

Briefing Note – 27 August 2016

AFGHANISTAN

Undocumented returnees from Pakistan



Need for international assistance	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
				X	

Expected impact	Very low	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
			X		

Crisis overview

Over 101,000 undocumented refugees are estimated to have returned from Pakistan in 2016, and the rate of returns increased significantly in July (see table). Most returnees came through Turkham border crossing, to Nangarhar province, and have subsequently remained in this province. Although refugee returnees are entitled to assistance, undocumented refugees do not have the same eligibility for assistance due to their status, and fall into a gap in programming.

Undocumented returnees 2016

	Spontaneous returnees		Deportees		Total returns
	Turkham crossing	Spin Boldak crossing	Turkham crossing	Spin Boldak crossing	
16 Jan– 16 June 2016	12,699	6,569	8,649	5,975	33,892
16 Jun–16 Jul	26,724	1,139	1,133	339	29,335
1–7 August	18,161	499	373	327	19,360
8–14 August	17,480	673	214	135	18,502
Total	75,064	8,880	10,369	6,776	101,089

Sources: IOM 27/07/2016; IOM 14/08/2016

Key findings

Anticipated scope and scale

The Pakistani government has set a deadline for all refugees (documented and undocumented) to return at the end of 2016, and living conditions are worsening in Pakistan. If returns continue at this rate, around 81,000 people will have returned in the month of August. Over the next five months, over 407,000 undocumented refugees could return. An estimated 1.5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan are undocumented.

Afghanistan has not established safety inside its borders. The returnees add to a large caseload of over one million internally displaced people, who already struggle to access basic services. Access problems are worse for undocumented refugee returnees, as their status means they are not entitled to cash and livelihood assistance.

Priorities for humanitarian intervention

- **Protection:** undocumented refugee returnees fall into a programming gap with no funds or aid available to them.
- **Shelter:** returnees are reportedly sleeping in the open.
- **Livelihoods:** returnees do not have access to land and do not have a means of income.

Humanitarian constraints

Nangarhar province is not secure, due to ongoing conflict between the Taliban and Islamic State. The Afghan government is also carrying out attacks, with the help of the United States, against both groups.

Humanitarian workers are frequently targeted, particularly foreign aid workers.

At least 17 districts of Nangarhar are contaminated with mines and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW).

Limitations

Limited information on the needs of undocumented refugee returnees.

Crisis impact

Between 16 July and 14 August 2016, over 67,100 unregistered refugees are estimated to have returned from Pakistan (IOM 27/07/2016; IOM 14/08/2016; NRC 21/08/2016). Returnees either cross at Turkham (Nangarhar province) or Spin Boldak (Kandahar province) border crossings; the majority pass through Nangarhar (IOM 14/08/2016; IOM 27/07/2016). In the first two weeks of August, an average of more than 2,500 returnees passed Turkham crossing per day.

The vast majority of returnees are not receiving assistance. For around 17,700 people who crossed into Turkham over 8–14 August, only 12% received basic humanitarian assistance (IOM 14/08/2016). In July, only 18% of people received assistance (IOM 27/07/2016). Between January and June 2016, only 35% of the arrivals at Turkham, 7,470 people, received basic humanitarian assistance; none of the arrivals at Spin Boldak received assistance (IOM 27/07/2016; IOM 14/08/2016). Returnees have stated that they have to pay bribes to the Pakistani border forces in order to carry belongings such as wood, animals, and utensils (AA 12/08/2016).

Nangarhar is a major area of origin for many Afghans residing in Pakistan, and 76% of undocumented returnees in July chose Nangarhar as a final destination. Other provinces of return include Kabul (15%), Kunar (5%), Laghman (3%), and Logar (1%) (IOM 14/08/2016, IRIN 20/06/2007; IOM 2015).

Protection: Returnees are living in a high-risk area, with fighting ongoing between the Taliban and Afghan armed forces, as well as the Islamic State and Afghan forces (VOA 05/01/2016; Reuters 13/08/2016).

Due to high level of contamination with landmines and ERW, returnees may be more at risk as they are not always aware which areas to avoid.

Having been forced to return earlier than intended, and possibly before they deemed the situation in Afghanistan safe, returnees may well be in need of psychosocial support (NRC 21/08/2016).

Shelter and NFIs: Refugee returnees often do not return to the same province as they are from, and have no shelter. Returnees have stated they are sleeping out in the open. Compounds are shared among several families huddled together (NRC 21/08/2016). Shelter needs will become more urgent when winter weather commences (OCHA 17/08/2016).

Food security and livelihoods: Over 1.6 million people are already severely food insecure in Afghanistan, and Nangarhar is reportedly one of the three most severely food insecure provinces (Food Security Cluster 15/08/2016). Returnees reportedly do not have access to land, and will therefore be in need of food and livelihood assistance. Land grabs in Nangarhar are common; some 966 hectares of land have been taken, reportedly by powerful local men (Tolo News 11/08/2016).

Registered refugee returnees are eligible for cash assistance of up to USD 400 (DAWN 20/08/2016). The returnees have however stated that this is insufficient. Unregistered returnees receive no cash assistance (Afghanistan Times 21/08/2016).

WASH: Returnees reportedly do not have access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities (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).

Health: While specific needs for health have not yet been indicated, it is likely that returnees living close together in open spaces without sufficient WASH facilities will face a heightened risk of disease outbreaks.

Documentation: Because these returnees have not been documented as refugees in Pakistan, they do not enjoy basic refugee rights. They fall into a programming gap, as humanitarian agencies responding to returning refugees' needs do not have sufficient funds or aid available for them (NRC 21/08/2016).

Conditions at repatriation centres

Documented refugees have to verify their identity at the Voluntary Repatriation Centres (VRC) in Peshawar and Balochistan if they want to be eligible for assistance when they return to Afghanistan – undocumented refugees have no such right or obligation. The verification process has been very slow, with long queues at the VRCs, and people sleeping in the open while waiting to be registered. There are no WASH facilities or food distributions. Vendors have created makeshift food stalls along stagnant water, creating a breeding ground for mosquitoes. People have reportedly become ill from eating this food (DAWN 20/08/2016; The News 03/08/2016).

Vulnerable groups affected

Around 17.3% of arrivals in August were females above 18, 34% were males under 18, and 32.4% females under 18 (IOM 14/08/2016).

Humanitarian constraints

Conflict: Ongoing conflicts in Nangarhar – between the government and the Taliban, as well as the government and Islamic State (see aggravating factors) – increase insecurity and limit access to affected populations (OCHA 17/08/2016; VOA 05/01/2016; Reuters 13/08/2016).

Attacks on humanitarian workers: 107 incidents affecting humanitarian agencies were reported in Afghanistan in the first half of 2016. Ten national and international aid workers

were killed and 13 injured, while 88 were abducted (OCHA 17/08/2016). In late April, an Australian aid worker was kidnapped in Jalalabad, the Nangarhar capital (BBC 29/04/2016). Kidnapping for ransom is a high risk for foreign aid workers in Afghanistan (VOA 28/04/2016).

Mines and ERW: At least 17 districts in Nangarhar are contaminated with mines and ERW as of 30 June 2016 (UN Mine Action Service & Government of Afghanistan 30/06/2016). Between April and June 2016, at least 28 people were killed and 53 wounded by landmines countrywide (Reuters 18/08/2016). Children made up 85% of ERW casualties between January and June 2016 (OCHA 17/08/2016).

Aggravating factors

Winter

The increase of refugee returnees is expected to slow down during winter (IRIN 2007). Humanitarian needs, however, are likely to increase, as shelter needs become more urgent. Winterisation processes have faced delays in previous years, and shelter improvement efforts began too late (OCHA 17/08/2016). In the winter of 2012, over 40 people froze to death in camps around Kabul (Al Jazeera 21/02/2012).

Ongoing insecurity

Both Islamic State and the Taliban are fighting over territory in Nangarhar province (VOA 05/01/2016). Drone strikes and attacks by the Afghan armed forces and the United States are common (Reuters 13/08/2016). As of 18 August, heavy clashes are reportedly ongoing in Hesarak district (KP 25/08/2016; Tolo News 20/08/2016).

In the first half of 2016, conflict in Afghanistan saw 4% more civilian casualties, 17% more displacement, and 8% more security-related incidents than in the first half of 2015 (OCHA 17/08/2016).

Taliban: The Afghan government has long battled the Taliban, including in Nangarhar province (KP 25/08/2016; Tolo News 20/08/2016). The Taliban has grown in strength since the withdrawal of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Forces in 2014 (Global Research 25/04/2010; Long War Journal 16/10/2015, The Guardian 30/09/2015).

Islamic State was first active in Nangarhar in September 2015. It has since reportedly taken control of several districts from the Taliban (The San Diego Union Tribune 15/03/2016). Afghan forces have battled IS and IS's activity has fallen, although it is still reported in Shinwar, Kot, and Achin districts. Raids and attacks on IS are ongoing (KP 30/07/2016; Albawaba 11/08/2016; San Diego Union Tribune 24/07/2016).

Restrictions at Turkham border crossing

It has become more difficult to cross at the Turkham border point since skirmishes between Afghan and Pakistani forces in June (The Diplomat 21/06/2016).

Any Afghan wishing to cross into Pakistan needs a visa or registration card. Many Afghans do not possess such documentation, and this is problematic for medical patients, for example, who seek treatment in Pakistan but are now unable to do so (Daily Times 16/08/2016).

Polio

Polio vaccination campaigns were put on hold in three districts in Nangarhar due to insecurity, affecting an estimated 18,000 children. IS has been blocking polio initiatives, claiming it is used as a tool by the Afghan government and the West to gather intelligence. Campaigns have resumed as of 15 August, insecurity remains (VOA 15/08/2016). In 2015, eight cases of polio were reported in Nangarhar province (GPIV 2015).

Key characteristics of Nangarhar

Key indicators	Nangarhar
Total population	1,462,600 (2013)
% population in rural areas	87% (2013)
Gender and age distribution of population	Male: 748,600 (2013) Female: 714,00 (2013)
Population below poverty line	33.4% (2008)
State capital	Jalalabad
Lighting and cooking sources	95% use of solid fuels (2008)
WASH	Access to improved sanitation facilities: 6% (2008) Access to improved drinking water sources: 62% (2015)
Health	Under-5 mortality: 180 per 1,000 live births (2005) Maternal mortality ratio: 1,100 per 100,000 live births (2005)
Food security	Global Hunger Index: 34.5, alarming (2015)
Nutrition levels	21% GAM 12% SAM
Literacy rate	24% (2008) Net primary school attendance: 54.65% (2005)

Sources: UNICEF, ACF 2014; OCHA 2015

Contextual information

Drivers of forced returns

Pakistani government: For over 30 years, Pakistan has hosted large Afghan refugee populations. These populations have arrived in waves: after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the civil war in the 1990s,, and later Taliban rule and conflict with the Taliban (IRIN 23/06/2016; ECHO 30/06/2016).

Pakistan's stance towards Afghan refugees has hardened, especially after the attack on a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, in December 2014, which left more than 100 children dead. The perpetrators were reportedly traced to Afghan armed groups. As a consequence, Afghan refugees faced crackdowns, and have been subject to abuse and ill treatment (Amnesty International 21/08/2016). Police in Peshawar conduct search-and-arrest operations for undocumented refugees: operations in Peshawar in June saw 2,000 refugees arrested (DAWN 28/07/2016, DAWN 28/06/2016). As of 23 August, over 9,600 undocumented Afghans have reportedly been arrested in 2016 (The Express Tribune 23/08/2016).

While the returning undocumented refugees people are registered as voluntary returns, human rights groups criticise the Pakistani government for forcing them to leave (DAWN 22/02/2016; Human Rights Watch 16/01/2016). Undocumented returnees in August indicated that their main reasons for return were: restrictions on rental homes for undocumented Afghans in Pakistan (46%), police harassment (17%), police and military raids on homes and workplaces (12%), and fear of forced eviction (12%) (IOM 14/08/2016). These reasons point more towards *refoulement* than voluntary return.

Pakistan has imposed several deadlines for the return of all Afghan refugees. The current deadline stands at end 2016 (Amnesty International 21/08/2016). Refugees have called for an extension (DAWN 04/08/2016).

Past displacement

Refugees in Pakistan: Around 1.6 million Afghan refugees are registered in Pakistan. A further 1.5 million Afghan refugees are estimated to be undocumented (IRIN 23/06/2016; UNHCR 23/06/2016).

IDPs in Afghanistan and Nangarhar: The IDP population has tripled in three years to exceed one million (Amnesty International 21/08/2016). 73,000–150,000 IDPs are located in Nangarhar province (Amnesty International 31/05/2016). The internally displaced live in camps with little access to WASH, food, education, and employment opportunities. Returnees from Pakistan are reportedly also seeking shelter in such camps (Amnesty International

21/08/2016). Between 1 January and 16 August 2016, over 221,300 people were internally displaced due to conflict (OCHA 21/08/2016).

Response capacity

Local and national response capacity

The government has reportedly asked the IOM to increase its assistance to undocumented returnees (IOM 14/08/2016).

International response capacity

While many agencies specialising in displacement are present in-country, such as the IOM and UNHCR, they do not have sufficient funding or aid to take on undocumented refugee returnees. IOM has stated they have provided basic assistance for a very limited number of undocumented returnees, and also these stocks are expected to be exhausted in about one to three months (IOM 27/07/2016; NRC 21/08/2016)

Information gaps and needs

- Limited information on the sectoral needs of returnees especially shelter, WASH, nutrition, and health.
- No information on where returnees are located within Nangarhar province.
- Limited information on the reintegration of refugee returnees and the perception of host communities.

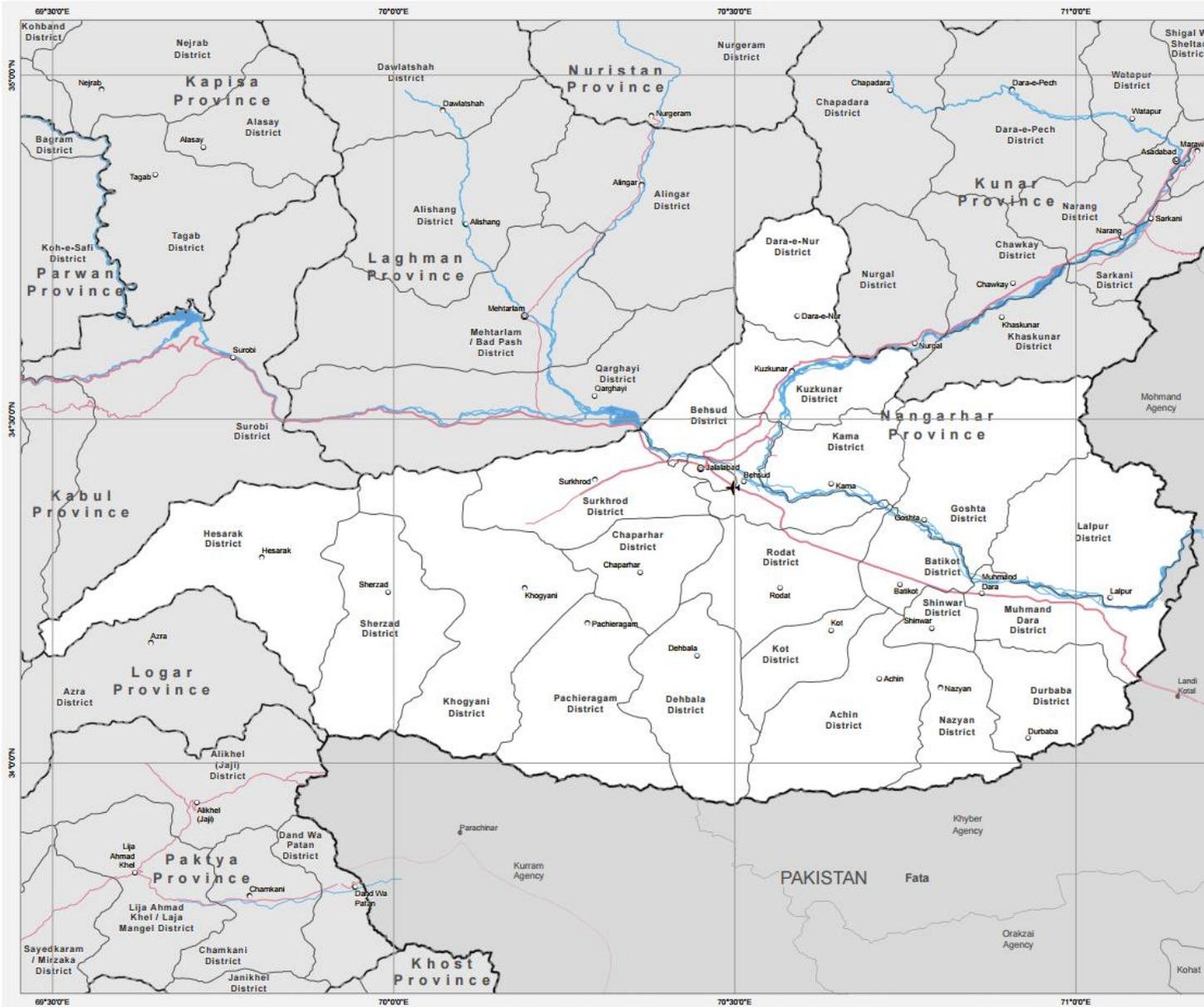
Lessons learned

- Coercive returns imposed by host states hamper returnees` ability to assess location and access to shelter and basic services 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).
- Lack of access to land, livelihood opportunities, basic services and conflict often results in further displacement (United States Institute of Peace 13/01/2016).
- A large number of returnees has been in protracted displacement. Having grown up outside of Afghanistan may result in social and cultural challenges (United States Institute of Peace 13/01/2016).

- A large number of returnees often resettle in urban areas, putting an additional strain on basic services and creating tensions with the local community (United States Institute of Peace 13/01/2016). Humanitarian actors have largely failed in recognising and responding to urban displacement issues (United States Institute of Peace 13/01/2016).
- Female returnees have been particularly affected by restrictions on mobility, which consequently impacts access to services, particularly education and health (United States Institute of Peace 13/01/2016).
- Young male returnees are particularly at risk of recruitment into extremist groups and criminal networks, due to high visibility in rural areas, social isolation and lack of reliable source of income (United States Institute of Peace 13/01/2016).
- The deteriorating security situation and dire state of economy impact severely on Afghanistan's ability to receive large influxes of returnees (United States Institute of Peace 13/01/2016).
- Conditions faced upon returning to Afghanistan have driven increasing flows of refugees to seek refuge in Europe and other regions (United States Institute of Peace 13/01/2016).

Map of Nangarhar province

AFGHANISTAN: Nangarhar Province Reference Map



Legend

- Capital
- Provincial Center
- District Center

Administrative Boundaries

- International
- Province
- District

Transportation

- Primary Road
- Secondary Road
- ✈ Airport
- ✈ Airfield
- River/Stream
- River/Lake

Date Printed: 30 March 2014 08:40 AM

Data Source(s): AGCHO, CSO, AIMS, MISTI
 Schools - Ministry of Education
 Health Facilities - Ministry of Health

Projection/Datum: Geographic/WGS-84

0 20 40 Kms

Disclaimers:
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