

AFGHANISTAN

**Baseline of Community-Based
Protection and
Solutions Programme
Response in Priority Areas
of Return and Re-integration
in Afghanistan**

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS NOTE

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WRITTEN BY

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About IMPACT Initiatives

IMPACT Initiatives is a leading Geneva-based think-and-do tank that shapes humanitarian practices, influences policies and impacts the lives of humanitarian aid beneficiaries through information, partnerships and capacity building programmes. IMPACT's teams are present in over 20 countries across the Middle east, Latin America, Africa, Europe and Asia, and work in contexts ranging from conflict and disasters to regions affected by displacement and migration. The work of IMPACT is carried out through its two initiatives- IMPACT & AGORA and through the provision of direct support to partners regarding Project Assessments and Appraisals (PANDA).

Summary

Since 2017, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been supporting durable solutions aimed at returns and reintegration through its Community-based Protection and Solutions Programme Response (Co-PROSPER) in Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARR). Initially supporting 1,347,207 individuals in 20 PARR locations in 11 provinces, in 2021, the programme was then further expanded in December 2021 to an additional 1,423,775 individuals in another 20 PARR locations in 19 provinces. In order to establish a baseline for the population prior to intervention, IMPACT conducted a Socio-Economic Vulnerability Assessment (SEVA) of the 20 locations. Between 22 November and 5 December 2021, IMPACT interviewed 2,031 households in each of the 20 new PARR locations on household vulnerabilities, community leadership inclusivity, service quality and access, livelihoods and economic outlook, and community relations and stability. The following preliminary findings note shares the key findings from the assessment, to provide an understanding of the overall level of integration of households living in the new PARRs.

Key Findings

Household Vulnerabilities

- PARR Populations were on average about equal between the three demographic groups: 39% host community, 32% IDPs, and 29% returnees. With few exceptions, all three groups reported similar impressions of community leadership, service quality, economic outlook, and community relations, suggesting that all three faced similar overall conditions in the PARRs.
- Female-headed households generally reported lower positive perceptions towards reintegration prospects and the associated pillars. This was likely due to the notable lack of community participation, leadership, and economic opportunities that both male and female respondents reported for female headed households.¹ Approximately 25% of female-heads of households reported being widowed.
- Around a third (31%) of households reported that the head of household had some form of disability, much higher than the 8% reported by the Whole of Afghanistan Assessment (WoAA) in September 2021. The high overall prevalence was driven by a very high reported incidence in very specific locations, many of which were the site of conflict in the last year.
- Most returns (32%) reported being pressured to return; this was most common in the Central, Central Highlands, and western Regions; a further 24% returned due to a lack of work opportunities, and 28% returned because it was safe to do so.
- The vast majority of households in the assessed PARRs intended to stay in the area; of the 5% intending to leave, almost half (41%) planned to leave the country, primarily for economic opportunities.
- According to the Household Hunger Score (HHS), most households (61%) were experiencing little hunger, while 35% reported moderate hunger. Severe hunger was reported by 4% of households; while this percentage is small, this was reported to be less than 1% by the WoA in September. Key locations, including the PARR locations in

¹ Though only 2% of the assessed households were female-headed, in total, 25% of household respondents were female. All data was gender-disaggregated by head of household gender.

Badakhshan and Uruzgan reported severe HHS scores of 18% and 12%, respectively, indicating pockets of severe food insecurity. Furthermore, the reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) categorized most households as high (70%) suggesting that most households are using extreme coping strategies and may be rapidly depleting their resilience.

Community Leadership Inclusivity

- Most households in PARR locations had either highly positive (62%) or positive (14%) perceptions of their community leadership and reported leadership structures to be both accountable and inclusive of the households that they represented. In addition, 76% of households reported being aware of ways to provide feedback or complaints to community leadership, and a further 85% reported that they would go to community leadership in the event of a dispute within the community, suggesting high levels of legitimacy among the population.
- More neutral or negative impressions of community leadership were reported in the north east (66%), central highlands (87%), and to a lesser extent in the north (35%) and south (30%). These PARRs also reported poor perceptions of other indicators, including service access and community relations, suggesting that households may hold community leadership responsible for poor service delivery or livelihoods outcomes. Overall negative or neutral impressions were low, at 24% overall.
- Household perceptions of gender equality promotion were generally poor, particularly in comparison to other leadership inclusivity metrics; 33% of households held negative perceptions of gender equality prospects. These findings were heavily regionalized as well; Perceptions were more positive in PARRs in the eastern and Central Regions, and negative in the Central Highlands, north east, south, and south east. Perceptions in the north and west were more mixed.

Strengthening Public Services and Access

- Household perceptions of service quality showed mixed views across the varying locations. Three quarters (73%) of households reported a positive or high positive perception of their access to public services. However, in the north and north eastern regions, households reported more negative perceptions. Generally, shelter (79%) and education (74%) access was positive or highly positive, while WASH (59%) and health (56%) access was more mixed, and often differed regionally. Households in PARRs in the central, north, north east, and south regions consistently reported poorer service access than other regions. Female headed households as a group had worse access to services than male headed households.
- IDPs were much less likely to have received aid (30%) than returnees (46%) or host communities (40%) despite reporting similar overall levels of service access and living conditions. PARRs in the east (54%), north east (48%) and south (36%) reported being more likely to access aid, likely due to most of these locations being more easily accessible urban areas.
- The most common humanitarian support received was direct humanitarian assistance (51%) followed by livelihood support (37%) with most communities stating that livelihoods were their biggest problem and that there was a significant need for assistance and trainings related to this particular issue.

Income Generation and Economic Empowerment

- Households reported an average income of 7,911 AFN a month, which was inadequate compared to the average reported monthly household expenditure of 9,068 AFN. Most households (77%) reported going into debt to be able to meet their needs each month; of these households, average debt was 42,183 AFN.
- The main reported reason that households took on debt was to meet their basic needs; households reported going into debt to pay for basic needs like food (47%), followed by healthcare (21%). Analysis of expenditures found that food expenses constituted 50% of household expenditure, while 25% of expenditure was spent on healthcare, mainly in the purchase of medicine.
- The most common reported household livelihoods source was unskilled labour (33%); this was particularly common in the Central Highlands, north, north east, and west regions. Most IDP and returnee households reported that they had worked in agriculture before their displacement (41%), suggesting a continued trend of households displaced from rural areas who flee to cities for safety, but lack any marketable skills or land and must take unstable and poorly paying jobs in order to meet their needs.
- Almost two thirds (63%) of households reported that their income had decreased in the last three months; nearly all households (97%) reported that this was due to a reduction in employment opportunities. This appears to have had a direct impact on increasing vulnerability, reducing household's abilities to purchase sufficient food and access basic needs.
- 97% of breadwinners were male; of the 30% of overall households that reported having a second income source, 15% of household members who were working were female. Women's limited participation in the workforce was likely further restricted by low wages, as female headed households reported earning a little over half of male households, on average.
- Perceptions of livelihood opportunities were worse than any of the other metrics; 69% of households reported either a neutral or negative perception of their economic and livelihoods outlook. More detailed measures, which questioned households on their perceptions found them to have neutral or negative perceptions of securing livelihoods opportunities (94%), accessing current or future work (57%) and their confidence in maintaining secure employment and income (73%) were even more pessimistic. PARRs in the south and south east were even more likely to report these concerns.
- Most households had easy access to markets within 2km (76%). Combined with the vulnerability and household spending indicators, this suggests that food insecurity is more due to the increasing cost of food, rather than a lack of food in market or market access overall.

Peacebuilding

- Households reported a complex picture of cohesion between different groups within the PARRs, with 48% of households reporting that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that they could trust everyone in the PARR. This may be the result of substantial population movement and resettlement over the year that has required communities to make greater efforts towards integration. However, most households also reported that communication had improved over the last year (47%), and agreed that the community leadership were taking measures to improve relations (59%).
- Nearly half of all households (47%) reported that there were frequent disputes between members of the community. Most of these disputes were reported to be over land (80%), money (63%), or marriage (53%).
- Despite the presence of disputes, 82% of households had a positive or highly positive perception of security in their PARR location. Most households reported that they believed their communities to be safe, incidents of conflict were low, and that authorities were able to manage crime, disputes, and threats to the community when needed.

Reintegration Prospects

Overall, the baseline PARR SEVA assessment found households in the 20 PARR locations to express confidence in both the overall safety, security, and stability of their communities, as well as the inclusivity and responsiveness of the community leadership who represent the PARR communities. However, this underlies a number of concerns, which, if not mitigated, may lead to a rise in tensions and lack of cohesion among the population. The economic crisis has limited livelihood opportunities and depressed wages and most households were dependent upon poor and unstable livelihoods, and have taken on debt to meet their basic needs every month. Perceptions of public services range from positive to mixed, depending upon the service, and the area, with clear regional divisions. Household responses from the north east and Central highlands suggest a linkage between perceptions of public services, community leadership inclusivity and intra-community relations. As the current economic situation in Afghanistan continues to erode, and public services collapse, the need for support to PARR communities remains critical, both to improve short term reliance and allow for the possibility of early recovery and conserve longer term development gains.