

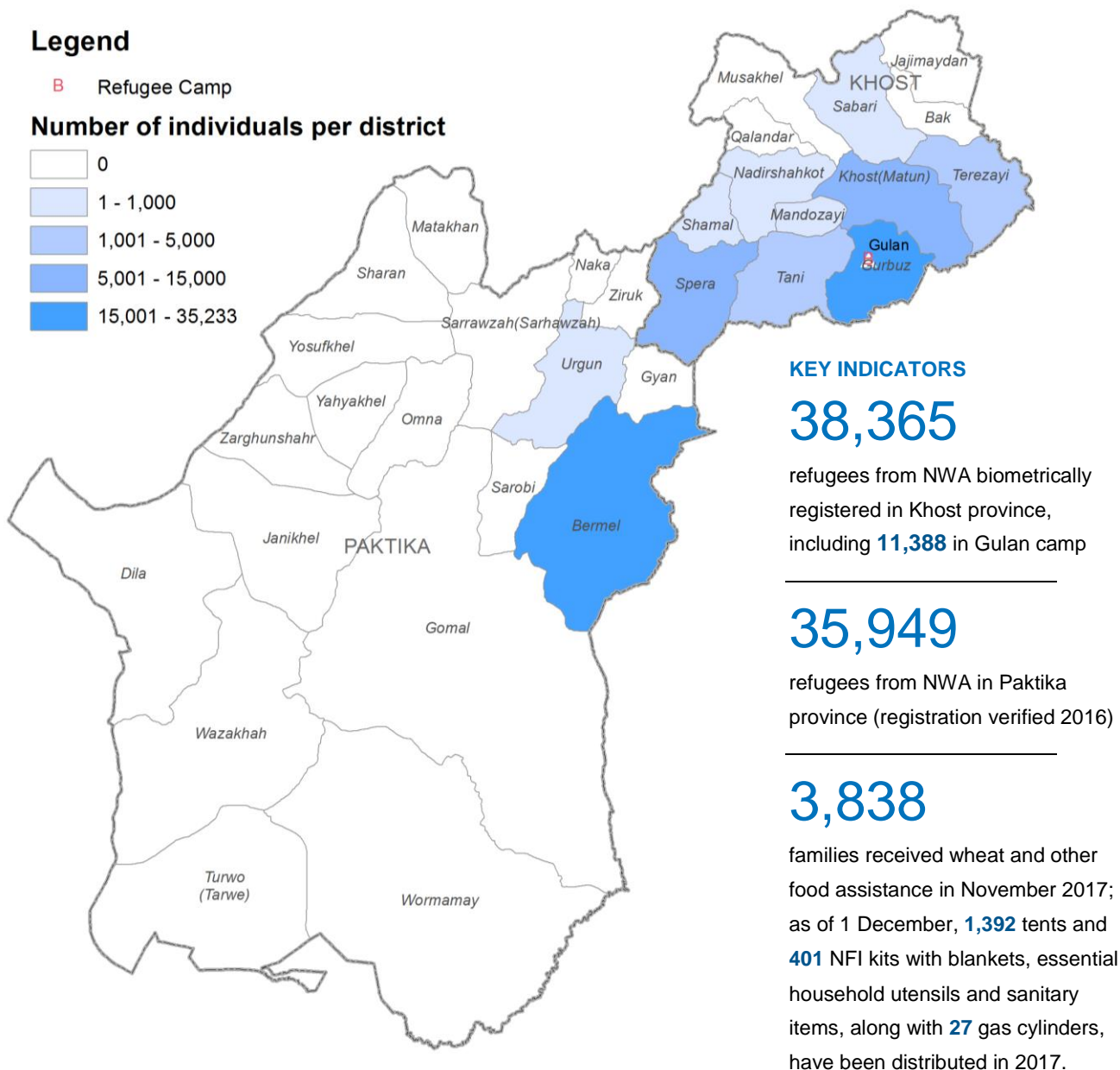
Afghanistan

December 2017

Afghanistan acceded to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees in 2005, but has not implemented a national asylum framework.

In 2014, Afghanistan received an influx of Pakistani refugees from North Waziristan Agency; an estimated 100,000 remain in a protracted refugee-like situation.

Under its mandate, UNHCR has registered 386 asylum-seekers and refugees of various nationalities in Kabul and other urban centres.



Operational Context and Response

The Government of Afghanistan acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in 2005. UNHCR continues to advocate for the enactment of a Refugee Law as a member of a taskforce comprised of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Ministry of Interior (MoI), and other government agencies, and provides technical support to enable the Government to meet its international commitments. A workshop on international refugee law and protection principles was co-facilitated on 7 November by UNHCR and MoRR in Kabul. At present, however, there is no national asylum framework to regulate issues of refugee protection in Afghanistan.

Under its mandate, UNHCR registers asylum-seekers in Afghanistan as a protection tool, with the aim to identify and assist persons with specific needs (PSN); to support access to humanitarian assistance and essential services including education and health care; to ensure freedom of movement and uphold basic rights; and to provide a minimum safeguard against refoulement. UNHCR conducts refugee status determination (RSD) where the formal recognition of an individual's refugee status would lead to a durable solution, such as resettlement.

Urban asylum-seekers and refugees



149 individual asylum-seekers and refugees receiving monthly cash-based assistance

Afghanistan currently hosts 386 registered asylum-seekers and refugees of various nationalities in Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and other cities. Meaningful and effective local integration is unattainable for the majority,

particularly for those without valid national passports and other documents necessary to regularize their legal status in Afghanistan. As foreign nationals, they remain marginalized, with limited access to jobs in the informal economy. Voluntary return to the country of origin in safety and dignity is generally not possible, while resettlement opportunities are scarce, as no resettlement country has allocated a specific quota for refugees in Afghanistan or scheduled a selection mission. Nonetheless, in 2017, 18 refugees have been accepted for resettlement under emergency programmes, or granted visas for family reunification in safe third countries.

UNHCR provides cash-based and in-kind assistance to the most vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees to help them pay for housing, food, utilities, and basic necessities. Additional financial assistance is provided during winter to mitigate heightened protection risks and reduce the reliance on negative coping mechanisms, since informal daily-wage labour and other income-generating activities are even more limited during the winter months. UNHCR currently distributes monthly cash assistance to 149 individual asylum-seekers and refugees, while ensuring their inclusion in livelihoods projects which promote self-reliance.

Through agreements with public education and healthcare providers, UNHCR promotes access to these services for asylum-seekers and refugees. Meaningful access is undermined, however, by the same challenges faced by the general population, as education and healthcare facilities in Afghanistan rely substantially on international aid and development programmes. An increasingly volatile security environment and limited livelihood opportunities further contribute to a challenging protection environment in Afghanistan, particularly as the country struggles to meet the reintegration needs of Afghan refugees returning from neighbouring countries, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by natural disasters and armed conflict.

Pakistan Refugees from North Waziristan Agency

Afghanistan hosts a protracted population of Pakistani refugees, who fled North Waziristan Agency (NWA) in 2014 as a result of military operations which displaced almost half a million civilians. As of December 2017, more than 38,000 refugees in Khost province are biometrically registered with active cases (approximately 14,000 registered individuals in Khost are currently inactive or on hold, as they have not collected recent food distributions). In 2016, UNHCR verified the registration of almost 36,000 refugees in Paktika province, where access remains a challenge on account of insecurity as anti-government elements (AGEs) control or contest a substantial amount of territory.

Cultural barriers impact on efforts to comprehensively register the refugee population, especially women, while verification of the registered refugee population who remain in Afghanistan is affected by secondary displacement and access constraints in both Khost and Paktika provinces. UNHCR has received unconfirmed reports that Pakistani refugees may be among the civilian casualties resulting from cross-border shelling, and armed conflict between pro-government forces and AGEs in Afghanistan. Based on focus group discussions and key informants, UNHCR estimates at least 100,000 refugees from NWA remain in Afghanistan.



11,388 refugees receive shelter and other essential services in Gulan camp, Khost province

Some 11,388 refugees receive shelter and other essential services in the Gulan camp in Khost province, while most live alongside Afghan host communities in various urban and rural locations. NWA refugees benefit from the generous hospitality of provincial

Afghan government authorities and the general population, due in part to tribal affiliations, as well as a shared understanding of the trauma of forced displacement. During participatory *shura* meetings, most refugees have stated they are currently unwilling to repatriate to Pakistan, including refugees who have undertaken independent visits to NWA to assess for themselves the conditions of return.

UNHCR does not have the permission of Pakistani military authorities to access and monitor refugee returns in NWA, or to support sustainable reintegration. The United Nations Resident Coordinator for Pakistan visited NWA in November, with specific authorization, and noted significant progress in reconstruction and provision of basic services since his previous visit (in 2016) at designated project sites in the urban centres of Miranshah and Mir Ali subdivisions. The RC observed “huge remaining needs”, however: more than half of the population in NWA do not have effective access to healthcare, and almost 40% do not have access to safe drinking water and latrines.

In November, UNHCR received unconfirmed reports of new displacement from the Razmak sub-division of NWA as a result of clashes between the Pakistani military and a non-state armed group. Details of new displacement and ongoing military operations in NWA are difficult to verify, however, owing to a lack of international observers; humanitarian interventions are generally implemented by the Pakistani Armed Forces and national organisations.

In Afghanistan, UNHCR coordinates with national and international humanitarian agencies to provide targeted assistance to persons with specific needs (PSN) among the NWA refugee population in Khost and Paktika provinces, and implements community-based protection measures to build the resilience of refugees as well as the host population, promoting peaceful co-existence through livelihoods initiatives, shelter, education, healthcare, nutrition, WASH projects, and NFI distributions. The primary source of income among refugees is non-agricultural daily-wage labour, while some refugees benefit from remittances from relatives working abroad in other countries.



PROTECTION

■ In Khost province, UNHCR continues to register refugees from NWA (including families who have been forced to move from Paktika to Khost for safety), verify population data, and to issue documentation to facilitate freedom of movement, and ensure access to humanitarian assistance and basic services; the majority (71%) of registered refugees are children.

■ Under the PSN programme, UNHCR and partners identify, refer, and assist some of the most vulnerable individuals and families including persons with disabilities or suffering serious medical conditions, single parents, women and children at risk, elderly persons, and survivors of gender based violence.



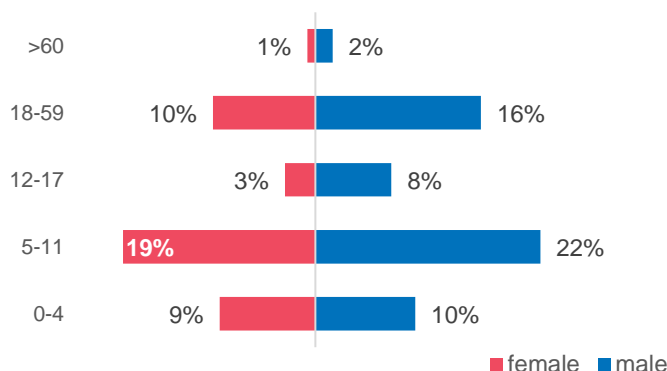
Photo 1 Biometric registration conducted in Khost in 2017 / © UNHCR

■ In September, UNHCR received reports of new displacement from the Shawal area of NWA, resulting from military operations, leading to new arrivals from Pakistan in both Paktika and Khost provinces. While access to refugee communities in Barmal and Urgoon districts of Paktika is affected by the adverse security environment and threats to humanitarian workers, identified beneficiaries continue to receive humanitarian assistance from ORCD distribution points in District Administration Compounds (DAC), including food and winterization support.

■ UNHCR envisages a gradual transfer of responsibility to Afghan government authorities for registration of asylum-seekers and refugees, including the NWA refugee population. The lack of birth registration for refugee children is a significant protection concern due to the risk of statelessness and long-term disadvantage. As a protection measure, NGO partners such as Health Net International (HNI), International Medical Corps (IMC), the Afghanistan Center for Training and Development (ACTD) and the Organization for Health Promotion and Management (OHPM) mitigate risk by issuing birth notifications to refugee mothers. This facilitates the registration of new-born children with UNHCR, and future birth registration with government authorities in the country of origin.

■ Regular community *shura* meetings with men and women by UNHCR and partners promote awareness about issues of education, as well as vaccination, hygiene and sanitation. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials provided by the Department of Public Health (DoPH) are used to support advocacy.

Age and gender (Khost and Paktika)



Note: Paktika data for age and gender are extrapolated based on age and gender of the registered population in Khost.



HEALTH

- With one clinic and one mobile medical team, ACTD provides primary health care services to refugees in the Gulan camp including natal care, vaccinations, and therapeutic food to infant children to meet their immediate nutritional needs. HNI is implementing a primary health care programme for refugees in Alishir (Terezayi), Tani, Spera, and Matun districts of Khost, including two mobile teams and two fixed clinics. The HNI project includes natal care, family planning, vaccinations, and infant nutrition, as well as psychosocial counselling, and medical treatment for trauma (including GBV), mental illness, and tuberculosis. OHPM also provides medical treatment, natal care, and vaccinations to refugee and host community patients in Khost province.
- IMC has been providing healthcare services to refugees in Paktika province through both static and mobile health clinics in Barmal district and a mobile clinic in Urgon district, as well as WASH projects as a preventative measure. One midwife, one doctor and one vaccinator is present in each health facility.
- The impact of health interventions by humanitarian agencies is life-saving, and essential for the refugee community, due to the limited resources of public health care providers in Khost and Paktika provinces.



WATER AND SANITATION

- To address protection risks for the refugee population arising from a lack of potable water and sanitation, UNHCR and partners have implemented WASH projects in Khost and Paktika provinces including the construction of wells and latrines. NCA and CoAR continue to implement WASH projects in Tani and Alishir (Terezayi) districts including construction of a gravity pipe network, latrines, bathing facilities, bore wells, chlorination of water points, and hygiene awareness programmes. Solidarités International (SI) is beginning a new phase of its WASH program in the Gulan Camp, which is due for completion in April 2018. The programme is designed to empower the refugee community to maintain WASH services independently, and foster self-reliance.
- In Paktika province, IMC has established WASH committees in Barmal and Urgon districts to promote hygiene awareness and build community capacity. The committees receive training on hand-washing, food and water hygiene, and personal and environmental hygiene. Community Hygiene Promoters have been selected from the community through a participatory approach to mobilise and lead future hygiene awareness in mosques and public gatherings, and through home visits.



SHELTER AND NFIS

- In 2017, UNHCR and partners have distributed 1,392 new tents in Khost and Paktika provinces to replace makeshift shelters and old tents which had deteriorated. Some 401 NFI packages have been distributed this year to provide soap and hygiene items, essential household utensils, buckets and jerry cans, and blankets, along with 27 gas cylinders for cooking. As refugees are sometimes not permitted by the local landowners to collect firewood, providing an alternative source of fuel promotes peaceful co-existence.

- To reduce vulnerability during the approaching winter months, which traditionally bring a heightened risk of infant mortality, and limited livelihood opportunities, NWA refugee families will be assisted in Khost and Paktika provinces through cash-based interventions and in-kind assistance such as firewood, plastic sheets, tents and woollen clothing, including 10% from the host communities.
- UNICEF has provided 10,000 mosquito nets to ACTD and HNI for distribution to refugees in Gulan Camp, and to refugees in other locations, along with 48,000 packs of Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) and zinc to reduce the incidence of childhood diarrhoea, which is one of the leading causes of infant mortality and malnutrition.



EDUCATION



40,000 school-age children (5-17 years of age), approximately, are registered with UNHCR among the refugee population



12% school attendance rate

- The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is providing primary education to boys and girls in the Gulan camp and other locations in Khost province, ensuring minimal disruption to their learning and promoting the development of refugee children during displacement. UNHCR and CoAR provide secondary education to refugees in Khost.


■ Student enrolment and attendance in both NRC and CoAR schools has fallen in 2017. Outside of Gulan camp, school-age children among NWA refugees are significantly less likely than Afghan children in the host communities to be attending school, in all districts. Girls are more likely to be out of school than boys. The leading causes for children to be out of school include language barriers, lack of physical access, lack of female teachers, and parents not allowing their daughters to attend school. Given that there are nearly 40,000 school-age children registered with UNHCR among the refugee population, the low rates of school attendance represent a critical need to mobilize resources, raise community awareness about the right to education, and empower parents with income-generating activities so as to reduce the reliance on child labour and other negative coping mechanisms.

■ Access to education, particularly for girls, has significant protection dividends for the safety and well-being of refugee children and their ability to exercise economic, social, and cultural rights in the longer term. Integrating refugee children in Afghan schools is often not viable, due to limited classroom and teaching capacity, as well as differences in language and curriculum as compared to Pakistan schools. There are 339 government schools in Paktika province; however, several of the schools in Barmal district where a majority of registered refugees are hosted have closed due to insecurity. Refugee elders report that there are no operational schools in their area.



FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

■ Refugees in Khost and Paktika continue to rely on food assistance from the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to meet their immediate needs for food security in light of limited livelihood opportunities. Food security remains the main concern of refugees raised in community consultations. The beneficiaries of food assistance included malnourished children, as well as pregnant and lactating women

 **3,838** families in Khost province received food assistance from the World Food Programme (WFP) in November 2017

■ Under tri-partite agreements with UNHCR and WFP, Afghan Planning Agency (APA) and ORCD distribute food packages to NWA refugees in Khost and Paktika provinces, respectively.

■ Supply channels are adversely affected by the conflict, however. In September, a truck carrying WFP food items intended for distribution to refugees, IDPs and other beneficiaries in Paktika province was diverted en route by AGEs while passing through Ghazni province, with the result that no food distributions took place during the month. Although food items were distributed to 766 families in Paktika province in October, refugees in Paktika did not receive food assistance in November .



DURABLE SOLUTIONS

■ UNHCR consults closely with the provincial authorities represented by the respective Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) in Khost and Paktika, and at a national level, with a goal to gradually transfer the responsibility for refugee protection to the Government of Afghanistan.

■ Most refugees including heads of household in Khost and Paktika have no formal education, which undermines their prospects of a durable solution through local integration. In 2017, HALO Trust has provided some 220 farmers including 60 women with vocational training in animal husbandry and livestock management, cultivation of saffron, and producing vegetables in three greenhouses.



Photo 2 Shura meeting in Khost province, 2017 / © UNHCR

■ Ensuring participation as a core protection principle, UNHCR and partners conduct *shura* meetings with tribal elders from the NWA refugee community, women, and youth, to design an inclusive and solutions-oriented protection strategy. UNHCR is increasingly seeking to engage development actors from the international community and advocates for the inclusion of refugees in Afghanistan’s national development programmes.

■ The right of refugees to return to their place of origin in NWA depends on issuance of a *Watan* card by the Pakistan National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to allow access to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Refugees must first register at the Baka Khel IDP camp in Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The overwhelming majority of NWA refugees in Afghanistan, in most districts, are not willing to repatriate at present due to concerns about the destruction of community infrastructure, lack of services, ongoing military operations, and restricted freedom of movement to and within NWA. Of the 4,234 families who have reportedly returned from Afghanistan in 2017, according to the Government of Pakistan, 1,784 families (42%) remain in the Baka Khel IDP camp or nearby villages.

Working in Partnership

■ UNHCR coordinates with the Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) at provincial levels and with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) at a national level, noting that the responsibility for refugee protection primarily rests with the Government of Afghanistan, as a signatory to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. Through ongoing dialogue with MoRR, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and Ministry of Interior (Moi), UNHCR will continue advocacy and provide technical support to develop a government registration process for asylum-seekers and training in refugee status determination (RSD), subject to passage of a national Refugee Law, to maintain and enhance the asylum space for refugees in Afghanistan.

UNHCR Partners in Khost and Paktika

- UN World Food Programme (WFP)
- Coordination of Afghan Relief (CoAR)
- International Medical Corps (IMC)
- Health Net International (HNI)
- The Liaison Office (TLO)
- Afghanistan Center for Training and Development (ACTD)
- Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DaCAAR)
- Solidarités International (SI)
- Mine Detection Center (MDC)
- Afghan Planning Agency (APA)
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
- International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- Mission d'Aide au Developpement des Economies Rurales en Afghanistan (MADERA)
- Organization for Health Promotion and Management (OHPM)
- Organization for Research and Community Development (ORCD)
- UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- Halo Trust

Financial Information

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CONTACTS

Donna Corcoran, External Relations Officer, Afghanistan,
corcoran@unhcr.org, Tel: +93 202200381, Cell: +93 (0) 791990011

M. Nadir Farhad, Associate Public Information Officer, Afghanistan
farhadm@unhcr.org Tel: +93 202200381, Cell: + 93 (0) 791990018