

2018 Response Planning Meeting: Pakistani refugees in Khost and Paktika

Minutes of Discussion

11 October 2017, UNHCR Kabul

Participants: UNHCR, MoRR, OCHA, NRC, DACAAR, MADERA, Solidarites, OHPM, IMC, PRM, CoAR, FAO, APA ORCD, WFP

The purpose of the meeting was for UNHCR, partners and other stakeholders, e.g donors, to discuss 2018 plans for Pakistani refugees in Khost and Paktika to ensure coordination and collect suggestions related to the envisaged strategic approach for this population group. UNHCR provided an update on the Khost and Paktika situation. WFP and UNHCR also presented on the findings of the joint vulnerability assessment conducted in May-June 2017, before participants discussed their respective plans for 2018.

2018 plans for Khost and Paktika

- **UNHCR** shared that UNHCR's operational approach in 2018 will shift from an emergency (care and maintenance) phase to strengthening refugees' self-reliance and coping mechanisms, while continuing targeted assistance to the most vulnerable. UNHCR has informed refugee elders of this change (e.g. in food assistance). UNHCR emphasized that key basic services should be maintained in 2018, and gradual disengagement would be in parallel with the engagement of the Government of Afghanistan.
 - Regarding the question whether *repatriation was the only option from negotiations between refugee elders and the Pakistani authorities*, UNHCR explained that this was the case at the moment as the Government of Pakistan does not recognize this population as refugees and therefore does not want to implement a Tripartite mechanism for repatriation. Hence, the modalities that are in place are for negotiations on return between the North Waziristan authorities and refugee elders in Khost and Paktika; however, UNHCR noted that the refugee elders are not a homogenous group but consist of many different tribes/groups which may result in fragmented negotiations.
 - UNHCR also shared that majority of the refugees have indicated that conditions are currently not conducive for return; therefore UNHCR does not foresee massive returns in 2018 and possibly in 2019. Hence similar numbers of refugees are expected to remain in 2018 (estimated 100,000). It was noted that some refugee families who returned to Pakistan have come back to Afghanistan for a second time, as conditions may not have been what they expected.
 - Another question was raised regarding *UNHCR's efforts for durable solutions* for the Pakistani refugees – apart from the bilateral engagement of refugee elders with the Pakistani authorities – as their displacement becomes protracted. UNHCR explained that UNHCR supports the Government with the IDP response in Pakistan; is engaged in advocacy and talks with the Government of Pakistan; and has offered support which has not been accepted because of how the population is perceived (i.e. as temporarily displaced) by Pakistan.
 - On the question of *UNHCR's plans for winter assistance*, UNHCR replied that preparations are ongoing and winter packages will be distributed from November until mid-December 2017.
- **DACAAR** raised the point that return prospects of refugee communities in Khost and Paktika will shape 2018 planning, as emergency interventions end. Many of the needs in Khost and Paktika remain the same and have also grown as refugee families have settled and spread out geographically.

- **WFP** agreed with the operational change from emergency to a focus on self-reliance and resilience activities for refugee communities in 2018. WFP plans to shift focus to livelihoods programmes, such as cash-for-work initiatives as this can stimulate the local market for the host community, as well as vocational skills training. Seasonal support is also being discussed.
- **NRC** has been operating in Khost since 2014, primarily providing education in emergencies and accelerated learning programs as well as shelter and other activities. A challenge faced by NRC is the difficulty of continuous funding, particularly as the emergency situation has shifted into a protracted situation and donors are asking for an exit strategy. While NRC would like to continue education activities until the end of 2018, funding is available until April 2018. Currently, some 3,000 children are enrolled in NRC's accelerated primary education learning every year.
 - UNHCR shared that the office will invest a lot of the available resources for maintaining these key basic services (e.g. education, health, WASH) as there may be no other option for the population of concern if these services discontinue.
- **ORCD:** A challenge for ORCD is the insecurity which affects food distribution processes. Due to insecurity, food distribution has been interrupted several times in the past.
- **Solidarites International (SI)** currently provides WASH services in Gulan camp. SI shared that providing self-reliance services is a challenge; currently it costs 1.2 Euros per family to sustain WASH services and the funding is only available until April 2018. SI asked UNHCR whether UNHCR has plans to support or fundraise for sector-specific services.
 - UNHCR responded that WASH is a priority in the camp as well as for host communities; how to transfer WASH services to the community will have to be given more consideration as the community is not yet ready to takeover. UNHCR will renew efforts to advocate for these basic services to continue until at least the end of 2018.
- **APA** requested all partners to work on security expansion for provision of assistance. In addition, questions were raised regarding: a) assistance for special needs groups, e.g. elderly persons or females, who may not benefit from cash-for-work initiatives; and b) durable solutions for the situation.
 - UNHCR responded that UNHCR will look into providing selected support for persons with specific needs and vulnerabilities; and will work out the methodology for the vulnerability criteria. UNHCR also noted that refugees do not want to return to become IDPs in Pakistan.
 - WFP will also look into safety net programs, including home gardening activities for females.
- **IMC** provided an update on IMC's health services which are funded by UNHCR and OCHA, with concerns over funding which ends in October 2017.
- **OCHA** mentioned that as the programming for Khost and Paktika is shifting from emergency to chronic, figures on needs should move from humanitarian response section to chronic needs.
- UNHCR proposed to re-activate a coordination mechanism with all stakeholders at a national level for Pakistani refugees in Khost and Paktika; participants agreed to meet every two months. UNHCR also proposed for regular information-sharing and coordination meetings with MoRR and other relevant Government ministries; this will first be discussed and agreed with the Government.

UNHCR-WFP joint vulnerability assessment

- Note: The sampling of 3,400 households is from the biometrically registered population in 10 districts (8 districts in Khost including 2 IDP camps, as well as 2 districts in Paktika) and is fully representative (with a 95 per cent confidence level) of the refugee population. The host community data is indicative and included for comparison with the refugee data.
- MoRR Advisor, Mr. David Majed asked why language was raised as a challenge in access to education for refugees in Khost and Paktika, as Pakistanis also speak Pashto. UNHCR replied that younger students may have difficulties with the medium of teaching in schools (Urdu in Pakistan versus Dari/Pashto in Afghanistan) despite being able to speak the language.
- Regarding the non-feasibility of agricultural activities in Paktika, UNHCR and ORCD responded that the terrain and weather may not be suitable in the non-urban mountainous areas of Paktika where refugees have settled, whereas agricultural projects are more easily implemented in Gulan camp. Alternate livelihoods activities may be explored.
- The findings also show that host communities face similar challenges and needs as refugees.

Conclusions

- Stakeholders and organizations working for refugees in Khost and Paktika will meet on a bi-monthly basis (every two months) at the national level for coordination and exchanging information; the next meeting chaired by UNHCR will be in December (date TBC).
- It is important to continue advocacy and fund-raising in order to maintain basic services for refugees in Khost and Paktika until the end of 2018, particularly as many partners face challenges in funding.
- UNHCR will consolidate the needs of partners/NGOs by sectors for the refugee section of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) with UNHCR's funding needs/requests for 2018.
- Participants agreed that the issue of ensuring continued education services for Pakistani refugees in Khost and Paktika should be included as part of the Education in Emergencies (EiE) Working Group, for further discussions and practical recommendations. MoRR agreed to follow-up with the Ministry of Education which leads the EiE Working Group.

Action Points:

- UNHCR will share a simple template with partners to complete regarding their funding requests for the 2018 inter-agency response plan.
- Partners will provide funding requests and indicative targets for 2018 with UNHCR by 18 October at the latest, in order for UNHCR to submit by 19 October.
- UNHCR will issue the inter-agency refugee updates on a regular (monthly) basis.
- UNHCR and WFP will share the final vulnerability assessment report with participants.
- UNHCR and WFP will share the mission report following the UNHCR-WFP joint mission to Khost in November, for exploring/designing joint WFP-UNHCR programming in Khost and Paktika.
- UNHCR will follow-up with MoRR and relevant Government ministries for establishing regular information-sharing and coordination meetings.