

Crisis impact

In December heavy fighting has been reported between the Taliban and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in Sancharak district, in the northern province of Sar-i Pul. Clashes and movement of armed groups have caused displacement (NYT 17/12/2017).

Between 4 and 10 December, 3,400 people were reportedly displaced in the province. During recent clashes the Taliban captured the village of Tebar in Sancharak district in mid-December and around 7,000 people were reported displaced in the surrounding area of the district. It is unclear whether the two displacement figures are related (NRC 14/12/2017 OCHA 11/12/2017 OCHA 18/12/2017).

Shelter and NFIs: The displaced have reportedly fled their homes and left belongings behind. They are therefore likely in need of shelter and NFIs, particularly considering harsh winter conditions in the northern provinces (NRC 14/12/2017). The growing number of displaced is likely to have increased the number of people in need of shelter assistance.

Protection: The displacement has occurred as a result of violence. There are reports that people have been exposed to indiscriminate attacks, harassment and movement restrictions. Displaced populations are more vulnerable to violence and exploitation, as well as financial insecurity (OCHA 01/12/2017). An escalation in conflict is likely to lead to further protection concerns.

Food: Sar-i Pul province is affected by food insecurity (OCHA 02/12/2017). Around 700,000 people are facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and more than 10,000 displaced people are facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food security outcomes. Recent displacement and harsh winter conditions are likely to have worsened food security conditions. An increase in clashes is likely to disrupt livelihood activities in rural areas and access to food. The upcoming lean season, from January to May, will also deteriorate food security and IDPs will likely have to rely on food assistance in order to meet their primary needs (FEWS NET 01/12/2017; FEWS NET 21/11/2017).

Health: 57 basic health facilities are present in the province of Sar-i Pul. It is unclear whether all are operational (IMMAP 18/12/2017). Ongoing violence is likely to have an impact on the number of people in need of primary health care and trauma assistance (OCHA 02/12/2017).

WASH: The majority of displaced across the province are living in informal settlements where WASH facilities are limited. Most people rely on public hand-pumps that are more difficult for women to access due to movement restrictions (OCHA 02/12/2017). A sudden increase in the number of IDPs is likely to have caused a further deterioration in access to WASH facilities.

Vulnerable groups affected

Children: An estimated 57% of the displaced population in Sar-i Pul province is under 18 (OCHA 26/11/2017). Displaced minors are more likely to be exposed to child labour and early and forced marriage. Displaced children are also particularly at risk of no access to education if their families are unable to afford tuition fees. Insecurity and violence also limits access to schools for the population in the affected areas (OCHA 02/12/2017).

Women: An estimated 21% of the displaced population in Sar-i Pul province are women (OCHA 26/11/2017). Displaced women are more exposed to sexual and gender based violence. They are also more likely to face difficulties in accessing civil documentation and livelihood activities. Forced marriage and restrictions to freedom of movement are specific concerns reported among displaced communities in Afghanistan, and are sometimes derived from negative cultural practices (OCHA 02/12/2017).

Humanitarian and operational constraints

Throughout 2017 Sar-i Pul province has been intermittently affected by violence, which has caused access constraints. The latest conflict developments are likely to have caused further deterioration to safe access in the area (NRC 14/12/2017; OCHA 17/12/2017).

In December, mobile network and GSM coverage are reported to be operative in most of the province, covering around 62% of the population. (IMMAP 18/12/2017).

As of 30 September, 305 security incidents against aid workers have been recorded countrywide since the beginning of the year (WFP 31/07/2017).

Aggravating factors

Seasonal information

The winter season runs from mid-October to March in Afghanistan. Sar-i Pul province experiences snowfall during winter. Freezing temperatures will deteriorate the living conditions of IDPs in need of shelter and NFIs (World Weather Online 07/12/2017). Shelter response will need to be timely and prioritise winterisation support (OCHA 02/12/2017; OCHA 01/12/2017; IMMAP 18/12/2017).

Food Security

The lean season in Afghanistan runs from January to May. 700,000 people are facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2), and more than 10,000 displaced people are facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food security conditions. This will likely deteriorate with the onset of the lean season (FEWS NET 31/10/2017; FEWS NET 30/11/2017; FEWS NET 21/11/2017)

Contextual information

Drivers of the current conflict

In Sar-i Pul province in northern Afghanistan, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces are currently fighting an insurgency led by non-state armed groups, namely the Taliban (PAJHWOK 14/12/2017; KHAAMA PRESS 18/12/2017). Armed clashes are reported mainly in Sancharak district, where the conflict parties are fighting over control of some areas, including the village of Tebar (AA 16/12/2017). Throughout 2017, violence has been reported in the province (TOLO NEWS 08/08/2017; IMMAP 18/12/2017; AA 16/12/2017).

Past displacement

From January 2017 to the end of November, over 9,600 people were displaced in Sar-i Pul province due to conflict. The majority of IDPs currently in Sar-i Pul were displaced from within the province, while some IDPs are from the neighbouring provinces of Faryab, Jowzjan and Baghlan. (OCHA 17/12/2017; OCHA 17/12/2017)

As of 30 November, more than 3,400 returnees have returned to Sar-i Pul province in 2017 (UNHCR 12/12/2017).

History of conflict and relevant stakeholders

Taliban: Ultra conservative Islamist group, known also as Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The group began in the rural south and southeastern areas, before moving to the northern provinces. In the last years they have progressively been pushing their control into urban population centres (NYT 09/01/2016)

Afghan National Security Forces: Forces of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, including the Afghan National Army (approximately 185,000 personnel), the Afghan National Police (approximately 152,600 personnel), and the Afghan Air Force (approximately 6,600 personnel) (NATO 31/10/2013). In 2017, they have reportedly faced a high number of casualties and loss of control over provinces and districts (NRP 01/05/2017).

Key characteristics

Demographic profile - Afghanistan has a total population of 34.6 million people (UNICEF 10/12/2017). Sar-i Pul has a population of 708,000 people (IMMAP 18/12/2017). 57% of displaced in Sar-i Pul are children under 18 (OCHA 26/11/2017; OCHA 02/12/2017).

Food Security - The majority of the population in Sar-i Pul is in Stressed (IPC Phase 2), while the displaced population is likely to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food security

outcomes. 700,000 people are facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2), and more than 10,000 displaced people are facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food security conditions. The projections for February to May 2018 show a slight deterioration with more people facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) (FEWS NET 30/11/2017).

Health - Countrywide statistics: under-5 mortality rate 70 deaths/1,000 births; neonatal mortality rate 40 deaths/1,000 births (UNICEF 10/12/2017).

WASH - Sanitation countrywide statistics: 43% of population using unimproved sanitation facilities; 13% practising open defecation; 12% using shared sanitation facilities. Water countrywide statistics: 12% of population using piped drinking water supply; 43% using other improved drinking water sources; 36% using unimproved drinking water source (UNICEF 07/12/2017).

Literacy – 15-24 year old: 47%. 15-24 male: 62%. 15-24 female: 32% (UNICEF 07/12/2017; UNICEF 10/12/2017).

Response capacity

National and international response capacity

Department of Refugees and Repatriation and Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development are government entities active in the province that are responding to the displacement crisis (OCHA 26/11/2017). International response is ongoing across the province. Most of the humanitarian response is operating in the northern part, where needs are most severe (OCHA 02/12/2017).

Data from July shows that 17 organisations were part of the Afghanistan Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) and were delivering assistance in seven districts of Sar-i Pul province. The majority were reported to be concentrated in Sar-i Pul district (OCHA 31/07/2017).

Information gaps and needs

- There is little information on the recent displacement in the area, making it difficult to assess specific sectoral needs.
- There is no information available regarding the specific sectoral needs of host communities.
- District level information regarding the number of people displaced and potential intra-district movement is not available.

Lessons learned

A high number of displaced people in an insecure area such as Sar-i Pul might increase the vulnerability to disease outbreak, putting the health response under further pressure. Health response is a key factor in order to avoid a quick deterioration of the situation (OCHA 02/12/2017).

As the number of people displaced is likely to increase and winter exacerbates the level of humanitarian need, prior knowledge among aid workers of the weather forecast would enhance preparedness (OCHA 02/12/2017; World Weather Online 07/12/2017; IMMAP 18/12/2017).

Host community support is crucial. IDPs and returnees are often reported to reside with host communities (IDMC 16/07/2015; UNHCR 12/12/2017).

