

HIGHLIGHTS

- UNHCR calls for redoubled support for Afghan refugees
- A new report revisits assistance and vulnerability criteria for supporting the displaced
- Humanitarian partners in southern Afghanistan work to find solutions to access challenges in Helmand province

At mid-year, the surge in the number of Afghans crossing into eastern Afghanistan has already exceeded total returns for the whole of 2014, which stood at 32,148.



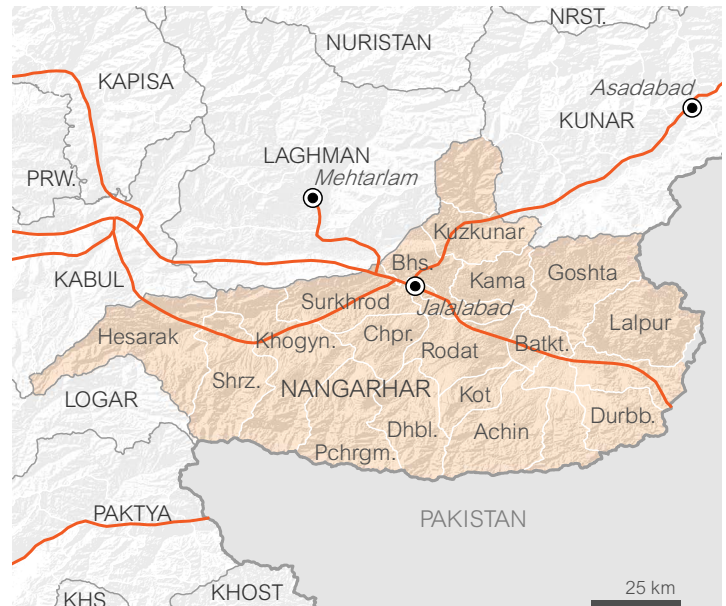
Conflict displaced in Kunduz province
Source: Mohammad Sadiq Zaheer - OCHA

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UNHCR calls for redoubled support for Afghans refugees

Farida (not her real name) is 22 years old and like many young Afghans returning from Pakistan via the Torkham border in Nangarhar province; she was born in Pakistan. She lived her 21 years in Pakistan's Lakhtai Banda camp, even getting married and starting a family of her own. Farida has fond memories of her life in the camp "We used to live a happy life. We lived within our means and had everything we needed – water points, mud houses, and schools," she said. By all accounts, it was home.



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But all that changed in December 2014 after an attack on a Peshawar school, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (KPK) led to anti-Afghan sentiments. The attack strengthened the government of Pakistan's resolve to make the repatriation of Afghan refugees and undocumented migrants a priority in its National Action Plan. According to Farida, after the attack on the school life became increasingly difficult for her family.

Farida and her family are among the 139,498 Afghans who came back from Pakistan since the start of 2015. Many returnees have reported coercion and harassment, as well as home and workplace raids. Finding the situation too difficult, many say that their only option was to return to Afghanistan. For Farida, this was a joint decision made by the tribal elders on the welfare of the 20 families that comprise their group.

The unprecedented rate of return is overwhelming the capacity of humanitarian actors to assist returning populations

Afghan families continue to return from Pakistan in large numbers: by 30 June, UNHCR had recorded 42,385 refugee returnees, larger than the number who returned in the whole of 2014 (32,148). IOM has recorded 91,458 undocumented returns and deportations since the start of 2015.

Like Farida, 21-year old Ahmad was born in Pakistan. He says the family left their home



Undocumented Afghan returnees at Torkham border, Nangarhar province
Source: OCHA

in Laghman province after his father was injured and left disabled during the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. Ahmad who supports his wife, eight siblings, and elderly grandfather says the family decided to return to Afghanistan because the situation for refugees was getting harder for refugees. “It was a two-day’s journey in harsh cold weather from Kashmir to village in Laghman. It took the life of my one year old sister, Parmina. She died while my

mother was breastfeeding her. The rest of the children gathered around my mother due to cold weather in the truck loaded with our few belongings. We paid the heaviest price for the journey,” he said.

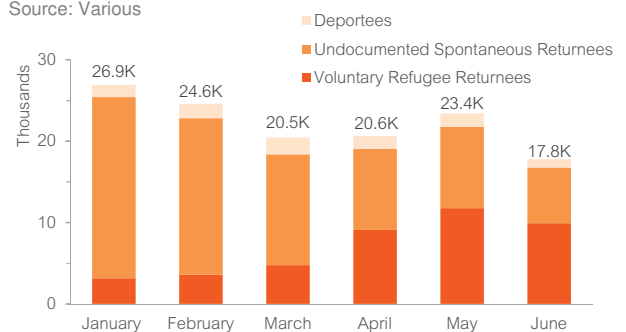
These families and the thousands of other refugees who have returned to Afghanistan since the start of 2015, received assistance in the form of a repatriation grant from UNHCR. Farida said her family used the vital grant money on transportation, food and some material to starting building a shelter. But the shelter is still incomplete with no boundary walls, doors, or windows.

She says the family is unable to return to their village in Jagdalak area of Kabul’s Surobi district because of on-going insurgent activity. In addition to the repatriation grant, Ahmad qualified for a \$700 Person with Specific Needs (PSN) cash grant from UNHCR. He used the money to buy a Tuktuk (motorized rickshaw) giving him the ability to earn an income and support his family.

The unprecedented rate of return is overwhelming the capacity of humanitarian actors to assist returning populations. For example, IOM and government border screeners predict

Her family used the vital grant money on transportation, food and some material to starting building a shelter. But the shelter is still incomplete with no boundary walls, doors, or windows.

Refugees and Undocumented Returns from Pakistan (Jan – June 2015)
Source: Various



Source: IOM, UNHCR

"It is critical that the international community steps up to support the Afghan government in their efforts to create adequate conditions for Afghans to return home and restart their lives in safety and dignity."

*António Guterres,
UN High Commissioner
for Refugees*



UNHCR helped Ahmad buy a rickshaw
Source: UNHCR

that between 30 to 40 per cent of the overall undocumented returnees from Pakistan are vulnerable and in need of assistance.

Addressing the media in Islamabad on 25 June, UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, called on the international community to redouble its engagement with Afghanistan. He said, "It is critical that the international community steps up to support the Afghan government in their efforts to create adequate conditions for Afghans to return home and restart their lives in safety and dignity."

According to UNHCR, Pakistan hosts 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees, including some 1 million registered Afghan refugees in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province -- making it the largest protracted refugee population globally. Another 1.3 million undocumented Afghans are estimated to be living in Pakistan.

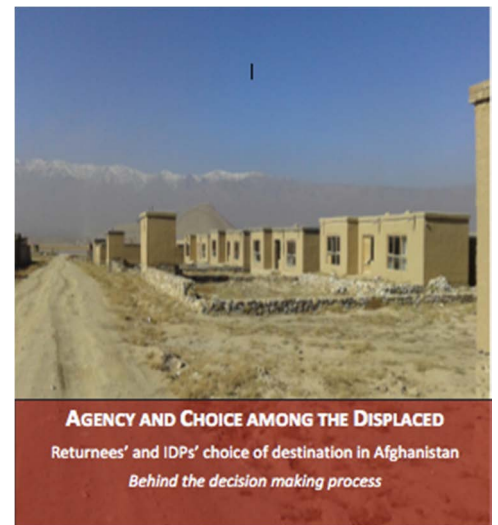
Agency and choice among the displaced: Returnees and IDPs choice of destination

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The dynamics of migration and displacement are rapidly changing in Afghanistan. A DACAAR/Samuel Hall (2015) report on *Agency and choice among the displaced: Returnees' and IDPs' choice of destination in Afghanistan* sheds light on the need to revisit assistance and vulnerability criteria for supporting to the displaced. The report is due to be launched on 28 July 2015.

External assistance to forcibly displaced Afghans has been largely humanitarian in nature and limited to specific groups. A recent survey in Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, and Nangarhar provinces found returnees¹ to be more likely (60 per cent) recipients of external support compared to internally displaced persons (51 per cent). They are also more likely to have received it earlier than internally displaced persons are. The most commonly provided support (Table 1) is food (48 per cent), non-food items – NFIs - (28 per cent) and fuel (25 per cent). Shelter and housing support (12 per cent) are limited, as are financial support and cash grants (11 per cent). This calls for more than humanitarian assistance, in particular there is need to bridge the gap with development actors.

The research finds that food security status is a more useful marker of vulnerability than migration status



DACAAR



¹ For the purpose of this article, returnees refer to returning refugees only.

The study shows that returning refugees are relatively less vulnerable compared to undocumented returnees

The focus of humanitarian and development assistance should be on the poorest families; many of whom will be either internally displaced or returnees. However, the argument for targeting returning refugees as a particular group is becoming less convincing. As this study and previous studies (Samuel Hall/MGSOG 2013 *UNHCR Shelter assistance*

programme evaluation) show, returnees are comparatively less vulnerable compared to internally displaced persons. These studies also show that wellbeing increases in the early years following return. The research finds that food security status is a more useful marker of vulnerability than migration status. An accurate food security assessment (contributing to a wider resilience index) is more likely to give a reliable assessment of relative needs for particular household or community. It is also a means of linking displacement and economic vulnerability under one 'humanitarian umbrella'.

The current focus of support, as shown by the difference in numbers that have received assistance, is on returning refugees. As the study shows, this population is relatively less vulnerable compared to undocumented returnees. This is due to a greater access to education, employment and social support while they were abroad and the cash grants facilitating their return. These populations would benefit from a renewed focus on vulnerability rather than one that is specific to migration status.

Finally, this study highlights positive results that for returnees and displaced persons -- few people regret their move, most perceive a successful migration, with conditions improving markedly in the first few years. This suggests that migration is a positive coping strategy. In addition, returnees and displaced persons move in groups and benefit from the support of relatives, friends, and trusted community leaders. While social capital is there, economic and financial burdens remain and should be addressed if expectations are to be aligned with reality. This will ensure that displacement does not lead to frustrations and resentment, but instead builds resilience and self-reliance, contributing to the power of agency.

The key findings call for a three-fold coordination focus: 1) peri-urban areas, which are particularly attractive for returnees and internally displaced persons, 2) expectations in education, healthcare and employment are unfulfilled, and 3) adopting a vulnerability – rather than migration – lens to provide humanitarian assistance.

Table 1: Type of assistance received (in %)

	Total
Food	47.93
NFIs	28.16
Fuel	25.29
Shelter / housing	11.72
Financial support / cash grant	11.26
Medical treatment	4.02
Training	3.33
Business start-up grant	2.76
Other	2.41
Education	2.18
Information / counseling / legal assistance	1.49
Transport	1.03
Job placement	0.57

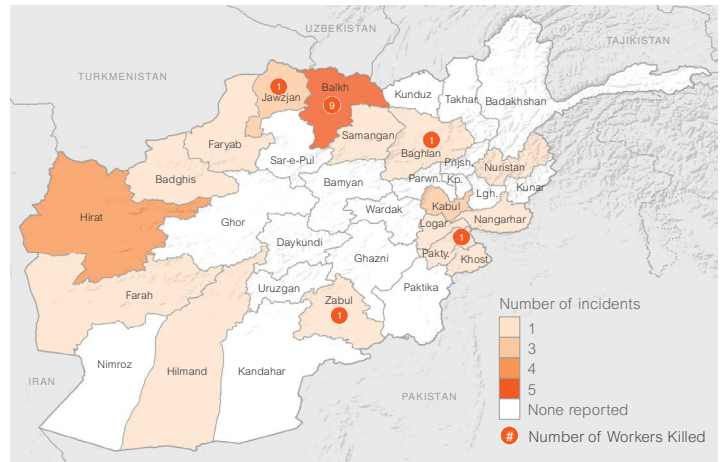
Few people regret their move, most perceive a successful migration, with conditions improving markedly in the first few years -- suggesting that migration is a positive coping mechanism

Humanitarian access

Incidents affecting humanitarian action

There were 27 incidents reported against national and international NGOs and international organisations across Afghanistan in June. These incidents resulted in violence against aid workers, assets or facilities, and obstruction of population's access to services and assistance. There were 14 reported deaths. This includes the killing of 9 national NGO workers in Balkh on 2 June. There were five reported incidents affecting health facilities and workers.

27 incidents
13 aid workers killed
2 aid workers wounded
14 aid workers abducted

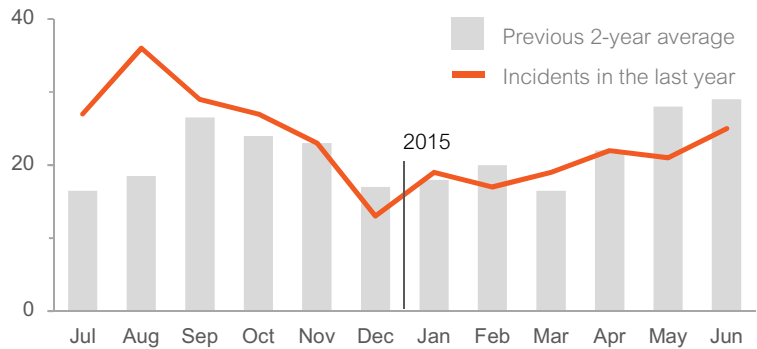


Incidents against Humanitarians in June 2015
 Sources: Various

There were five reported incidents affecting health facilities and workers.

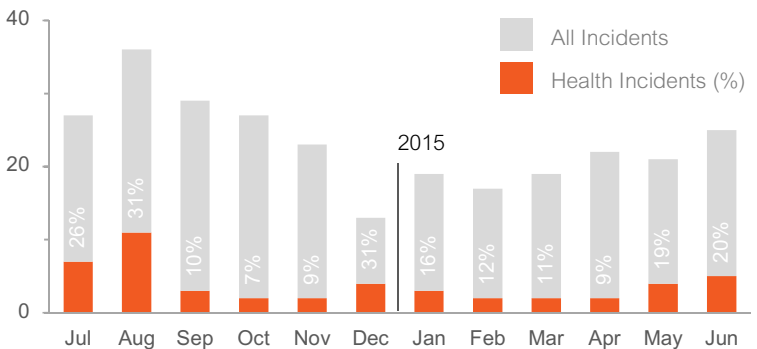
Notably, two of these incidents were direct attacks resulting in the killing of one nurse and another being injured, and three of the incidents were due to nearby ground engagements resulting in collateral damage.

Incidents against Humanitarian related Workers and Assets
 Source: Various



Incidents against Health Workers and Assets
 Source: various

Notes: Politically or economically motivated violence and incidental violence directly affecting humanitarian personnel and assets, equipment and facilities.



Humanitarian access in focus

Humanitarian actors work with elders to open access in Helmand province

A redoubled Taliban push during the 2015 fighting season has resulted in significant civilian casualties and conflict displacement

Heavy clashes between the Afghan security forces and armed non-state actors in the Helmand province on 13 June brought into sharp focus the complexities of the on-going conflict in southern Afghanistan and its impact on humanitarian actors. The Southern provinces of Hilmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Uruzgan, and Zabul – has witnessed a significant level of conflict in the past decade. The withdrawal of international military forces from Helmand in December 2014 opened the door for armed non-state actors to ‘reclaim lost’ territory. This coupled with a redoubled Taliban push during the 2015 fighting season has resulted in significant civilian casualties and conflict displacement. The province ranks consistently high on the vulnerability index. Since the start of the spring offensive in April, the security situation in Northern areas of Sangin, Kajaki, Musa Qala, Nawzad, Baghran and Nahre Siraj and southern areas Marja

Humanitarian partners at both provincial and regional levels are working to find solutions to these challenges in order to deliver basic humanitarian assistance

and Nad Ali has gradually deteriorated. These areas have become centres of clashes between forces competing for control. Because of on-going clashes and the danger of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) humanitarian access to these areas is high-risk. This hampers humanitarian ability to deliver urgently needed assistance and services to affected communities, and to monitor the quality of delivery.

Humanitarian partners are working to find solutions to these challenges to deliver urgent humanitarian assistance. The IDP Taskforce was established to coordinate response to families displaced by conflict. However, due to insecurity, the response has been limited to the more secure areas. With negotiation at national level continuing, OCHA Southern Region commenced a series of meetings and at local levels in cooperation with humanitarian partners such as ICRC. This has involved engagement with elders and community leaders to allow humanitarians to navigate through this impasse. In practical terms, a measure of trust has developed between OCHA and the main powerbrokers in these areas. This has led to positive indications

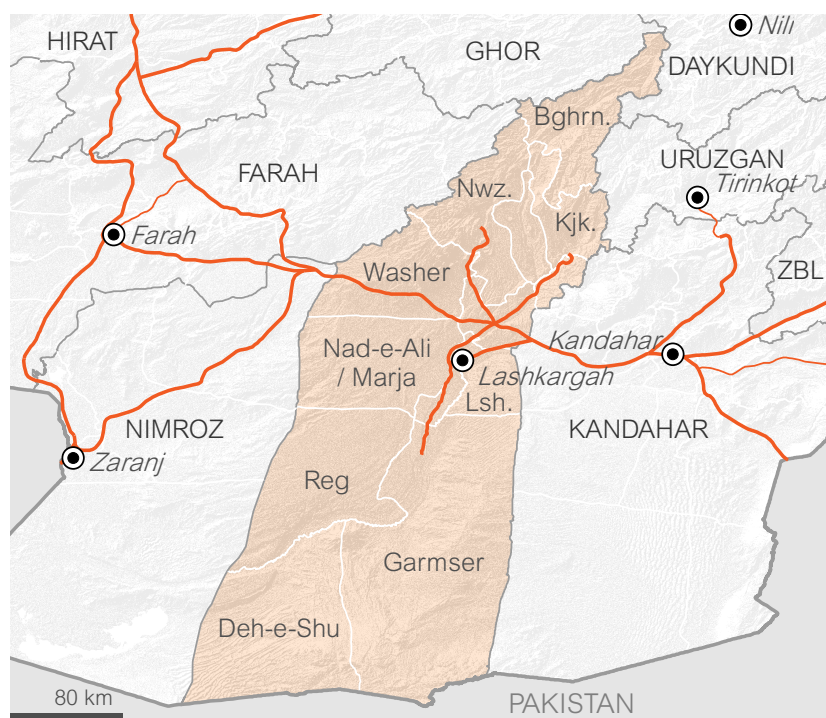
2015 Overall Need and Vulnerability Index³

Ranked 3 out of 34 provinces

3.8	Overall Need Index (Average M & V)			
3.9	Mortality & Morbidity (M Score)			
2	Under-5 Mortality			
5	Civilian Casualties (Conflict)			
5	Civilian Casualties (Mines/UXOs)			
5	Severe Acute Malnutrition			
4	Global Acute Malnutrition			
4	Acute Diarrhoeal Disease			
3	Measles			
1	ARI (Pneumonia)			
3.7	Vulnerability (V Score)			
1	Kcal intake deficiency (<1,500 Kcal/p/d)			
2	Poor Food Consumption			
1	Household Hunger			
5	Vaccination Coverage Deficit			
4	% Deliveries without Skilled Birth Attend.			
2	Poor Access to Safe Water			
4	Poor Hygiene Practices			
5	Insecurity			
4	Exposure to Mines/UXOs			
5	Conflict Induced IDPs			
1	Unmet Emergency Needs			
3	Natural Disaster Exposure			
5	Conflict Profile			
Index Scale Reference:				
1	2	3	4	5
Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High

Advocacy and engagement with all actors underpinned by humanitarian principles remains the key to making inroads into previously inaccessible areas.

Hilmand Province



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that these areas could open up to humanitarian assistance, with safety and security of both aid workers and recipients as the paramount consideration. As the 2015 fighting season has increasingly concentrated on provinces in the North, the comparatively lower levels of insurgent activity in the Southern region now provides an opportunity to explore such engagement initiative with greater depth.

The need to deliver humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable in inaccessible areas led to the establishment of an access group chaired by OCHA. The newly established group is planning to deploy assessment teams to Sangin. Actors on the ground have agreed to ensure the safety and security in the assistance process. Advocacy and engagement with all actors underpinned by humanitarian principles remains the key to making inroads into previously inaccessible areas.²

Humanitarian Presence in Hilmand



12 organizations
delivering humanitarian services

ACTD, ARCS, DRC, EMERGENCY, ICRC, IRC, MSF, OBA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WADAN and WFP

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OCHA humanitarian bulletins are available at: <http://afg.humanitarianresponse.info> | www.unocha.org

² 3W information collected by OCHA Sub Offices through the Humanitarian Regional Team (HRT) mechanism, June 2015