

Voluntariness to remain

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In the context of prevention of further displacement or re-displacement (specifically, preventing returnee refugees becoming refugees again), two elements are particularly important: post-repatriation activities in the return destination countries to ensure the durability of the voluntary repatriation, and the living conditions in these return countries. In practice this often becomes a question of whether the returnees have the freedom of choice to remain or are 'forced' to do so in the absence of any viable alternative.

The voluntariness to remain will be determined by push factors such as security and socio-economic situation in the country of origin to which they have returned, and pull factors such as the availability of other durable solutions and respect of refugee rights in other countries in which they might consider seeking refuge.

In Afghanistan, recent data¹ shows that only around 20% of returnees have regular employment, only 23% of them have adequate shelter and less than 20% of them have full access to clean drinking water. Half of the returnee population have only partial access to basic health services and only half of the returnee children have full access to school. These push factors – added to the general poor security in Afghanistan – undermine the sustainability of their return. Better access to

these facilities and services would be conducive to preventing their re-displacement. And both of the most likely potential countries of asylum, Iran and Pakistan, are far less welcoming than they were in the past.

Those returning to Burundi face a lack of internal security and reduced access (in comparison with the undisplaced population) to socio-economic opportunities but their most obvious country of asylum, Tanzania, is not a welcoming prospect. The government there had insisted on repatriation for the refugees as the preferred durable solution in the 1990s, and by 1997 Tanzania considered Burundian refugees as a security threat and has taken a tough approach towards refugees, restricting their movements and limiting their access to economic activity, making it clear to Burundians that they are not welcome.

For both Afghans and Burundians there were no pull factors from potential host countries, yet plenty of push factors within their country of origin. If they could have had freedom of choice, they would probably not have remained in their countries of origin. As it is, they are 'forced' involuntarily to remain within the borders of their own land.

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1. From surveys covering one third of the assisted returnee population