

AFGHANISTAN

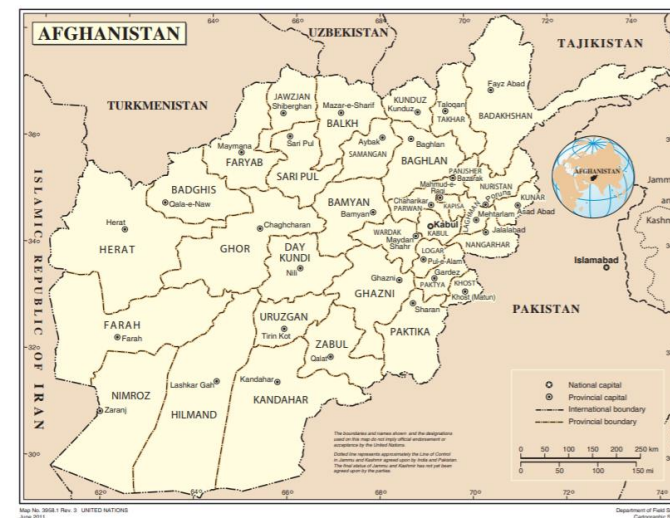
Anticipation of displacement

Since mid-September, conflict has escalated between the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and the Taliban in Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan and Balkh provinces. Parliamentary elections will be held on 20 October and violence will likely continue in the runup to the vote. An unknown number of people have been displaced in the affected provinces.

More people will probably be displaced as fighting can be expected to continue in the coming weeks. Continued insecurity will also mean that people are unlikely to be able to return home quickly and will be in need of humanitarian assistance.

Lack of security in Sar-e-Pul and Jawzjan provinces will prevent IDPs and host communities from accessing basic services (NYT, 17/12/2017; OCHA, 18/12/2017).

Potential aggravating factors: previous displacement; drought and food insecurity; malnutrition; parliamentary and general elections.



Source: UN, 2018

PROBABILITY



NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE



IMPACT



Key priorities



Protection attacks against civilians reported



WASH limited availability and access



Food security Crisis outcomes (IPC 3)

Humanitarian constraints



The highway between Sar-e-Pul and Jawzjan is closed. The Taliban have controlled multiple checkpoints since mid-September. Further damage to infrastructure is likely to hamper humanitarian assistance. Insecurity in the provinces will also affect the activities of aid workers. The main routes leading to the provincial capital of Sar-e-Pul will likely be disrupted because of the intensity of conflict in this area.

Limitations

There is little information on the recent displacement in the area, making it difficult to anticipate specific sectoral needs as well as the overall level of humanitarian needs in the area. It is not possible to accurately assess the potential humanitarian impact that may ensue following the upcoming election.

Current situation

The recent escalation of violence in the provinces of Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan and Balkh on 9 and 10 September follows a failed diplomatic effort to end the conflict between the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and the Taliban (BBC, 11/09/2018).

Local sources report that hundreds of people have been killed and displaced in northern provinces by clashes between Taliban and government forces since 9 September (Reuters, 10/09/2018; VoaNews, 10/09/2018; France24, 10/09/2018). The attacks on the northern provinces are among the deadliest by the Taliban in recent months (The Australian, 10/09/2018). IDPs are in need of humanitarian assistance following the escalation of violence, but data of specific sectoral needs in the northern region is unavailable.

Sar-e-Pul province: Intense clashes between the Taliban and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces broke out in the centre of northern Sar-e-Pul province on the night of 9 September (ToloNews, 10/09/2018; RFERL, 10/09/2018; ToloNews, 11/09/2018). The Taliban seized control of several military bases and police checkpoints around the capital Sar-e-Pul (ANI, 10/09/2018; RFERL, 10/09/2018). It is likely that the escalation of violence has caused a large number of displaced people, leading to humanitarian needs.

Jawzjan province: Key areas of the province, including the centre of Kham Aab district, fell to the Taliban on 10 September after intense fighting between Taliban and government forces on 9 September (BBC, 11/09/2018; ToloNews, 10/09/2018). Most Afghan troops were forced to retreat from their headquarters in the district to prevent further civilian casualties and damage to buildings (RFERL, 10/09/2018; ToloNews, 11/09/2018). Fifty government soldiers remain in the district. An escalation in conflict is likely to lead to further humanitarian needs.

Balkh province: Local sources reported that at least four security outposts fell to the Taliban in Chamtal district following an attack by the group on 10 September. Army forces evacuated the base and set fire to the facilities. The police rejected the allegations, however, and said no outposts had fallen to the Taliban in Chamtal district (ToloNews, 12/09/2018).

Anticipated impact

Large-scale displacement has already been observed since 9 September in the northern provinces. If the clashes continue, people will likely flee from their place of origin within or to Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan, Balkh and neighbouring provinces with no immediate plans to return, considering that the situation will likely remain volatile over the coming weeks.

A similar unexpected situation of displacement occurred in 2016 and 2017 in Kunduz province, when there was a lack of emergency preparedness and coordinated planning to respond. The number of people displaced could rise significantly in Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan and Balkh provinces. Insecurity in Sar-e-Pul and Jawzjan provinces is likely to prevent IDPs and host communities from accessing basic services (OCHA, 31/12/2017).

Protection: Civilian casualties have been reported and more fatalities and injuries are likely as violence continues in the coming weeks. Accurate reporting of fatalities is not available, although it is likely that people have been exposed to indiscriminate attacks and harassment. In such situations of armed conflict, particular attention must be directed towards supporting people who may have been subjected to sexual or gender-based violence. Displaced populations are particularly vulnerable to violence and exploitation, as well as financial insecurity (OCHA 12/2017). An escalation in conflict is likely to lead to further protection concerns.

WASH: Most displaced people across the provinces are living in informal settlements. The majority will probably depend on public hand-pumps, as WASH facilities in these settlements are limited (OCHA, 05/2018). A sudden increase in the number of IDPs is likely to cause a further deterioration in access to WASH facilities. In the absence of clean water, the affected people will be forced to rely on unprotected water sources, exposing themselves to a high risk of waterborne diseases (FEWS NET, 31/08/18).

Food: More than 26,700 people in Sar-e-Pul, 81,300 people in Jawzjan and 156,800 people in Balkh provinces are severely affected by drought, which has exacerbated food insecurity in the region (OCHA, 06/05/2018). Most parts of Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan and Balkh provinces face crisis (IPC 3) outcomes (FEWS Net, 08/2018). Food security is likely to further deteriorate in these provinces. Conflict will interfere with agricultural livelihood activities, limiting availability and shrinking access to markets. Reduced food availability will also likely lead to higher prices for staple foods. IDPs in Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan and Balkh provinces will likely have to rely on food assistance to meet their primary needs (FEWS NET, 08/2018).

Shelter and NFIs: Displaced people who have fled their homes and left belongings behind will likely be in need of shelter and NFIs, particularly considering the winter conditions (mid-October–November) in the northern provinces. The growing number of displaced people is likely to have increased the number of people in need of shelter assistance (FEWSNET 14/04/2018).

Health: Around 57 basic health facilities are present in the province of Sar-e-Pul. It is unclear whether all remain operational. Conflict in the affected provinces is expected to

further disrupt healthcare services that are already critically challenged by a lack of resources and the protracted complex emergency (OCHA, 12/2017).

Impact on critical infrastructure

The highway between Sar-e-Pul and Jawzjan is closed to traffic. The Taliban has set up multiple checkpoints along the highway (ToloNews, 10/09/2018). In addition, telecommunication services remain suspended in areas of fighting in Jawzjan province. Hostilities are taking place about 170km north of the provincial capital of Sheberghan (Voa News, 10/09/2018). Further disruptions to traffic and telecommunications are expected as the conflict escalates.

Humanitarian constraints

In Afghanistan, humanitarian constraints hinder efforts to respond appropriately to the crisis. Access to populations in need remains a significant challenge. The protracted conflict has left major roads in very poor condition, further limiting the population's access to vital services. As of August, 23 aid workers have been killed, 37 injured and 74 abducted this year. Between January and May, 63 attacks destroyed 21 health facilities and caused the closure of 41 others, leaving people without access to basic health services (UN, 20/08/2018; FEWS NET, 31/08/18). The Taliban have historically targeted humanitarian workers. Islamic State (IS) has also attacked humanitarian workers, particularly in the north. Robberies, lootings, kidnappings and killings are regularly reported and expected in northern provinces (UN, 20/08/2018; UN, 31/12/2017).

Potential aggravating factors

Conflict

The renewed fighting between the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and the Taliban has diminished the prospect of diplomatic progress ending the hostilities. The Taliban have held more territory in 2018 than at any time since the 2001 US military invasion. The Afghan government controls or influences about 56% of the country and the Taliban control or contest the rest. While Afghan forces battle with the Taliban, militants linked to IS have stepped up attacks (The Courier, 10/09/2018; BBC, 11/09/2018; Voa News, 10/09/2018).

Displacement

Roughly 4.2 million people in Afghanistan are in acute need of humanitarian assistance. This includes 1.9 million internally displaced by conflict, and at least 420,000 refugees

who returned to Afghanistan from Iran and Pakistan in the first half of 2018. More than 150,000 people have been displaced by drought in 2018 and 170,000 people are displaced by conflict as of 31 August (UNICEF, 07/2018; WFP, 31/08/2018).

There are 45,000 IDPs in the northern provinces (OCHA, 16/09/2018). IDPs, especially those recently displaced, rely heavily on humanitarian assistance and support from host communities. Many refugees and returnees have few assets and limited employment opportunities, making it difficult to establish livelihoods (FEWS NET, 08/2018).

In December 2017, clashes over territorial control between the Taliban and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces caused internal displacement in Sar-e-Pul province. More than 7,000 people were displaced in the first half of December 2017 (OCHA 18/12/2017).

Drought and food insecurity

Drought is affecting an estimated 2.3 million people in about 20 provinces (70% of the country), making it the fifth consecutive year in which the main planting season has been compromised. Of these, around 1.4 million people would need humanitarian food assistance to minimise food consumption gaps and protect livelihoods. Afghanistan is facing a severe drought in the northern provinces, including Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan and Balkh provinces (UN, 10/09/2018; UNICEF, 06/2018; WFP, 31/08/2018).

The number of households facing acute food insecurity typically decreases with the July-to-September harvest. The number of people in Crisis (IPC 3) is atypically high in Afghanistan because of drought, however, and is expected to swell through the start of the lean season in January (FEWS NET, 08/2018).

Conflict and insecurity also restrict food availability in Afghanistan. Conflict limits access to land, hampering food production and undermining the labour market linked to the agricultural sector, in a country where four out of five people rely on agriculture for their food and income (FAO 2018). Active hostilities hinder trade routes of agro-pastoral products, including cross-border trade. In Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan and Balkh provinces, fighting and the presence of armed opposition groups such as the Taliban and IS have a negative impact on food security and livelihoods (FEWS NET, 31/08/18; FEWSNET 13/10/2017).

Malnutrition

In 2018, 1.6 million people in Afghanistan are in acute need of nutrition assistance. This constitutes a significant increase from the 1.1 million acutely malnourished people reported in December 2017. About 22% of the severe acutely malnourished are from drought-affected regions, including Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan and Balkh provinces (WHO, 06/2018; Cordaid, 06/2018).

The intense drought between April and September is expected to further impair the already poor nutrition status in the 20 affected provinces. As a result, the acute malnutrition caseload in Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan and Balkh provinces is expected to grow in the coming six months. The increase in magnitude and severity of acute malnutrition will stretch the capacity of health facilities to provide treatment, and children will face heightened vulnerability (WHO, 19 Jul 2018). An estimated 125,000 additional cases of malnutrition are expected to need treatment services in the second half of 2018 (FEWS NET, 31/08/18).

Presidential and parliamentary elections

President Ashraf Ghani was elected in 2014. Due to allegations of widespread fraud, the results of the vote were delayed and the UN monitored the recount of the second-round ballot. The Afghan government will hold presidential elections on 20 April 2019, six months after parliamentary and local elections scheduled for 20 October 2018 (Al Jazeera, 01/08/2018).

Parliamentary elections were initially set for October 2016, postponed to July 2018, and finally rescheduled for 20 October 2018 (Reuters, 01/04/2018; HRW, 14/09/2018). The delay in the elections has been attributed to political groups' growing distrust of electoral commissioners, the lack of progress made in preparing for the vote, and growing insecurity (Reuters, 04/02/2018; Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, 09/2018). Violence across the country is likely to escalate in the run-up to the parliamentary elections.

Seasonal information

The drought and conflict between government forces and the Taliban are likely to affect the current harvest season (September–November). Moreover, the living conditions of displaced people are likely to deteriorate during the winter rainy season (mid-October/November–February) and the upcoming lean season (January–April) due to the risk of flooding and further food insecurity (see seasonal calendar below) (FEWSNET 14/04/2018).

Additional contextual information

History of conflict

Civil war in Afghanistan began in 1989, followed by the establishment of the Taliban regime in 1996 and international intervention in 2001. Active hostilities have been affecting livelihood activities across the country, disrupting agro-pastoral production as well as procurement and distribution systems (FEWSNET 02/2018). Conflict has also led to

widespread displacement. IDPs and Afghan returnees are likely to compete with local communities for already-stretched resources and livelihoods options (IPC 20/08/2017).

Relevant stakeholders

Taliban: The ultraconservative Islamist group's activities have expanded from southern and southeastern areas to northern provinces, especially Kunduz, Balkh and Faryab. The Taliban are increasingly financed by criminal enterprises including heroin laboratories, illegal mining and kidnapping. Most top Taliban leaders are believed to be in Pakistan, and the country serves as headquarters. Pakistan is also considered as a rest and recuperation location for Taliban soldiers. On 28 February 2018, Ghani offered to recognise the Taliban as a political group, aiming to create a platform for peace talks. The proposal was rejected in April (Afghanistan Analysts, 17/10/2017; EFE, 25/04/2018).

Islamic State (IS): Militants are fighting under the IS banner in Afghanistan, including an unknown number of former Taliban and foreign fighters. There are 2,000–4,000 IS fighters in the country. Islamic State has maintained strongholds in Nangarhar province. IS has launched attacks in Jawzjan province throughout 2018, but there is no evidence that any group affiliated with Islamic State is present in Sar-e-Pul or Balkh province (Indrastra, 07/09/2018; Voa, 17/06/2018; ACLED 06/2018; UN, 06/2017).

Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF): Afghan National Defense and Security Forces comprised 168,300 soldiers in 2016, but the number is believed to be lower today. ANDSF faces challenges including casualties, temporary losses of provincial and district centres, weakness in logistics, corrupt or ineffective leadership, and overreliance on highly trained special forces for routine missions. In addition, about 35% of the ANDSF do not re-enlist each year. The Afghan Ministry of Defense fired 1,394 of its officials for corruption in April 2017 (SIGAR 2017; NPR 2017).

International military presence: The US Army maintains 11,000 soldiers in Afghanistan. NATO's combat mission in the country ended on 31 December 2014, leaving more than 16,000 troops from 39 NATO allies and partner countries in a non-combat mission. The current mission aims at supporting Afghan forces' clashes against the Taliban along with US counter-terrorism operations. The mission's headquarters are in Kabul, with four other bases in Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Kandahar, and Laghman. Many concerns have been raised about the achievements of the mission, with some critics highlighting issues such as a lack of clarity about rules of engagement and the function of the NATO troops on the ground (ABC News, 2018; NATO, 14/09/18).

Key characteristics of host population

Demographic profile. Total population is 34.6 million people (UNICEF 10/12/2017). Sar-e-Pul has a population of 708,000, Balkh 1,073,000 and Jawzjan 452,000 (IMMAP 18/12/2017; Statoids, 2018). About 57% of displaced people in Sar-e-Pul are children under 18 (OCHA 02/12/2017).

Food. 1.4 million people in need of humanitarian food assistance. Most of the population in Sar-e-Pul is in Stressed (IPC 2), while the displaced population is likely to face Crisis (IPC 3) food security outcomes (FEWS NET 30/11/2017).

Nutrition levels. Stunting 41%; severe wasting 4% (UNICEF 10/12/2017).

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

WASH. About 43% of the population use unimproved sanitation facilities, 13% practice open defecation, and 12% use shared sanitation facilities. In terms of water use, 12% of the population use piped drinking water and 43% use other improved drinking water sources (UNICEF 10/12/2017).

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

Response capacity

Local and national response capacity

The Department of Refugees and Repatriation and the Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development are the government entities that usually respond to displacement crises.

International response capacity

International humanitarian actors remain active across Afghanistan. Most of the humanitarian response is in the northern part of the country, where needs are most severe (OCHA, 11/2017; OCHA 12/2017).

The ECHO-funded Emergency Response Mechanism is available to respond to displacements within Sar-e-Pul province. NRC has already initiated coordination efforts with local authorities and other humanitarian agencies operational in the district in preparation for a potential response. WFP, UNHCR and other UN agencies are also in the country.

Information gaps and needs

There is little information about the recent displacement in the area, making it difficult to assess specific sectoral needs of new IDPs.

There is limited information available regarding the specific sectoral needs of IDPs in the affected area, prior to the latest outbreak of violence.

Little information is available about the specific sectoral needs of host communities.

District-level information regarding the number of people displaced and potential intra-district movement is not available.

There is no accurate information on the number of casualties as a result of the latest outbreak of violence.

Lessons learned

A high number of displaced people in an insecure area such as Sar-e-Pu province or Jawzjan province is likely to increase vulnerability to disease outbreaks, putting the health response under further pressure. Health response is critical to avoid a rapid deterioration of the situation (OCHA 12/2017).

As the number of displaced people is likely to increase and winter exacerbates the level of humanitarian need, knowledge among aid workers of the weather patterns/forecast is essential to enhance preparedness (OCHA 12/2017).

Community-based targeting in collaboration with local authorities for humanitarian interventions is successful because they also include host populations.

Methodology

ACAPS anticipatory briefing notes provide a brief outline of the likelihood and impact of a particular crisis or spike in crisis. Likelihood describes the certainty of a particular outcome, and is therefore a subjective measure. The objective of estimating likelihood is to indicate how confident we are that the identified risk will occur. Likelihood estimates help prioritise the most significant risks. This can contribute to better decision making with regard to preparedness.