

319

Incidents affecting access in 2019

133*

Attacks on health workers or facilities in 2019

27

Aid workers killed in 2019

31

Aid workers injured in 2019

33

Aid workers abducted in 2019

PEOPLE IN AFGHANISTAN FACE UNCERTAIN TIMES

Civilians continue to be gravely impacted by the highly unpredictable and politicized situation in Afghanistan. Violence along with a number of political processes coming to a head risks impacting not only people in need, but also affects the access of aid workers and their ability to provide essential services to people in need.

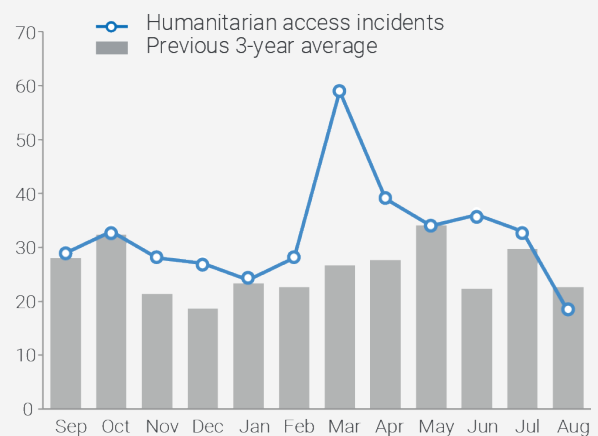
Although security incidents in early 2019 remained below 2018 levels, a change in conflict dynamics led to a marked increase in airstrikes and complex attacks. This included increased attacks by non-state armed groups (NSAG), Afghanistan National Security Force (ANSF) and International Military Forces (IMF). July recorded the highest number of security incidents thus far this year. Notably, on 28 July, an attack on the office of a political party in Kabul resulted in the deaths of 25 people (15 civilians) and an additional 70 civilian injuries.

Several high profile attacks also occurred in August. On 3 August, airstrikes reportedly targeting NSAGs in Andar and Wali Mohammad Shaheed districts of Ghazni Province damaged two nearby health facilities. The Afghan National Police Headquarters in Police District 6 in Kabul city was hit with a powerful vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) on 7 August. The attack killed 36 people and injured some 150 others, the majority of whom were civilians. On 17 August, a suicide bomber detonated his vest at a wedding hall in Kabul, killing 85 people and injuring 187 others in an attack claimed by Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K), the Islamic State's Central Asian arm. Two days later, on 19 August, 17 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were reported to have detonated across Jalalabad City in Nangarhar causing an estimated 125 injuries. On 31 August, fighting between NSAG and ANSF in Kunduz City caused thousands to be temporarily displaced. At least five people were killed and 56 others were injured according to initial reports. At the time of writing, high profile attacks impacting civilians continued into September.

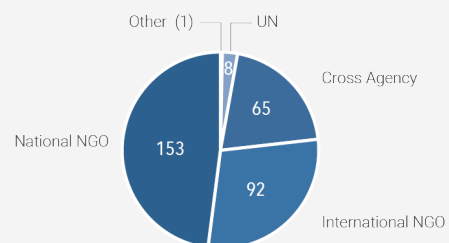
According to UNAMA, more than 3,800 civilian casualties were recorded in the first half of 2019 and while civilian casualties decreased compared to previous years, they remained at unacceptably high levels. As documented by UNAMA, 2018 witnessed 10,993 civilian casualties (3,804 deaths and 7,189 injured) — the highest number of civilian deaths to date. Continued violence impacting civilians occurred against the backdrop of the 2019 presidential elections, a series of peace negotiations and an increasingly volatile political and security context. The IS-K remains an active and significant threat, particularly in the country's East. Overall, the nature of the violence, along with the proliferation of NSAGs throughout the country, could see more civilians being touched by the conflict than before.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS TRENDS

MONTHLY TREND (SEPT 2018 - AUG 2019)



HUMANITARIAN GROUPS IMPACTED (2019)



*As reported by the Health Cluster, per WHO guidelines, attacks include destruction of healthcare delivery, removal of personnel, armed or violent search, assault, militarisation of health facility, removal of healthcare assets and other forms of violence.

Other incidents affecting humanitarian access included: 60 incidents of restriction/obstruction of people's access to services and assistance, 47 incidents of interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities, 30 incidents of military operations and ongoing hostilities, 17 incidents of restrictions on movement, and 16 incidents of physical environment and lack of infrastructure.

Already, almost two-thirds of the population live in areas directly affected by conflict, routinely exposing them to human rights violations including the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure, such as schools and health facilities and sexual and gender-based violence. Those living in conflict areas have disproportionately high needs for trauma care and rehabilitation services which are often not available. Shorter term support and assistance will be required should there be a sudden increase in humanitarian needs.

The UN and humanitarian partners in Afghanistan continue to closely monitor developments and any changes in the security landscape, balancing staff safety concerns with a mandate to stay and deliver. Any repeat of previous election trends of insecurity and violence will very likely worsen the humanitarian situation for the 6.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2019. Based on the experience of the 2014 presidential election, contestation of the election outcome may undermine the delivery of basic services, particularly to remote areas, and increase humanitarian needs. Humanitarian organisations will come under pressure to fill gaps.

TRAPPED IN A PERVERSIVE PROTECTION CRISIS

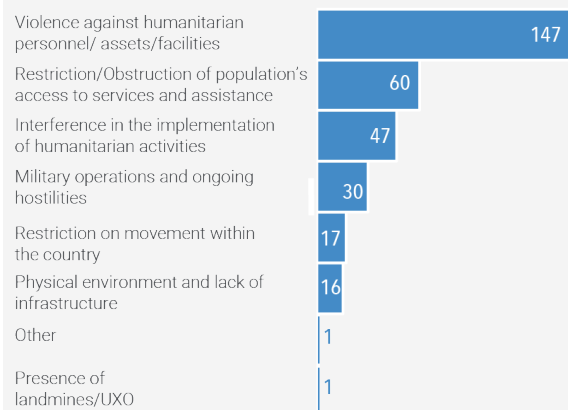
Decades of conflict have trapped civilians in a pervasive protection crisis. Years of continuous hostilities across large parts of the country, including ground engagements, aerial operations, shelling, landmines and indiscriminate use of IEDs, often suicide attacks, cause extreme levels of physical and psychological harm. Systematic violations of international humanitarian and human rights law continue to be reported, ranging from attacks on health and education facilities to targeted killings.

A potential increase in violence and election-related insecurity could compound existing humanitarian challenges related to the conflict and natural disasters, including drought. Poverty and high levels of debt have reduced people's ability to cope with sudden shocks. Approximately 54 per cent of people in Afghanistan live below the poverty line, as defined by the national norm for the cost of covering basic needs. Rapid population growth, rural-urban migration and continued displacement are further compounding the stress on urban centres and increasing competition for local resources. Chronic needs arising from years of under-investment in basic services and economic stagnation are also increasing.

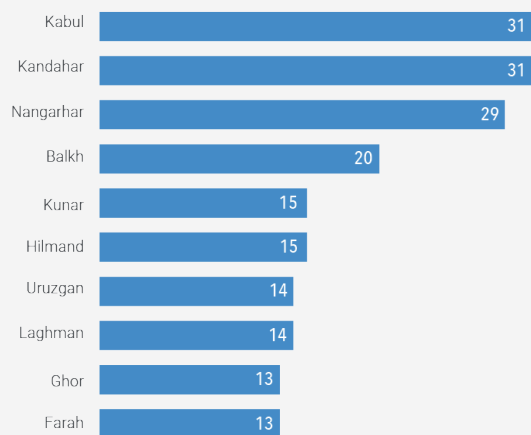
From 1 January 2019 to 5 September 2019, 262,129 people fled their homes due to conflict, which is roughly the same number of people who were displaced during the same time period in 2018. The highest numbers of people displaced by conflict were in the Northeast, North and East which make up 81 per cent of all displacement (211,133 people). June had the highest number of displaced people to date this year with 56,682 people displaced. Overall, 30 out of 34 provinces had recorded some level of forced displacement in 2019. This year, an additional 294,500 people have been affected by natural disasters.

Substantial returns from Iran and Pakistan are likely to continue and be driven by the political and economic situation in these countries along with the perceived durability of peace in Afghanistan. In the event of a peace agreement, the scale and timing of any returns to rural areas will depend on a range of factors including alignment with agricultural cycles.

ACCESS CONSTRAINTS (2019)



INCIDENTS BY PROVINCE (2019)



Civilians need to be protected

The humanitarian crisis in Badghis and Hirat illustrates how recurring shocks, conflict and displacement have eroded the resilience of people, forcing internally displaced people to engage in harmful practices such as child labour and child marriage. A Protection Monitoring Assessment conducted in August focused on communities in the West affected by displacement and revealed significant vulnerabilities. The survey showed that 39 per cent of the 10,000 respondents had disabilities and 49 per cent were single-headed households. In Hirat alone, 74 per cent of Focus Group Discussion participants said child labour was observed in the community.

One father of five living in Hirat after fleeing from Badghis province claimed he had to sell his 2 1/2 year old daughter to pay for a life-saving surgery. When describing his situation he said “What were we to do? If I died, our family would have no way to be supported.” - Protection Cluster

Indebtedness is a significant and long-term challenge for those who remain displaced or have recently returned home. A recent study outlining Household Financial Status in Places of Displacement shows families in Badghis will take years to pay off their debt if they return to their place of origin and immediately start earning the same amount they did prior to displacement. In Hirat, families will take, on average, seven months to pay off their debt. With chronic and ongoing conflict in some areas of origin, it is unlikely that safe returns will be possible for some time.

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AND RESPONSE

Humanitarian organisations stand ready to reach people in need including areas that may become newly accessible due to any future lull in hostilities. The provision of aid will continue to be needs-based, in line with humanitarian principles and guided by the objectives outlined in the multi-year Humanitarian Response Plan.

In the first half of the year, 4.2 million people targeted in the Humanitarian Response Plan in 2019 were reached with assistance at least once. This includes 837,000 people that were reached with protection services in the first half of 2019, equal to 63 per cent of the target. For example, a total of 224,525 documented and undocumented returnees from Pakistan and Iran were provided with Explosive Ordnance Risk Education. Psychosocial support, including psychological first aid and basic counselling, was provided to 10,117 children affected by trauma. As active conflict and drought have affected children’s access to quality education and increased their vulnerability to protection risks, approximately 44,011 school-aged children were provided with access to emergency education across Afghanistan.

In the pre-election period, the Protection and the Education Clusters undertook a planning exercise to mitigate the risk of violence prior to, during and after the election, including identifying most at-risk schools. This work includes regular monitoring of key protection issues (violations of International Humanitarian Law, displacement, vulnerable populations, gender-based violence and child protection) in order to identify people in need of assistance, inform the humanitarian response and support advocacy on protection of civilians.

This year, 5,706 schools are expected to be used as a polling centres across Afghanistan. The UN is advocating with the Government and relevant operational partners to protect ‘at-risk schools’, students and teachers, during the election period, through measures such as using alternative locations, and/or limiting the presence of children and teaching staff at schools being used as polling stations. Education partners also supported rehabilitation and provided support to schools that had been damaged after the 2014 and 2018 elections.

6.3M

PEOPLE IN NEED

4.2M

PEOPLE REACHED

837K

PEOPLE REACHED
WITH PROTECTION
SERVICES

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