

Transition and displacement

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Afghanistan in 2014 will experience a combination of security, political and economic 'transitions', the responses to which will be fundamental in determining the extent of any further displacement of Afghan people over the coming years.

In predicting prospects for Afghanistan during and after 2014, international attention has mainly focused on the impact of the withdrawal of international military forces from Afghanistan by the end of this year. However, the political transition of 2014, starting with the Presidential election, will be just as important for security and stability in the short term. There are also concerns that an economic transition will still further reduce access to sustainable livelihoods for many Afghans, and this is likely to be as important a driver for further migration as insecurity or the fallout of the political process. At least Afghanistan's neighbours appear to see a stable political transition as a priority and are unlikely to undermine the process.

Mobility has been a fundamental coping and survival strategy for Afghans over very many years and their previous migration experiences will certainly influence migration strategies by Afghans in the future. There is a general consensus that the most likely and significant displacement outcome of the current transitions will be more internal displacement, and a

particular challenge will be the increasing number of urban IDPs, in turn swelling the number of urban poor especially in Kabul. Any new internal displacement would compound a serious existing crisis.

Even as the need to protect and assist more displaced people is likely to increase, humanitarian access and security are likely to become more difficult. But there is already a significant (although not comprehensive) legal, institutional and programmatic structure in place to support displaced Afghans. While there may be limitations on the capacity, coordination and effectiveness of these structures, at least there is a foundation for responses to any new movements.

When questioned, many Afghans have expressed reservations about the focus of the international community on 2014 as pivotal for their country's immediate prospects. One reason is the risk of suspending action while waiting to see what unfolds. There are priorities in many areas today, ranging from corruption through women's rights, rising unemployment, local government

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Construction work begins on a new hospital in Ghazni, Afghanistan.

capacity and building investor confidence. The same is true for displacement; while 2014 may bring further displacement, this is no reason not to deal with the dimensions of the crisis that already exist.

Another reason is resistance to the idea that Afghanistan's fate is effectively in the hands of the international community; Afghans instead tend to view 2014 as a staging-post in a long-term project of state-building, and part of a broader transition between the past and the future. Finally, there is a sense that a self-fulfilling prophecy may be created. Uncertainty over the future of Afghanistan, sharpened by international attention on 2014, is for example already influencing migration and return decision making today.

Significant returns of existing refugees during or soon after the transition in 2014 are not expected, with uncertainty both over the future and over the sustainability of voluntary repatriation and reintegration. But nor are massive new refugee flows or cross-border migration generally envisaged. For political and economic reasons, and for certain groups

concerns for their safety too, the possibility and inclination to move to either Iran or Pakistan may decrease over the next year. Although there is likely to be a continuation of migration by those seeking asylum outside the immediate region and heading for Turkey, Europe or Australia, it is also the case that many Afghans are committed to making a future for their country, have often invested significant resources after returning, and may be unwilling to move again unless it is absolutely unavoidable.

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www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/Country/docs/Transition-Crisis-and-Mobility-in-Afghanistan-2014.pdf