

Briefing Note – 07 April 2017

# AFGHANISTAN

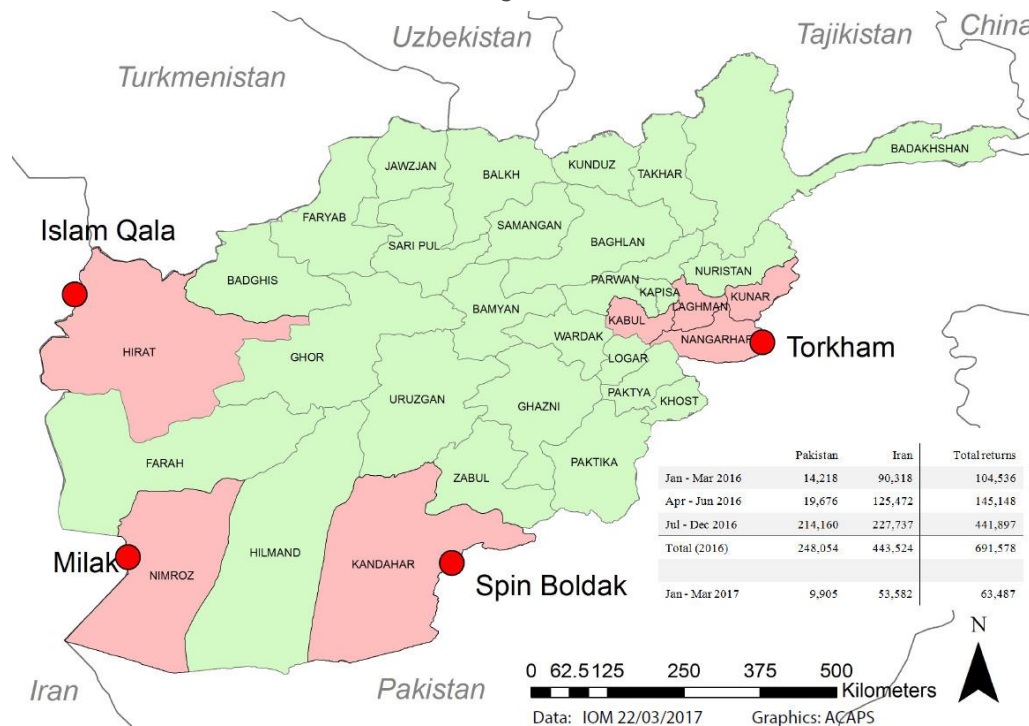
## Undocumented returnees



Need for international assistance	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
Expected impact	Very low	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major

### Crisis overview

#### Areas of return of undocumented Afghans from Iran and Pakistan



Source: IOM 22/03/2017. See end of document for enlarged version

#### Limitations

Limited information on the current coping mechanisms being employed by returnees, as well as on living conditions of Afghan returnees from Iran living in Herat and Nimroz provinces.

Although the flow of returnees to Afghanistan has slowed since its peak in mid-2016, more than 60,000 people have returned from Iran (54,000) and Pakistan (almost 10,000) this year. They are in need of livelihoods and shelter as well as protection assistance.

Returnees from Pakistan go through Torkham border in Nangarhar province and Spin Boldak border in Kandahar. Undocumented returnees make up around 40% of a total of 620,000 Afghans who returned from Pakistan in 2016. Returnees from Iran go through Islam Qala border in Herat province and Milak border in Nimroz province. More than 248,000 people returned from Pakistan in 2016, and more than 443,000 from Iran. The increase is a result of worsening relations between the Afghanistan and Pakistan governments, prompting increasing pressure to return. The increase in returns from Iran is primarily due to the perceived pressure by the Iranian government that Afghan undocumented migrants put on the Iranian economy.

### Key findings

#### Anticipated scope and scale

Living conditions for returnees are worsening. Most provinces were unprepared for the larger-scale arrival of returnees in 2016 and a similar influx in 2017 will stretch resource capacities to breaking point, with provinces in the east, particularly Nangarhar, incapable of absorbing any more. At least 600,000 returnees are expected in 2017, but the number could reach one million.

#### Priorities for humanitarian intervention

**Shelter and NFIs:** Access to land/housing is the main challenge.  
**Food security and livelihoods:** 30% of returnees face challenges finding livelihood opportunities and 18% in accessing food in the areas they settle. Undocumented returnees were estimated in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food security by FEWSNET in February 2017.  
**Protection:** Returnees are living in insecure areas, where fighting is ongoing.

#### Humanitarian constraints

- Insecurity in Nangarhar province hampers access to certain districts.
- The security situation on the road from Khashrod districts to Zaranj in Nimroz province, is volatile. Escorted convoys have been attacked and trucks looted and set alight.

## Crisis impact

Afghanistan has been experiencing large-scale arrivals of undocumented returnees from Pakistan since 2016. The primary driver of returns are protection concerns: harassment from authorities and the threat of deportation in Pakistan. Moreover, it has seen a steady influx of undocumented returnees from Iran due to deteriorating living standards.

### Undocumented returnees 2016-2017

	Pakistan	Iran	Total returns
Jan-Mar 2016	14,218	90,318	104,536
Apr-Jun 2016	19,676	125,472	145,148
Jul-Dec 2016	214,160	227,737	441,897
<b>Total (2016)</b>	<b>248,054</b>	<b>443,524</b>	<b>691,578</b>
Jan-Mar 2017	9,905	53,582	63,487

Source: IOM 11/03/2017, IOM 17/12/2017, IOM 03/2017

In total, around 620,000 documented and undocumented Afghans returned from Pakistan in 2016 due to a hostile protection environment (OCHA 14/03/2017). Undocumented returnees make up around 40% of the total number of Afghans who returned from Pakistan in 2016 (OCHA 14/03/2017). The total number of documented returnees is around 380,000. Documented returnees are eligible for UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme, which resumed at the beginning of April after a winter pause. These returnees are less vulnerable than undocumented returnees. Pakistan has imposed several deadlines for the return of all Afghan refugees. The current deadline is at the end of 2017 (Amnesty International 21/08/2016). As of 11 March, there have been an almost 10,000 total undocumented returns from Pakistan in 2017 (IOM 11/03/2017). In 2016 around 244,000 unregistered Afghans returned or were deported from Pakistan (IOM 17/12/2017). Returns from Pakistan fell significantly between mid-February and mid-March, when Pakistan closed the border after a spate of terrorist attacks (IOM 18, 11, 04/03, 25/02/2017).

Returns from Iran total around 54,000 since 1 January (IOM 11/03/2017) In 2016, 443,000 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran (IOM 03/2017). This is a decrease from 2015, when 544,000 people returned. Nevertheless, the influx remains steady. The route from Iran is through Islam Qala border crossing in Herat province or the Milak border

point in Nimroz province. However, Islam Qala border has not been used since 1 March because of damage after heavy rains and flooding (IOM 11/03/2017). The closure has led to decreased returns in March 2017, when only 33 people crossed through this point, compared to over 10,000 between January and February (IOM 30/03/2017).

Pressure to return, and in some cases deportation, hampers returnees' ability to assess and plan for their return, putting them at higher risk of poverty and impacting on prospects for long-term reintegration (United States Institute of Peace 13/01/2016). Returnees need livelihood and shelter support as well as protection services (OCHA 17/08/2016). The increase in population is putting pressure on the already limited resources of host communities. Nangarhar and Kunar are among the provinces with the largest numbers of returnees, and are also affected by conflict. Health and education services are non-existent in many locations, having been destroyed. Where some services are available, they appear to be overstretched or partially dysfunctional (Relief International 04/02/2017, IOM 22/03/2017). Herat province, where many returnees from Iran are living, is among the more secure provinces in western Afghanistan but the Taliban are active in a number of its remote districts, including Obe and Shindand (Khaama Press 14/03/2017).

Returnees from Pakistan are also returning to other areas of the country, including northern provinces such as Baghlan, Kunduz, and Jawzjan (Relief International 04/02/2017, OCHA 26/12/2016).

**Shelter and NFIs:** Access to land/housing is the main challenge cited by 38% of returnees, according to an IOM survey (IOM 22/03/2017). Returnees settle both in urban and rural areas. However, they prefer to stay in urban centres where they assume there are more livelihood opportunities and security, especially if they have no relatives or connections in host communities. However, they do not have adequate shelter and often live in overcrowded makeshift shelters and squatters (WASH Cluster 10/02/2017).

**Food security and livelihoods:** 30% of returnees face challenges finding livelihood opportunities and 18% in accessing food in the areas they settle. Undocumented returnees were estimated in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food security by FEWSNET in February 2017. (FEWSNET 28/02/2017). 54% of interviewed returnees from Pakistan reported having incurred debt (IOM 07/02/2017).

**Protection:** Returnees return to insecure areas, with fighting ongoing between the Afghan armed forces and insurgent groups. Civilians are caught in the cross-fire or suffer casualties as a result of weekly drone strikes on insurgent groups. Despite regular cross-border shelling on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, returnees have settled in these areas (TOLONews 05, 07/03/2017, Relief International 04/02/2017). Occasional attacks also occur in urban centres, including Kabul, which is one of the main recipients of returnees (IOM 22/03/2017). At least 15 different armed groups are active in Kunar province, including the Taliban, IS, Al-Qaeda, and Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (TOLONews 15/03/2015).

Many of the returnees have lived outside of Afghanistan for more than 20 years, or were born in Pakistan as part of the undocumented Afghan community there. The returnees face challenges as they reintegrate into communities contending with conflict and record levels of displacement (IOM 10/03/2017).

**Health:** Continued insecurity has seen the closure of healthcare facilities in Nangarhar province (Health Cluster 25/10/2016). In Kunar province, nearly half the population is more than 10km from the nearest health facility (Government of Afghanistan 2010). Overcrowded shelter settings in urban centres where returnees tend to settle favour vector-breeding and the transmission of waterborne diseases (WASH Cluster 10/02/2017).

**WASH:** Undocumented returnees have limited access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, as they are not entitled to support from UNHCR, and IOM can only support a small portion of them (NRC 21/08/2016). In Nangarhar province, water is scarce and 38% of the population does not have access to safe drinking water (OCHA 2015). 45% of the population in Kunar province has no access to safe drinking water (Civil Military Fusion Centre 2012). Kunar provinces also has limited hygiene services (WASH Cluster 28/02/2017). 70% of the 5,934 returnee and IDP families assessed in the eastern region in September 2016 did not have adequate hygiene materials. Nimroz province does not have full access to sanitation services and only 12.7% of households in four districts have access to improved water sources (UNFPA 31/01/2017, WASH Cluster 28/02/2017).

**Education:** Children of returnee families have faced lack of education documentation, and few or no education opportunities in Afghanistan. Approximately 37% of returnee children surveyed in Nangarhar were not enrolled in school, and for those returnee children that were attending school, 49% were more than 3km from the nearest formal school (ACTED 13/03/2017).

## Vulnerable groups affected

### Children

The ongoing conflict in Afghanistan severely impacted Afghan children in 2016. UNAMA recorded 3,512 child casualties (923 deaths and 2,589 injured), a 24% increase from 2015, and the highest number of child casualties recorded by UNAMA in a single year (UNAMA 06/02/2017).

### Women

Female returnees have been particularly affected by social restrictions on mobility, which impacts access to services, particularly education and health (USIP 13/01/2016).

### Youth

As young returnees struggle to find livelihood opportunities and integrate, they are particularly vulnerable to recruitment into the various armed groups and criminal networks active in Afghanistan (United States Institute of Peace 13/01/2016). IS has been on a recruitment campaign in March in Logar province, dropping leaflets onto streets and into people's homes urging youth to join them in the fight against the Taliban (Pajhwok Afghan News 12/03/2017).

## Humanitarian constraints

**Insecurity:** In Nangarhar, access is currently lacking to Shinwar, Surkhrod, Khogyani, Batikot, Chaparhar, Kot, Achain, Dehbal, Hearak, Pachieragam, Sherzad, Durbaba, Nazyan districts. It is difficult to conduct needs assessments in certain districts of Nangarhar and to provide assistance (ACTED 13/03/2017).

The security situation on the road from Khashrod district to Zaranj, Nimroz province, is volatile. Many incidents of food looting occur in Bakwa desert on this road. Escorted convoys have been attacked and trucks looted and set on fire. Transporters usually decline to deliver food to Nimroz province for these reasons (Logistics Cluster)

At the end of 2016, Ghoriyan district in Herat was contested by the Taliban and Afghan forces. Dilaram and Khashrod districts in Nimroz province are insecure, and access to populations in need in these districts is restricted due to insurgent group activity (Geopolitical Futures 2016).

In 2016, almost 200 incidents against aid workers were reported in Afghanistan (OCHA 17/01/2017). The Taliban has historically targeted humanitarian workers. In 2016 IS militants engaged in attacks on humanitarian workers as well (OCHA 30/09/2016).

**Physical constraints:** The transport infrastructure in Kunar is reasonably well developed, with over a third (39%) of roads in the province useable by cars in all seasons, and 14% in some seasons. However, in nearly half of the province (47%) there are no roads at all (Government of Afghanistan 2010).

## Aggravating factors

### Economic pressure

Economic growth in Afghanistan is limited to 1%–2% per year. Returnees put more stress on the economy, particularly on the job market. Competition is high, particularly among unskilled daily labourers (USIP 23/02/2017).

## Fighting season

Spring is the beginning of the fighting season in Afghanistan as improved weather conditions enables movement and armed groups tend to launch offensives (Arab News 28/02/2017). Increased insecurity means reduced access to vulnerable and displaced populations, as well as increased displacement.

## Spring rains and flooding

After the heavy winter snowfall, rapid snowmelt, along with heavy spring rains, leads to heavy flooding in Afghanistan. The sources of most of the rivers lie in the mountains and are fed by snow and glaciers. Lack of vegetation (as is the case in Nimroz province) and denudation of the mountain areas, primarily due to environmental damage, also contribute to flooding (World Bank 28/02/2017).

Spring flooding in Afghanistan ordinarily begins in February and it is expected to last up until May (FEWSNET 02/2017). Flooding will exacerbate humanitarian needs for displaced and returnee families.

## Elections in Pakistan

The 2018 national legislative elections are likely to worsen the situation for Afghans in Pakistan as parties may want to increase the consensus of the Pakistani electorate by showing intransigence towards Afghans.

## Outlook

Most provinces were unprepared for the mass influx of returnees in 2016 and a similar influx in 2017 is likely to stretch resource capacities to breaking point, with provinces in the east, particularly Nangarhar, incapable of absorbing any more returnees. The HRP for 2017 projects the possible return of a further one million Afghans from Pakistan (OCHA 17/01/2017).

Afghans are likely to become more vulnerable in Pakistan in the coming months: the Pakistan parliament has passed a constitutional amendment reviving the use of secretive military courts for trying civilians on terrorism charges, and the status of Afghan refugees is likely to become an electoral issue (Reuters 21/03/2017).

In Iran, deteriorating relations with the United States may lead to more sanctions. This will likely lead the Iranian government to speed up deportations, as Afghans are perceived as putting a strain on the Iranian economy.

Conditions faced upon returning to Afghanistan have driven increasing flows of refugees to seek refuge in Europe and other regions (USIP 13/01/2016). Should security deteriorate further this trend is likely to continue.

## Contextual information

### Afghan population in Iran and Pakistan

Iran and Pakistan have hosted large Afghan refugee populations for over 30 years, since the Soviet invasion in 1979.

**Pakistan:** Since early 2007, Pakistan has refused to register any new Afghan refugees, despite the lack of meaningful improvement in conditions in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, Afghans have continued to arrive in Pakistan. The current number of unregistered Afghans amounts to one million, despite a surge in deportations in 2016. Registered refugees are around 1,35 million (IOM 18/03/2017, OCHA 07/01/2017).

**Iran:** Since 1992, residence rights have not been automatically granted to new arrivals (HRW 20/11/2013). As of 2017, the majority of Afghans (documented and undocumented) live in the provinces of Tehran, Khorsan-e Razavi, and Isfahan (HRW 20/11/2013). As of April, 951,142 documented Afghan refugees are hosted in Iran (ECHO 04/2017). Prospects for local integration in Iran are limited. Refugees' movements within Iran are restricted and the living standards of Afghan refugees have deteriorated significantly in recent years (European Resettlement Network 2013). The fear of forced conscription into the Iranian army is a driver of returns to Afghanistan. Since 2016, the Iranian government has recruited thousands of Afghan refugees living in Iran to join the Syrian war (PRI 16/07/2016).

### Pakistan: drivers of return

Pakistan's stance towards Afghan refugees has hardened, especially after the attack on an army-owned school in Peshawar, Pakistan, in December 2014, which left more than 100 children dead. The perpetrators were allegedly traced to Afghan armed groups, and the Pakistani government has been saying since then that militants are hiding among the Afghan population and planning attacks. As a consequence, Afghan refugees have been subject to abuse and ill treatment (Amnesty International 21/08/2016, VOA 09/03/2017). Incidents reported include: widespread police extortion, arbitrary detention, deportation threats from Pakistani government officials, police raids on refugee shelters and apartments, exclusion of Afghan children from state schools and closure of Afghan refugee schools, and unlawful use of force and theft (HRW 13/02/2017).

In 2016, the number of returnees rose sharply as the result of further increased harassment by Pakistani authorities after Afghanistan-India relations strengthened and Pakistan-India relations soured (Reuters 19/12/2016).

The Pakistani security forces launched a nationwide anti-terrorist operation in February 2017 after a spate of suicide bombings killed more than 120 people. Since then, Pashtun

leaders, both Afghan and from Pakistan's northwest, have complained that their communities are being targeted, harassed, and suffering racial profiling, especially in Punjab province. The police have targeted many Pashtun communities in Punjab and elsewhere, combing markets and going house-to-house (Washington Post 03/03/2017). For the first time, women and children have been detained along with men (GEO TV 02/03/2017). In the first 24 hours after the deadliest attack on 16 February, more than 100 people were killed nationwide and hundreds detained as terrorism suspects by authorities. Many were said to be Afghans (Washington Post 03/03/2017).

## Iran: drivers of return

In Iran, many Afghan refugees have said that their basic human rights are violated (Al Jazeera 17/05/2016). Those who are born in the country are afforded UN-recognised refugee status, but hold only a fraction of the rights granted to Iranian citizens, such as citizenship and marriage rights. Many do not have residency documents and are forced to make their living on the black market (Al Jazeera 17/05/2016). As of 2017, only one-third of refugees have formal refugee status (Reuters 26/10/2016).

Human rights groups have accused the Iranian government of severe maltreatment of Afghans, including summary deportation, physical abuse at the hands of security forces, limited job opportunities outside menial labour, and restricted access to education (Al Jazeera 17/05/2016).

However, a recent study found that returnees from Iran were less dependent on assistance upon return to Afghanistan than returnees from Pakistan, supporting the widely held belief that refugees living in Pakistan are more vulnerable than refugees living in Iran (HRW 13/02/2017). In 2015, as Iran's ties with the European Union and the US improved, the Iranian government allowed approximately 48,000 undocumented Afghan refugee children to enrol in public primary schools (Reuters 26/10/2016).

## History of conflict in Afghanistan and relevant stakeholders

Afghanistan has struggled with a declining economy and deteriorating security since the international community withdrew numerous humanitarian and security operations in 2014 (International Rescue Committee retrieved 21/03/2017). The Taliban remains a serious challenge for the Afghan government in almost every province. Insecurity is expected to worsen as Afghan forces cannot cope and foreign forces have been obliged to stay in Afghanistan. It continues to declare that it will pursue a peace deal with Kabul only after foreign military forces leave (CIA Factbook 12/01/2017).

**The Taliban** has focused operations in various rural districts of Afghanistan. The group has been seen as a rural militant movement capable only of hit-and-run attacks on cities

but over the last year it has demonstrated an alarming push into urban population centres. On 29 December 2016, more than 12 civilians were injured by Taliban-fired mortar shell in the Batikot district of eastern Nangarhar province (Pajhwok Afghan News 29/12/2016). In 2014 the Taliban movement numbered an estimated 60,000, compared to 25,000 in 2009 (BBC News 26/05/2016).

**Islamic State (IS):** Since 2014, the Islamic State (IS) has been a significant threat in the east of Afghanistan. Its headquarters are in Nangarhar (ISW 28/06/2016). IS targets government facilities, policy posts, checkpoints, international aid organisations, and civilians from the Shia hazara community. In recent months, IS has carried out attacks in Kabul and in areas in the east. Their attacks primarily consist of bombing attacks and acts of arson. In early March, IS militants carried out an attack in Nangarhar, killing four (News Nation 06/03/2017). IS claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb attack on the Afghan Supreme Court building in Kabul on 7 February 2017, which killed 20 people and injured four (RFERL 07/02/2017). The objective of IS is to establish a caliphate, but the Taliban consider themselves the legitimate government in Afghanistan.

**Displacement:** More than 1.5 million people were displaced within Afghanistan as of 28 October 2016, mostly due to conflict (UNHCR 28/10/2017). IDPs live in camps with little access to WASH, food, education, and employment opportunities. Between 1 January 2017 and 12 March 2017, 76,600 people were internally displaced due to conflict (OCHA 12/03/2017).

## The India–Pakistan–Afghanistan triangle

India–Afghanistan relations are strengthening, while India–Pakistan and Afghanistan–Pakistan relations are deteriorating. India has been showing increasing support for Afghanistan, and Pakistan perceives India's funding of development in Afghanistan as part of India's plan to draw Afghanistan into its camp, leaving Pakistan encircled by enemies (The Diplomat 19/06/2016). In December 2016, Afghanistan rejected USD 500 million in aid from Pakistan, while planning to expand trade relations with India, including via the port at Chabahar, Iran, which will allow Afghanistan to bypass Pakistan for its exports (The Diplomat 06/12/2016, Times of India 04/12/2016). Cross-border tensions between Afghan and Pakistani forces have occurred multiple times (Al Jazeera 19/02/2017, Khaama Press 22/12/2016).

Pakistan's relations with India have been deteriorating since July 2016, because of a renewed insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir, a region both have been claiming since independence. Pakistan has always been prominent in supporting Kashmiri insurgents (The Diplomat 28/04/2018).

## Iran: Foreign economic sanctions

In November 2012, the Iranian cabinet issued a regulation allowing the government to expel 1.6 million foreigners 'illegally residing in Iran' by the end of 2015. The regulation also instructed the Interior Ministry to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of 200,000 Afghan registered refugees and terminate the refugee status of another 700,000 Afghans (Human Rights Watch 20/11/2013). This regulation was mainly driven by the impact of economic sanctions (DIIS 22/12/2016). Despite the lifting of sanctions, many Afghans still face difficulties in Iran (DIIS 22/12/2016).

## Response capacity

### Local and national response capacity

Afghanistan has a Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) in charge of monitoring and managing all matters related to refugees and returnees in the country. According to MoRR, there are 61 camp sites being built to house returnees who have nowhere else to go. But at present, none of these sites is ready (FEWSNET 20/02/2017).

### International response capacity

IOM has launched a four-year, EUR 18 million project to support returnees and host communities across Afghanistan. Communities in Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Balkh, Kandahar, Baghlan, Uruzgan, and Laghman will be targeted. IOM 14/03/2017

In February 2017, the Government of India expressed interest in building low-cost housing for refugees and returnees. Khaama Press 26/02/2017

### Population coping mechanisms

Returnees often left Pakistan hurriedly and families had to sell their assets, often at a fraction of their value. This, together with the cost of travel, has meant that returnees have arrived in Afghanistan with reduced coping capacity. Relief International 04/02/2017

## Information gaps and needs

- Limited information on the current coping mechanisms being employed by returnees.

- Limited information on specific living conditions of returnees from Iran living in Herat and Nimroz provinces.

## Lessons learned

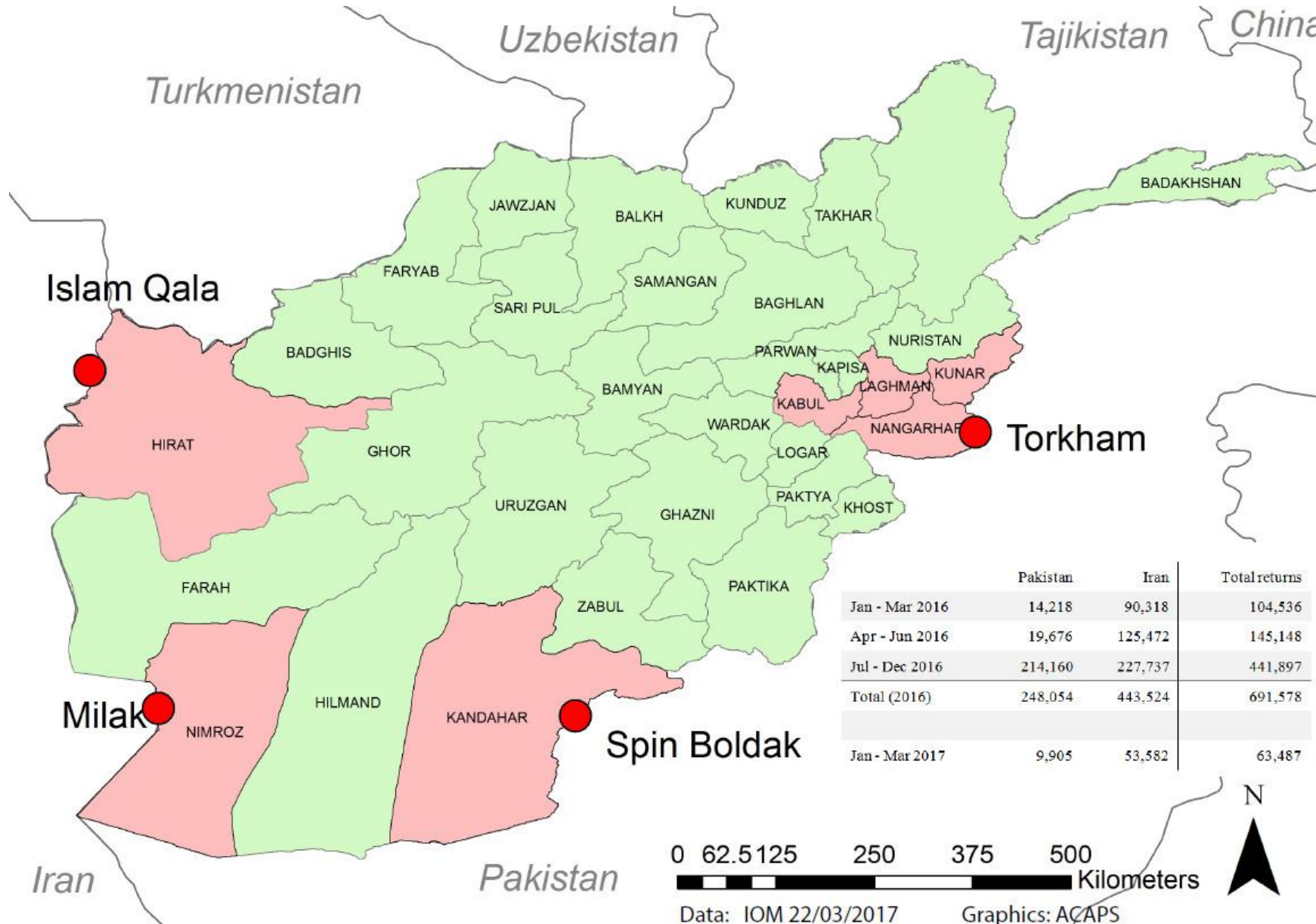
- Lack of access to land, livelihood opportunities, basic services and conflict often results in further displacement (USIP 13/01/2016).
- A large number of returnees have been in protracted displacement. Having grown up outside Afghanistan may result in social and cultural challenges (USIP 13/01/2016).
- A large number of returnees resettle in urban areas, putting an additional strain on basic services and creating tensions with the local community. In the past, some humanitarian actors have failed in recognising and responding to urban displacement (USIP 13/01/2016).

## Key characteristics of host population and area

Key indicators	Nangarhar	Kunar	Herat	Nimroz
Total population	1,545,448 (2016)	458,130 (2016)	1,928,327 (2016)	167,863 (2016)
Gender and age distribution of population	Female: 48.8%, Male: 51.2%	Female: 48.8%, Male: 51.2%	Female: 49.3%, Male: 50.7%	Female: 48.9%, Male: 51.1%
State capital	Jalalabad	Asad Abad	Herat	Zaranj
Lighting and cooking sources	95% use of solid fuels (2008)		47% LPG for cooking 96.1% of households in Herat had access to electricity	50% wood for cooking 73.1% of households have access to city electricity for lighting.
WASH				
Access to improved sanitation facilities (2008)	6%		60.3%	78%
Access to improved water sources (2015)	62%		82.4%	12.7%
Health				
Under-5 mortality	180 per 1,000 live births (2005)			210 per 1,000 live births
Maternal mortality ratio	1,100 per 100,000 live births (2005)			1,600 per 100,000 live births
Food security across the province	IPC 3	IPC 2	IPC 2	IPC 2
Literacy rate	24% (2008)	21% (2010)	47.9% (2017)	46.2% (2017)

Sources: UNFPA, FEWSNET, Government of Afghanistan, UNICEF, ACF 2014, OCHA 2015

Map: Areas of return of undocumented Afghans from Iran and Pakistan



Source: IOM 22/03/2017