms
Authorities ↔ UN agencies and NGOs	Authorities expect technical expertise, programs aligned with national priorities, and close coordination with local authorities, accountable, high-quality services, regular reporting, and data harmonisation; while UN agencies and NGOs expect facilitated access, operational space, policy coordination, data sharing, rights protection, and commitment to durable solutions, alongside guidance on legal/administrative procedures.	MoUs, official agreements, regular communication, information sharing, and joint planning meetings.
Authorities ↔ Media	Authorities expect greater support in awareness raising and information sharing, to inform communities of their rights and support provision; while media outlets face lengthy authorisation processes and require further support and greater availability of the authorities for interviews.	MoUs and media permits should be facilitated and expedited to ensure timely information sharing.
Authorities ↔ Research institutions	Authorities expect greater alignment on data and surveys in Afghanistan. Research institutions can support with training, capacity building, data collection but require also further support on letters of authorisations and permits for data collection.	Letters of Authorisation for research and data collection need to be facilitated, alongside access to existing databases for joint analysis and planning.
Communities ↔ Authorities	Authorities expect greater information sharing with communities with support of community workers and media; Communities expect situation management, coordination, leadership, proper planning/strategy, and materials to be used in livelihoods (e.g., agriculture materials).	Networks of community workers, Shuras and community councils, media as an outlet to share information.

87 Key informant interviews conducted in Kabul and Herat, Afghanistan, November and December 2025.



About the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform

The Asia Displacement Solutions Platform is a joint initiative of the Danish Refugee Council, International Rescue Committee, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, which aims to contribute to the development of solutions for populations affected by displacement in the region.

Drawing upon its members' operational presence throughout Asia, and its extensive advocacy networks, ADSP engages in evidence-based advocacy initiatives to support improved outcomes for displacement-affected communities. As implementing agencies, ADSP members work closely with displaced populations and the communities that host them and are therefore able to contribute a distinctive, field-led, perspective to policy and advocacy processes which can sometimes be removed from on-the-ground realities, and, the concerns of those living with and in displacement.

By coming together under the aegis of ADSP the three member agencies – global leaders in innovative policy and programming – commit to collaboration to achieve improved outcomes for displacement affected communities in the region.

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About Samuel Hall

Samuel Hall is a social enterprise that conducts research, evaluates programmes, and designs policies in contexts of migration and displacement. Our approach is ethical, academically rigorous, and based on first-hand experience of complex and fragile settings.

Our research connects the voices of communities to changemakers for more inclusive societies. With offices in Afghanistan, Germany, Kenya, and Tunisia and a presence in Somalia, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates, we are based in the regions we study.

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About REHA

Resilience, Environment and Humanitarian Aid (REHA) is a national Afghan non-governmental organization working to strengthen community resilience in the face of climate change, environmental degradation, disasters, and humanitarian challenges. REHA works across climate change, environmental protection, disaster risk reduction, water, agriculture and livelihoods, resilience programming, policy development, research, capacity building, and advocacy.

REHA works with national institutions, UN agencies, donors, INGOs, NGOs, academia, and communities to promote evidence-based, inclusive, and locally grounded solutions.

 www.reha.org.af

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POLICY BRIEF

