

A photograph of two young girls walking away from the camera down a dusty, unpaved street. The girl on the left is wearing a dark blue headscarf and a patterned dress. The girl on the right is wearing a red headscarf and a dark dress with a green waistband. To their left is a long, low wall made of light-colored mud bricks. In the background, there are utility poles and a clear sky. A large red circular graphic is overlaid on the top half of the image.

CHILD RETURNS IN AFGHANISTAN: PROSPECTS FOR DURABLE SOLUTIONS



Save the Children

Annex 1 – ‘Achieving Durable Solutions for Returnee Children: What Do We Know?’

1 Returns contextualized

The United Nations recently re-labeled Afghanistan from a post-conflict to a country in active conflict. Despite this, in an environment of increased insecurity and civilian-targeted attacks¹, the extent of returns to the country is unprecedented. Analysts highlight Afghanistan as becoming a country of forced returns.² Some 150,000 people returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan in 2017, along with some 400,000 from Iran. A year earlier, in 2016, the deputy Afghani Minister of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) estimated that one million Afghans had returned from neighboring Iran, Pakistan, and from Europe. The majority of returnees were children under the age of 18. As many as 142,000 returnee children are expected to arrive to Afghanistan in 2018, thousands of them unaccompanied.³ These children are in need of, and have a right to, particular types of assistance.

Afghanistan benefits from existing laws and policies relevant to children⁴, and is a signatory to the UN Child Rights Convention. But the Child Act, which will address the rights of children in Afghanistan, has not yet been approved by Parliament. In addition to this there is no current *National Children at Risk Protection Strategy*, the previous one having expired in 2014. Another key issue is the definition of a child which is inconsistent with UNCRC, in addition to the fact that a directive on the return and reintegration of minors does not exist.

The key actors for supporting returnees include the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Afghan's MoRR and its Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled (MoLSAMD). None of these organizations have adapted structures to support child returnees. Overall, existing support to child returnees in Afghanistan is fragmented and inconsistent.

The gaps in governance and response result in part from a lack of information and limited evidence of what children's needs and life on return are like. Such evidence is key to understanding whether or not these returns are, in fact, appropriate and in line with children's rights. Using Save the Children's child-sensitive durable solutions indicators, this paper assesses the information available on conditions faced by returnees to Afghanistan. It sheds light on data available, as well as on data gaps, for the population as a whole and child returnees in particular, whenever available. It summarizes what is known of the conditions of children generally within the country, and then analyses conditions of returnee children, consequently presents recommendations, most notably in terms of support needed, and information required to better monitor the respect of international obligations in regards to child rights.

This report provides stakeholders with the knowledge needed to better support vulnerable returnee children and improve their access to rights in Afghanistan. It should be used in combination with available information regarding associated key drivers of solutions, namely public attitudes, the policy environment, solutions programming in place, as well as the input of the displaced themselves in shaping the policies and programmes designed to benefit them.

2 Return conditions: available information and data gaps

The 4 dimensions of the child-specific durable solutions indicator framework are material, physical and legal safety as well as psychosocial well-being. Each of these dimensions is in turn composed of a number of individual indicators. The following section sheds light on those relevant indicators and dimensions where reliable data is available, ideally disaggregated not only by migration status but furthermore by age. In order to ascertain to which degree returnees in general, and child returnees specifically, face particular hardship, their status is compared to that of the population as a whole whenever possible. Offering a comprehensive view of the various domains that support the welfare of a child, this indicator framework is designed to help the user understand the extent to which the general environment is conducive to the achievement of durable solutions for children. This framework was not developed with the objective of assessing protection thresholds or informing status determination, but rather as a generalized baseline which can enable prioritized reintegration support, and assist stakeholders in their quest to minimize migration-specific vulnerabilities of young returnees.

Caveat: No primary data was collected for this brief. The data presented is based on a thorough review of the available literature, but does not claim to be exhaustive of all information in the public domain. It was aggregated from different sources which on occasion adopt their own definitions of indicators, and sometimes figures do not cover the entire country but are rather reflective of a particular local context within Afghanistan. This is pointed out in the text where applicable. Sources are provided for all figures cited.

Physical Safety



States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation.

CDC

Article 19

Afghanistan is undergoing a conflict that in 2018 showed no signs of abating. In its Annual Report for 2017, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported on the impact of the conflict on children, noting a consistent rise in child casualties between 2009 and 2016.⁵ This generalized and chronic insecurity and violence is not particular to returnees, or returnee children, but rather a serious risk to the population as a whole.

Protection against violence and abuse

This category of indicators focuses on the risk of violence and abuse incurred by children in the countries of return, their risk of child detention and their vulnerability to human trafficking. Firstly, the risk of violence to the population at large, and children in particular, is real, as illustrated by statistics on violent incidents – in 2017 UNAMA recorded nearly 10,500 civilian casualties.⁶ The trend is alarming: in the first quarter of 2018, the number of civilian casualties caused by attacks deliberately targeting civilians more than doubled compared to the first quarter in 2017.⁷

As OCHA noted in 2017, “children continue to be disproportionately affected by the conflict. During the first nine months of the year, some 2,480 children were killed and injured as a result of the fighting, with a five percent increase in the number of deaths recorded versus the same period in 2016.”⁸ Data on violence is not available disaggregated by the migration status of the victims, but UNHCR data on perceptions of the security situation shows that some 80% of recent (2017) returnees feel that the security situation is improving, compared to only 25% of the general population.⁹ This might well be due to the fact that security considerations impact the choice of return location.

Physical abuse of minors is common. In a 2017 study based on 1,000 children in different provinces, Save the Children found that 91% faced some sort of abuse – be it physical and/or mental. Corporal punishment is routinely used against children both in schools and at home.¹⁰ The detention of children, including for alleged association with armed groups, also remains a concern. A recent Rule of Law survey by UNAMA confirms that the total population of detention centers in Afghanistan counted over 1,000 juveniles.¹¹

Finally, solid data on the prevalence of trafficking is, by nature, difficult to obtain, but as noted by the 2017 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Afghanistan remains a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Throughout 2017, the Government reported the investigation of 103 alleged traffickers.¹²

Protection of child rights

This dimension covers the right of children to be safe from recruitment into armed forces, from forced labor and child marriage. Statistics on recruitment do not exist, but it is acknowledged by humanitarian actors and researchers that both the Afghan Local and National Police and (to a lesser degree) anti-government elements use children both in combat and non-combat roles, including as personal servants, support staff, and body guards.¹³ Returnee children, uprooted and often with no family in Afghanistan, are particularly vulnerable to such recruitment. A recent Samuel Hall study for Save the Children notes that “10 of the 53 children [returned from Europe] interviewed stated that someone had attempted to recruit them to fight in combat, commit acts of violence, or otherwise engage with armed groups.”¹⁴

Child labor is common in Afghanistan. Based on the *Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey*, in 2013–14, of a total population of 10.3 million children between 5 and 17 years of age, 2.7 million children, or 27%, were part of the labor market. Of the entire population of boys between 5 and 17 years of age, a third was engaged in child labor.¹⁵ Child labor appears to be more prevalent in contested areas compared to Government-controlled areas.

Human Rights Watch reported in 2017 that many Afghan children are employed in jobs that can result in illness, injury, or even death. Only half of Afghanistan’s child laborers attend school.¹⁶ UNHCR reports that the share of households which report having a child under the age of 14 contributing to the family income stands at 16% for 2017 returnees households, 18% for 2016, and 37% of the host population.¹⁷ The lower rates of child labor among recently returned households might well be due to the fact that this coping mechanism is not needed in the period immediately following return, a period during which returnees often still benefit from humanitarian aid.

Child marriage is technically criminalized in Afghanistan under the EVAW law though the legal age of marriage is only 16 for girls whereas it remains 18 for boys. In light of this, according to the UNFPA in 2016, 57% of girls are married before the age of 19, and about 40% are married between 10 to 13 years.¹⁸

Protection from other incidents

Other factors which might make a context unsafe for minors (as well as adults) to return to are natural hazards, along with human-made hazards such as landmines. Afghanistan is prone to earthquakes, flooding, drought, landslides, and avalanches. The ability of the population to cope with such shocks has been reduced after decades of conflict, insufficient investment in disaster reduction strategies, and environmental degradation. OCHA notes that between 2018 and 2019, over 478,000 people were affected by natural disasters throughout Afghanistan. A total of 27 provinces out of 34 experienced some kind of natural disaster during the period. On average such disasters affect 200,000 people every year.

In regards to human-made hazards, in the first half of 2017, improvised explosive device (IED) tactics caused over 2,000 civilian casualties. UNAMA notes in 2017 that “*while children remained at serious risk of harm from unexploded ordnance, the use of pressure-plate IEDs and aerial operations in civilian-populated areas substantially contributed to the increases in both women and child casualties.*”²⁰ UNOCHA notes that in 2018, 88,000 people in Afghanistan are living in areas in need of mine clearance.²¹

Material Safety



For the population to enjoy material safety, basic needs in terms of water / sanitation, nutrition, healthcare and shelter need to be covered in line with the minimum SPHERE standards. Furthermore, and particularly for children, access to education must be ensured. For such material safety to be available in the long-term and in a self-reliant fashion, livelihoods must be sustainable. The context in Afghanistan does not currently fit this description. After four decades of conflict, there are huge economic and development challenges in the country.

WASH

The overall situation of water supply and sanitation in Afghanistan is one of the poorest in the world as 68% of Afghans do not have access to improved sanitation and nearly 45% still using unimproved water sources.²² Ongoing returns, mainly from Pakistan and Iran, are putting additional pressure on already limited and dilapidated infrastructure. Half of the internally displaced populations living in informal settlements rely on public hand-pumps. Such conditions are pushing affected populations to share limited water sources as well as to resort to unimproved water sources and risky sanitary practices, which as a result can lead to outbreaks of waterborne diseases such as cholera and diarrhea. According to the 2015 *Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey*, 35% of children between 6–11 months of age regularly suffer from diarrhea as a result of poor sanitation. According to OCHA, of the 1.1 million people in Afghanistan in acute need of WASH assistance, 58% are children. Additionally, two thirds of recent returnees interviewed by UNHCR in 2017 report that they have the same access to water as the host community.²³

Nutrition

Food insecurity in Afghanistan is widespread. The 2017 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification exercise (IPC) found 1.9 million people to be in acute nutritional emergency, 5.6 million in crisis and nearly 10 million experiencing stressed levels of food insecurity.²⁴ Internal displacement due to conflict, natural disasters and high numbers of returns further contributes to food insecurity in the country. The recent multi-cluster needs assessment found that 87% of IDPs and 84% of returnees are severely food insecure. At the same time, UNHCR notes that “27% of 2017 returnees report skipping a meal or reducing their food intake in the last week. This trend is much more pronounced amongst female respondents (53%) than male respondents (28%).”²⁵ For the non-displaced host population, this rate stands at 24%. Children suffer the most from malnutrition – damage to the body and brain from poor nourishment in early years is considered irreversible.

Housing

Housing conditions are poor in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) 2016/17 finds that some 72% of the urban population lives in slums, and that 44% are housed in overcrowded dwellings. Most of the materials used for constructing buildings and dwellings are not durable: traditional mud houses continue to form the majority of housing. This problem is aggravated for returnee households who tend to cluster in informal settlements, as well as for the most vulnerable community members who are hosting them. Of the displaced populations living in informal settlements, over a third lives in transitional shelters.²⁶

Only 18% of 2017 returnees and 22% of 2016 returnees report owning their homes.²⁷ However, rural returnees are twice as likely to own their homes compared to their urban counterparts, indicating that the displaced are flocking to cities for reasons other than tenure security. In comparison, according to the 2013–2014 ALCS, 87% of the general population report owning their own home.²⁸

Healthcare

The Afghan health system exhibits high infant mortality rates (70/1000 live births)²⁹ and maternal mortality rates, low immunization coverage³⁰, and compromised access to essential healthcare for 30% of the population. Only 18% of children aged 12–23 months are fully vaccinated, and one in four children receive no vaccination before turning 1. For vaccines with multiple dosages, coverage declines with the dosage, with the highest coverage at the first dosage.³¹ For instance, 66% of children received Polio 1 by the age of 12 months and this declines to 42% by the third dose. (It is of note here that Afghanistan is one of only two countries in the world where polio remains endemic.) Coverage for the measles vaccine by 12 months reaches 44%.³² Access to healthcare for IDPs, returnees and refugees is of particular concern and many have been deprived of the most basic essential services. The WHO notes in 2017 that returnee populations show a high prevalence of tuberculosis, HIV, medical complications related to malnutrition, and pregnancy.³³ 30% of returnees in Government-controlled areas and 46% of returnees in contested areas report that they are unable to access healthcare.³⁴

Education

Education is a vital prerequisite for combating poverty and advancing development. Significant gains have been made in this regard since decades of conflict decimated Afghanistan's education system and institutions. Nonetheless, with some 10 million illiterate inhabitants, Afghanistan takes one of the lowest places in the world in terms of literacy. Today, according to the 2016/17 ALCS, the youth literacy rate stands at 51% for the non-displaced and 64% for youth with a migration background. The adult literacy rate stands at 42%/32% respectively.³⁵

In 2018, UNICEF/Samuel Hall found that nearly half of children aged between 7 and 17 years old – 3.7 million – in Afghanistan are not in school.³⁶ Great differences exist between genders and according to age: the net attendance rate stands at 56% for primary education, 36% for secondary education and 10% for tertiary education.³⁷ Attendance rates of girls are a fraction of that of boys (70% for primary, 50% for secondary).

Returnee children, who tend to be housed in temporary settlements with inadequate infrastructure, suffer greatly from lack of access to education. Save the Children's *Rapid Assessment of Education Needs of Returnee Children in Afghanistan* found that 37% of school-aged returnee children in Nangarhar (which receives the majority of returns from Pakistan) are out of school, mainly due to the distance between their settlement and the nearest available educational facility.³⁸ The figures for recent returnees are below those for the population as a whole – the 2016–2017 ALCS estimated net primary school attendance in the general population of 65% for male children and 46% for female children. There are important differences between school attendance in Government-controlled-areas compared to contested areas, particularly for girls: “33% of returnee girls are attending school in government areas, compared to only 23% in contested areas.”³⁹

Livelihoods

Afghanistan's economy mainly relies on the informal sector, which accounts for 80% to 90% of total economic activity. The labor market is dominated by the agricultural sector (which performs poorly in providing decent work and income) and the services sector (which has previously been the main driver of strong economic growth in Afghanistan, but is currently suffering the most from the progressive reduction of international financial inflows). The rate of unemployment officially stands at 24%. The share of male youth not in employment, education or training stands at 42%, whilst for females it is 68%. 80% of all jobs are classified as vulnerable employment, characterized by job insecurity and poor working conditions. Only 13% of the working population of Afghanistan can be considered to have decent employment.⁴⁰ UNHCR notes that in 2018, “more than 24% of 2017 returnees, 33% of 2016 returnees and 21% of IDPs report difficulty finding a job. (...) it seems that the economic situation facing 2016 returnees has further deteriorated over the last year.”⁴¹

The proportion of the population living below the national poverty line stands at 55%. Those with a migration background are slightly less likely to fall below the poverty line than non-migrant households.⁴² Studies show however that returnees score the lowest in terms of income, as well as job satisfaction, with 60% of returnees expressing job satisfaction as opposed to 85% of non-migrants.⁴³ One of the main causes of dissatisfaction is a mismatch of skills: 74% of deportees perceived their current work to be a poor match for their skills, compared to 29% of non-migrants. Finally, children both add to, and suffer the most from, the risk of poverty, as evidenced by much higher poverty rates among large households and households with relatively many children.⁴⁴

Access to electricity

Some 70% of the Afghan population does not have access to the national electricity grid. The share of returnee households with access to the electricity grid is lower than that of the population as a whole, at approximately 22%.⁴⁵ Even those connected to the grid suffer from frequent power blackouts of up to 15 hours a day in some areas, which impacts residential and commercial users and severely limits development across all sectors of the economy. Solar energy is widely used but not reliable enough to support large devices and home-based economic activities. Generators are a rare luxury. Cooking and heating solutions almost exclusively rely on gas and wood/dung/biofuels.⁴⁶

Legal Safety



Within the framework of legal safety, child-appropriate durable solutions imply that the population of concern has some kind of legal identity/civil documentation. Society does everything in its power to keep children and parents from being separated, and to reunite them should such need arise. People feel that they have access to fair justice mechanisms, and their movement is not restricted.

Civil documentation

Decades of civil war in Afghanistan have damaged government institutions, disrupting their regular functions and causing destruction and loss of civil registry records. While efforts have been made to improve applicable legislation and procedures, frequent changes in political leadership have resulted in a range of different civil documents. The most common identification document in Afghanistan is the tazkera national ID, possessed by 90% of men and 38% of women. 94% of all 2017 returnee heads of household (but only 72% of 2017 female returnee heads of household) had a tazkera as of December 2017.⁴⁷ Birth registration is rare at 37% of all births according to the *Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey* (AMICS). Returnees appear slightly more likely to possess birth certificates than the average Afghan, perhaps resulting from procedures for their issuance abroad.⁴⁸ The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) notes in 2016 that nearly half of children returned to Afghanistan have passports, and they possess tazkera at rates comparable to that of adult men in Afghanistan more broadly. This may affect enrolment in school, transfer of previous education certificates, access to basic health services, employment in certain sectors etc.

Family (re)unification

Family separation is a reality in Afghanistan which is poorly reflected in official statistics. It is well known that Afghans constitute one of the main groups of unaccompanied children submitting asylum claims in Europe: approximately 5,300, 17% of total claims, did so in 2014 alone⁵⁰. If those children find themselves in a position to return to Afghanistan on their own, it is almost unheard of for them to receive assistance in terms of family reunification.⁵¹ According to an IOM report on undocumented Afghan returns from Iran and Pakistan from January to June 2015, a total of 683 unaccompanied minors were provided with humanitarian assistance at the borders.⁵² Beyond humanitarian assistance however, no assistance in terms of family tracing appears to be provided. MoLSAMD has a mandate for unaccompanied minors, and runs two orphanages for them, one for girls, one for boys. More broadly, the Afghan legal system lacks provisions for adoption. There is no foster care policy.⁵³

Justice mechanism

The justice sector was largely dismantled during the 30-year civil war, leaving its institutions unable to address the needs of the Afghan population and unable to regain public trust. Despite significant support from the international community, there are still structural weaknesses. UNICEF noted in 2015 that *“informal justice systems which follow customary laws, tribal codes and customs are more commonly used than the official state government justice sector, and an estimated 90% of Afghans use non-state legal systems. In the non-state legal systems, children do not have a voice in the justice process. Instead complaints are presented by the child’s parents. A child’s inability to represent their cases means that many abuses go under-reported and unpunished.”* The same publication states that only a minority of returned children state that they feel they have a safe access to recourse for justice; and 39% say that they would not go to the police or courts for help if they feel threatened.⁵⁴

Freedom of movement

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. In practice, the greatest restriction to movement is the lack of security. In many areas insurgent violence, banditry, land mines, and IEDs make travel extremely dangerous, especially at night. Women’s freedom of movement continues to be hindered: social customs limit women’s ability to move without a male chaperone. Freedom of movement, despite being technically a right, is not a universal reality in Afghanistan.

Mental health and psychosocial safety



In order for child-sensitive durable solutions to be ensured, mental health needs should receive particular attention. Any child-friendly return environment must feature spaces where children can safely socialize and thrive. Children must be respected as part of the community and, free from discrimination, have a sense of inclusion. Reconciliation programs should be available to those wishing to benefit from them. Children with special needs or suffering from mental health disorders/trauma have a right to benefit from adequate care.

Nurturing environment

In 2017, Samuel Hall/IOM found that two thirds of interviewed returnees in Afghanistan felt like they belonged in the community in which they currently lived, yet at the same time, this did not translate into being able to rely on a network for support, as nine respondents out of ten felt they had no one to turn to in times of need.⁵⁵ Data is not available on the number of child-friendly spaces in Afghanistan. Returnee children and youth are particularly prone to lacking a sense of inclusion given that many have never lived in Afghanistan. They often have no personal networks in or connections to Afghanistan, with loved ones and friends more likely to be in the countries where they grew up. For these young returnees, “home” is not necessarily synonymous with the homeland but rather with the country they grew up in.

Community and family support, professional support

Beyond the common physical impairments (often a result of landmines and explosive devices), many Afghans suffer from mental health and psychosocial problems. A WHO survey conducted in 2004, the last available, found 68% of respondents suffering from depression, 72% from anxiety and 42% from post-traumatic stress disorders. More than ten years later, Afghan youth are still exposed to conflict, insecurity, domestic violence, extreme poverty, gender disparities, displacement and other potentially traumatic experiences.⁵⁶ Samuel Hall/Save the Children found in a 2018 study on young returnees from Europe that a number of them were considering suicide.



Save the Children

Germany's Interior Minister deflected blame on Wednesday for the suicide of an Afghan man among a group deported to Kabul. (...) The 23-year-old Afghan man was found dead in Kabul shortly after he was flown back. Afghanistan said he had lived in Germany for eight years, having arrived as a teenager.

New York Times
July 11, 2018

Healthcare facilities providing mental health care are scarce, particularly for children. According to European Asylum Support Office (EASO), there are 20 shelters for children in Kabul for the city's 4.5 million residents, and these shelters lack expertise and capacity to support traumatized minors. Almost all are based on dwindling foreign aid.⁵⁷ In addition, Save the Children reported in 2017 that “only 10% of children and 17% of adults reported there is a place in the community where children can go to ask for help if they are abused by their parents.”⁵⁸

The most recent statistics on disability in Afghanistan date back to 2005, when the *National Disability Survey* found that one in five households was estimated to have a person with a disability. The vast majority of the estimated 200,000 children with disabilities in Afghanistan did not go to school. This has not improved over the past decade: according to the UNFPA's *Afghanistan State of Youth Report* for 2014, “there is only one school in Afghanistan for students with visual impairments. There are four schools for students with hearing impairments accommodating 900 students altogether.”⁵⁹ Regular government schools typically have no institutionalized capacity to provide inclusive education or to assist children with disabilities.

Conclusions

Save the Children's child-sensitive durable solutions indicator framework highlights very limited potential for reintegration of children returned to Afghanistan. From a physical and material safety perspective, child returnees to Afghanistan face many of the same challenges as other children in Afghanistan. They face difficulties in accessing reliable shelter, education, jobs, and medical support, and run the risk of recruitment to armed groups as well as facing physical harm due to conflict; these challenges are endemic to the context. Child returnees also face clear psycho-social and in some cases legal challenges, which not only render reintegration improbable but pose more fundamental challenges to their well-being. The lack of networks makes accessing both support and livelihoods difficult. The processes and support necessary to ensure sustainable returns for children are not in place, and it is likely that a large share of child returnees to Afghanistan will re-migrate in the years to come.

In addition, the brief summary of available data shows considerable data gaps regarding the status of children, and the status of child returnees in particular, in a range of important dimensions. A more comprehensive mapping of returnee needs and local contexts is needed to make tailored reintegration programs more effective. Monitoring and evaluation of returnee outcomes is also needed to better understand what is working and in which contexts. Where monitoring is not feasible due to conflict and insecurity, returns should not be occurring.

The following steps are recommended with a view to allowing the international community to compile the information necessary to achieving durable solutions:

- It is difficult, based on available data, to compare the vulnerabilities of the displaced with those of the general population. Similarly, additional risks related to disabilities or to unaccompanied minors have been difficult to ascertain from existing data sets. Data collection should adopt a displacement focus, and data collection instruments should be standardized. Once collected, raw (anonymized) data should be shared among stakeholders rather than just presented in a report in the form of summary statistics.
- Respecting the Age, Gender and Diversity approach, information must be collected and presented disaggregated by age – lest the plight of the most vulnerable become lost in the aggregate of the population as a whole, or (in the case of selected areas and selected indicators) the returnee population as a whole.
- Child-sensitive indicators must feature more prominently in future rounds of data collection targeting both the displaced, and the population as a whole. While some relevant metrics (such as trafficking, child recruitment etc.) suffer from notorious underreporting, many are measurable and should be collected as a matter of course, by all, disaggregated by migration status and age. Those include the prevalence of child labour and child marriage, child malnutrition and school attendance rates, as well as data on the prevalence of children without any type of legal documentation.

These minimum standards currently only exist (in a measurable fashion) in one of the two frameworks covered by the child-sensitive durable solutions indicators: the SPHERE standards represent the most widely known and internationally recognized set of common principles and universal minimum standards in life-saving areas of humanitarian response and then additionally the UNHCR protection thresholds.

In all four domains of physical safety, material safety, legal safety and mental health, not only is it hard to know how the displaced fare with respect to the non-displaced but also if this forms the basis of a longer-term integrated solutions. While it is not universally agreed when a solution has indeed been reached, it is certainly also not agreed in the context of Afghanistan, which seems a most urgent need given the increasing return dynamics. It is recommended that a monitoring scheme be developed which standardizes the generation of relevant 'solutions' data. Such data, disaggregated by age and migration status, should inform a broad stakeholder dialogue (including humanitarian and development actors along with Government, regional administrations and local authorities) on the topic of minimum standards in the Afghan returns environment.

Finally, differences in the various dimensions are subject to considerable regional disparities though this does not clearly show from this analysis. This calls for area-based solutions to displacement affected communities, and urgently needed, more granular research particularly in the regions where high returns numbers are anticipated. This should enable pragmatic advocacy, locally anchored response strategies and programming inclusive of and accountable to returnees, IDPs and host communities... and their children.

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