

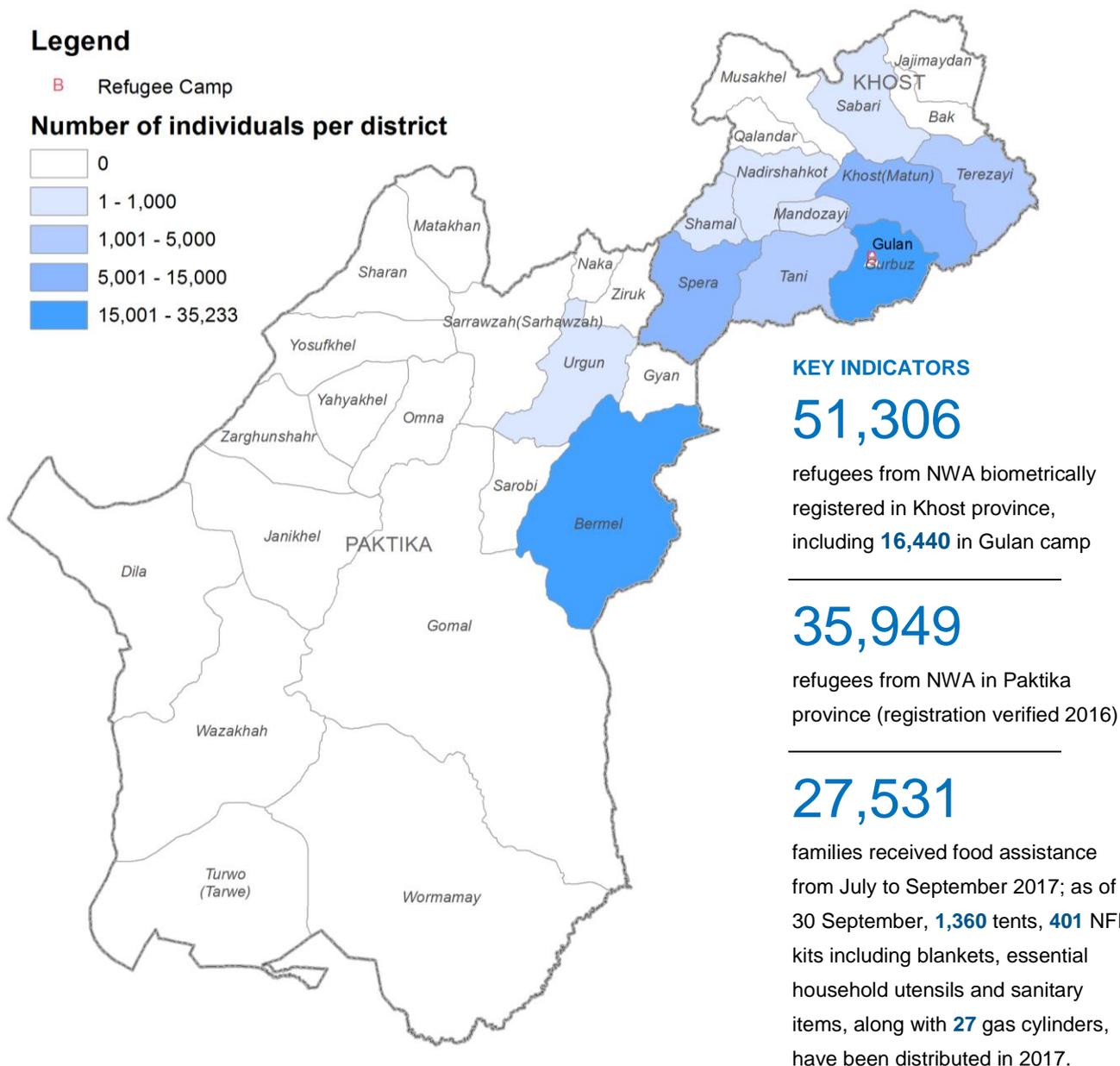
# Afghanistan

October 2017

Afghanistan acceded to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees in 2005, but has not implemented a national asylum framework.

In 2014, Afghanistan received an influx of Pakistani refugees from North Waziristan Agency; an estimated 100,000 remain in a protracted refugee-like situation.

Under its mandate, UNHCR has registered 381 asylum-seekers and refugees of various nationalities in Kabul and other urban centres.



## Operational Context and Response

The Government of Afghanistan acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in 2005. UNHCR continues to advocate for the enactment of a Refugee Law as a member of a taskforce comprised of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Ministry of Interior (Moi), and other government agencies, and provides technical support to enable the Government to meet its international commitments. A workshop on international refugee law and protection principles is scheduled for 7 November, to be co-facilitated by UNHCR and MoRR in Kabul, with a view to a gradual transfer of responsibility to the Government for asylum-seeker registration and Refugee Status Determination (RSD). At present, however, there is no national asylum framework to regulate issues of refugee protection in Afghanistan.

Under its mandate, UNHCR registers asylum-seekers and refugees in Afghanistan as a protection tool, with the aim to identify and assist persons with specific needs (PSN); to support access to humanitarian assistance and essential services including education and health care; to ensure freedom of movement and uphold basic rights; and to provide a minimum safeguard against refoulement. UNHCR conducts RSD where the formal recognition of an individual's refugee status would lead to a durable solution, such as resettlement.

### Urban asylum-seekers and refugees



**149** individual asylum-seekers and refugees receiving monthly cash-based assistance

Afghanistan currently hosts 381 registered asylum-seekers and refugees of various nationalities in Kabul, Herat and other major cities. For the majority, local integration is unattainable, particularly for those without

valid national passports and other documents necessary to regularize their legal status in Afghanistan. Many remain socially marginalized, with limited access to jobs in the informal economy. Voluntary return to the country of origin in safety and dignity is not possible, while resettlement opportunities are scarce, owing to the fact that no resettlement country has allocated a quota for refugees in Afghanistan or scheduled a selection mission.

UNHCR provides cash-based and in-kind assistance to the most vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees to help them pay for housing, food, utilities, and basic necessities. Additional financial assistance is provided during winter to mitigate heightened protection risks and reduce the reliance on negative coping mechanisms, since informal daily-wage labour and other income-generating activities are even more limited during the winter months. UNHCR currently distributes monthly cash assistance to 149 individual asylum-seekers and refugees, while ensuring their inclusion in livelihoods projects which promote self-reliance.

Through agreements with public education and healthcare providers, UNHCR promotes access to these services for asylum-seekers and refugees. Meaningful access is undermined, however, by the same challenges faced by the general population, as education and healthcare facilities in Afghanistan rely substantially on international aid and development programmes. An increasingly volatile security environment and limited livelihood opportunities further contribute to a challenging protection environment in Afghanistan, particularly as the country struggles to meet the reintegration needs of Afghan refugees returning from neighbouring countries, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by natural disasters and armed conflict.

## Pakistan Refugees from North Waziristan Agency

Afghanistan hosts a protracted population of Pakistani refugees, who fled North Waziristan Agency (NWA) in 2014 as a result of military operations which left the civilian population of Miranshah and surrounding villages forcibly displaced. As of 30 September 2017, UNHCR has biometrically registered more than 51,000 refugees in Khost province. In 2016, UNHCR verified the registration of almost 36,000 refugees in Paktika province, where access remains a challenge on account of insecurity as anti-government elements (AGEs) control or contest a substantial amount of territory. UNHCR has received unconfirmed reports that Pakistani refugees may be among the civilian casualties resulting from cross-border shelling, and armed conflict between pro-government forces and AGEs in Afghanistan. Cultural barriers also impact on efforts to comprehensively register the refugee population, especially women. Based on focus group discussions and key informants, UNHCR estimates that at least 100,000 refugees from NWA remain in Afghanistan.

 **16,440** refugees receive shelter and other essential services in Gulan camp, Khost province

Some 16,440 refugees receive shelter and other essential services in the Gulan camp in Khost province, while most live alongside Afghan host communities in various urban and rural locations. NWA refugees benefit from the generous hospitality of provincial

Afghan government authorities and the general population, due in part to tribal affiliations, as well as a shared understanding of the trauma of forced displacement. During participatory *shura* meetings, most refugees have stated they are currently unwilling to repatriate to Pakistan, including refugees who have undertaken independent visits to NWA to assess for themselves the conditions of return. UNHCR does not have the necessary permission of the Government of Pakistan to monitor refugee returns in NWA or to support sustainable reintegration.

UNHCR Afghanistan, in coordination with other humanitarian agencies, provides targeted assistance to persons with specific needs (PSN) among the NWA refugee population in Khost and Paktika provinces, and implements community-based protection measures to build the resilience of refugees as well as the host population, promoting peaceful co-existence through livelihoods initiatives, shelter, education, healthcare, nutrition, WASH projects, and NFI distributions. The primary source of income among refugees is non-agricultural daily-wage labour, while some refugees subsist on remittances from relatives working abroad in other countries.

### 2018 planning meeting for the refugee response in Khost and Paktika

On 11 October, UNHCR hosted a meeting in Kabul with a MoRR representative and humanitarian partners to update stakeholders on the current response to the refugee situation in Khost and Paktika. The meeting also provided a forum for UNHCR and partners to share information about respective programme planning for 2018 and ensure coordinated interventions to address the needs of the refugee population, as well as vulnerable individuals and families in host communities. The key findings of the joint vulnerability and needs assessment conducted by UNHCR and WFP in mid-2017 were presented, which will inform the response in 2018.

At the field level, regular coordination meetings are held in Khost and Sharana (Paktika). UNHCR will continue to host similar meetings at a national level in Kabul to coordinate, implement and report on activities described in the Refugee Chapter of the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP).



**PROTECTION**

- UNHCR has registered over 87,000 refugees and issued documentations to help facilitate freedom of movement, and access to humanitarian assistance and basic services; 71% of registered refugees are children.

- Under the PSN programme, UNHCR and partners identify, refer, and assist some of the most vulnerable individuals and families among NWA refugees and host communities, including persons living with disabilities and serious medical conditions, single parents, women and children at risk, elderly persons, and survivors of gender based violence.



Photo 1 Biometric registration conducted in Khost in 2017 / © UNHCR

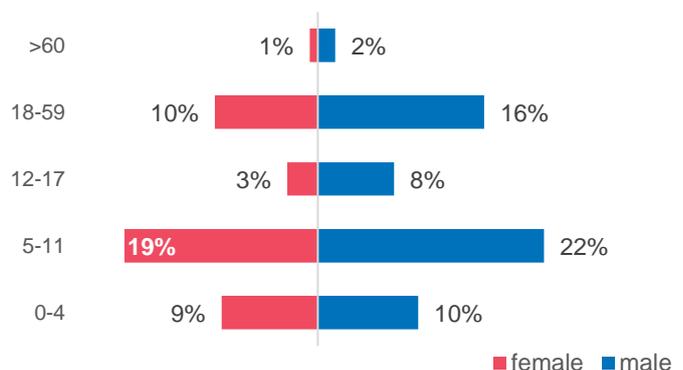
- While access to refugee communities in Barmal and Urgoon districts of Paktika is affected by the adverse security environment and threats to humanitarian workers, identified refugee beneficiaries receive humanitarian assistance from ORCD distribution points in the district administration compounds.

- In September, UNHCR and UNAMA visited Sharana on a joint mission to find solutions for enhancing the delivery of humanitarian assistance to refugees in Paktika province, as well as IDPs and host communities. During the mission, community elders reported that a majority of the NWA refugees in Paktika are not presently registered with UNHCR. UNHCR conducted another mission to Sharana in October to plan winterization assistance for refugees in consultation with the Governor of Paktika Province, DoRR, and NGO partners.

- While UNHCR envisages a gradual transfer of responsibility to Afghan government authorities for future registration of asylum-seekers and refugees, subject to the enactment of a national refugee law and an asylum framework, UNHCR will consider another registration and verification exercise in 2018 if a national refugee law is not adopted. In September, UNHCR received reports of new displacement from the Shawal area of NWA, resulting from military operations, leading to new arrivals from Pakistan in both Paktika and Khost provinces.

- The lack of birth registration for refugee children is a significant protection concern due to the risk of statelessness and long-term disadvantage. As a protection measure, partners such as Health Net International (HNI), International Medical Corps (IMC), Afghanistan Center for Training and Development (ACTD), and the Organization for Health Promotion and Management (OHPM) mitigate risk by issuing

Age and gender (Khost and Paktika)



Note: Paktika data for age and gender are extrapolated based on age and gender of the registered population in Khost.

birth notifications to refugee mothers, thereby facilitating the registration of new-born children with UNHCR, and future birth registration with government authorities in the country of origin.

- Regular community *shura* meetings with men and women by UNHCR and partners promote awareness about issues of education, vaccination, hygiene, and sanitation. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials provided by the Department of Public Health (DoPH) are used to support advocacy.



## HEALTH

- With one clinic and one mobile medical team, ACTD provides primary health care services to refugees in the Gulan camp including natal care, vaccinations, and therapeutic food to infant children to meet their immediate nutritional needs. HNI is implementing a primary health care programme for refugees in Alishir (Terezayi), Tani, Spera, and Matun districts of Khost, including two mobile teams and two fixed clinics. The HNI project includes natal care, family planning, vaccinations, and infant nutrition, as well as psychosocial counselling, and medical treatment for trauma (including GBV), mental illness, and tuberculosis. OHPM also provides medical treatment, natal care, and vaccinations to refugee and host community patients in Khost province.
- IMC has been providing healthcare services to refugees in Paktika province through both static and mobile health clinics in Barmal district and a mobile clinic in Urgon district, as well as WASH projects as a preventative measure. One midwife, one doctor and one vaccinator is present in each health facility. Between 1 July and 30 September, some 10,773 individuals received primary healthcare services, including vaccinations and infant nutrition, while 159 pregnant women received kits to assist safe delivery.
- The impact of health interventions by humanitarian agencies is life-saving, and essential for the refugee community, due to the limited resources of public health care providers in Khost and Paktika provinces.



## WATER AND SANITATION

- To address protection risks for the refugee population arising from a lack of potable water and sanitation, UNHCR and partners have implemented WASH projects in Khost and Paktika provinces including the construction of wells and latrines. NCA and CoAR continue to implement WASH projects in Tani and Alishir (Terezayi) districts including construction of a gravity pipe network, latrines, bathing facilities, bore wells, chlorination of water points, and hygiene awareness programmes. Solidarités International (SI) is beginning a new phase of its WASH program in the Gulan Camp, which is due for completion in April 2018. The programme is designed to empower the refugee community to maintain WASH services independently, and foster self-reliance.
- In Paktika province, IMC has established WASH committees in Barmal and Urgon districts to promote hygiene awareness and build community capacity. The committees receive training on hand-washing, food and water hygiene, and personal and environmental hygiene. Community Hygiene Promoters have been selected from the community through a participatory approach to mobilise and lead future hygiene awareness in mosques and public gatherings, and through home visits. In the last quarter, IMC provided hygiene awareness to 5,740 refugees in Paktika province, distributed 1,613 hygiene kits, and constructed 17 boreholes and 140 latrines.



**SHELTER AND NFIS**

- In 2017, UNHCR and partners have distributed 1,360 new tents in Khost and Paktika provinces to replace makeshift shelters and old tents which had deteriorated. Some 401 NFI packages have been distributed this year to provide soap and hygiene items, essential household utensils, buckets and jerry cans, and blankets, along with 27 gas cylinders for cooking. As refugees are sometimes not permitted by the local landowners to collect firewood, providing an alternative source of fuel promotes peaceful co-existence.
- To reduce vulnerability during the approaching winter months, which traditionally bring a heightened risk of infant mortality, and limited livelihood opportunities, 9,000 families will be assisted in Khost province including 10% from the host communities. Firewood will also be distributed in some locations as a source of fuel, together with blankets and plastic sheets to protect refugees from rain, snow, and freezing temperatures.
- UNICEF has provided 10,000 mosquito nets to ACTD and HNI for distribution to refugees in Gulan Camp, and to refugees in other locations, along with 48,000 packs of Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) and zinc to reduce the incidence of childhood diarrhoea, which is one of the leading causes of infant mortality and malnutrition.



**EDUCATION**



**45,000** school-age children (5-17 years of age) are registered with UNHCR among the refugee population



**12%** school attendance rate

- The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is providing primary education to boys and girls in the Gulan camp and other locations in Khost province, ensuring minimal disruption to their learning and promoting the development of refugee children during displacement. UNHCR and CoAR provide secondary education to refugees in Khost.

- Student enrolment and attendance in both NRC and CoAR schools has fallen in 2017. Outside of Gulan camp, school-age children among NWA refugees are significantly less likely than Afghan children in the host communities to be attending school, in all districts. Girls are more likely to be out of school than boys. The leading causes for children to be out of school include language barriers, lack of physical access, lack of female teachers, and parents not allowing their daughters to attend school. As there are more than 45,000 school-age children registered with UNHCR among the refugee population, the low rates of school attendance represent a critical need to mobilize resources, raise community awareness about the right to education, and empower parents with income-generating activities so as to reduce the reliance on child labour and other negative coping mechanisms.
- Access to education, particularly for girls, has significant protection dividends for the safety and well-being of refugee children and their ability to exercise economic, social, and cultural rights in the longer term. Integrating refugee children in Afghan schools is often not viable, due to limited classroom and teaching capacity, as well as differences in language and curriculum as compared to Pakistan schools. There are 339 government schools in Paktika province; however, several of the schools in Barmal district where a majority of registered refugees are hosted have closed due to insecurity. Refugee elders report that there are no operational schools in their area.



**FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION**

Refugees in Khost and Paktika continue to rely on food assistance from the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to meet their immediate needs for food security in light of limited livelihood opportunities. Food security remains the main concern of refugees raised in community consultations. The beneficiaries of food assistance included malnourished children, as well as pregnant and lactating women

**27,531** refugee families in Khost and Paktika provinces received food assistance from the World Food Programme between July and September 2017

channels are adversely affected by the conflict, however. In September, a truck carrying WFP food items intended for distribution to refugees, IDPs and other beneficiaries in Paktika province was diverted en route by AGEs while passing through Ghazni province, with the result that no food distributions took place during the month.

Under tri-partite agreements with UNHCR and WFP, Afghan Planning Agency (APA) and ORCD distribute food packages to NWA refugees in Khost and Paktika provinces, respectively. Supply



**DURABLE SOLUTIONS**

UNHCR consults closely with provincial authorities represented by the respective Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) in Khost and Paktika, and at a national level, with a goal to gradually transfer the responsibility for refugee protection to the Government of Afghanistan.

More than 70% of refugee heads of household in Khost and Paktika provinces have no formal education, which impacts negatively on their prospects of a durable solution through local integration. In 2017, HALO Trust has provided some 220 farmers including 60 women with vocational training in animal husbandry and livestock management, cultivation of saffron, and producing vegetables in three greenhouses.



Photo 2 Shura meeting in Khost province, 2017 / © UNHCR

Ensuring participation as a core protection principle, UNHCR and partners conduct *shura* meetings with tribal elders from the NWA refugee community, women, and youth, to design an inclusive and solutions-oriented protection strategy. The right of refugees to return to their place of origin in NWA depends on issuance of a *Watan* card by the Pakistan National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to allow access to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

In 2017, UNHCR has received reports that some refugee families have returned to Pakistan where they must register at the Baka Khel IDP camp in Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; however, the overwhelming majority of NWA refugees in Afghanistan, in most districts, are not willing to repatriate at present due to concerns about the

destruction of community infrastructure, lack of services, ongoing military operations, and restricted freedom of movement to and within NWA.

## Working in Partnership

■ UNHCR coordinates with the Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) at provincial levels and with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) at a national level, noting that the responsibility for refugee protection primarily rests with the Government of Afghanistan, as a signatory to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. Through ongoing dialogue with MoRR, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and Ministry of Interior (Mol), UNHCR will continue advocacy and provide technical support to develop a government registration process for asylum-seekers and training in refugee status determination (RSD), subject to passage of a national Refugee Law, to maintain and enhance the asylum space for refugees in Afghanistan.

### UNHCR Partners in Khost and Paktika

- UN World Food Programme (WFP)
- Coordination of Afghan Relief (CoAR)
- International Medical Corps (IMC)
- Health Net International (HNI)
- The Liaison Office (TLO)
- Afghanistan Center for Training and Development (ACTD)
- Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DaCAAR)
- Solidarités International (SI)
- Mine Detection Center (MDC)
- Afghan Planning Agency (APA)
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
- International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- Mission d'Aide au Developpement des Economic Rurales en Afghanistan (MADERA)
- Organization for Health Promotion and Management (OHPM)
- Organization for Research and Community Development (ORCD)
- UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- Halo Trust

## Financial Information

UNHCR is grateful for the financial support provided by donors who have contributed with un-earmarked and broadly earmarked funds as well as those who have contributed directly to the operation (as at 12 October 2017).

United States of America | European Union | Australia | Denmark | Republic of Korea | Japan | Germany | Norway | Canada | China | Luxembourg | UNIQLO Co., Ltd | France | Mexico | Switzerland | Sweden | Netherlands | United Kingdom | Italy | Algeria | Austria | Belgium | Bosnia and Herzegovina | Chile | Costa Rica | Estonia | Finland | Holy See | Iceland | Indonesia | Ireland | Kuwait | Lithuania | Malta | Monaco | Morocco | New Zealand | Portugal | Qatar | Russian Federation | Saudi Arabia | Serbia | Singapore | Spain | Sri Lanka | Thailand | Turkey | United Arab Emirates | Uruguay | Zambia | Private Donors

### CONTACTS

**Donna Corcoran**, External Relations Officer, Afghanistan,  
corcoran@unhcr.org, Tel: +93 202200381, Cell: +93 (0) 791990011

**M. Nadir Farhad**, Associate Public Information Officer, Afghanistan  
farhadm@unhcr.org Tel: +93 202200381, Cell: + 93 (0) 791990018