

HIGHLIGHTS

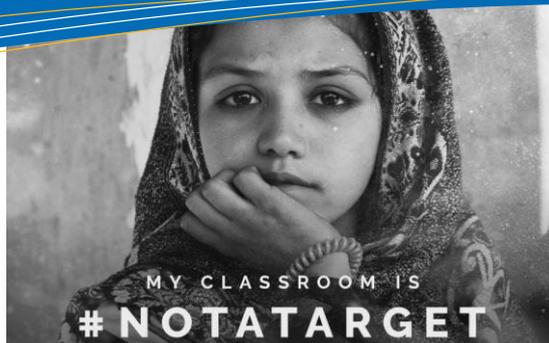
- Fighting over control of eight district centres displaced more than 50,000 people in August.
- More than two million people have been reached with assistance in the first six months of the year.
- Girls and boys across the country are exposed to high levels of violence and often brutal punishments.
- Skills taught in youth development centres improve women's employment prospects and help them break with traditional gender roles.
- The number of people targeted for assistance via the Cluster system in 2017 has been reduced from 5.7 to 3.6 million.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLAN FUNDING 43% FUNDED

414 million
requested (US\$)

179.5 million
Received (US\$)

<http://fts.unocha.org>
by 11 September 2017



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Fighting escalates over control of districts

The third week of August has been one of the most active in terms of armed clashes, according to security sources, and the whole month continued a trend of starkly intensified conflict across the country. Fighting between Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) over territorial control increasingly escalated around district centres, usually following attacks by NSAGs on surrounding checkpoints.

In August, NSAG attacked or fought over control of at least eight district centres in seven provinces (*see table*). From January to end of July, NSAGs had already attacked and taken control of more than a dozen district centres. All but two – Qala-e-Zal, Kunduz, and Sangin, Hilmand – were subsequently retaken by ANSF, often after heavy fighting including the military deploying reinforcements and pounding enemy positions with airstrikes.



Fighting over control of Janikhel district centre continued in August. Source: Social Media

Attacks on district centres displaced more than 50,000 people in August

Communities from the whole district often rely on the district centre for important basic services like health care, education or trade and when conflict reaches rural villages the district centres are often also the place where displaced families seek shelter.

When district centres come under attack, the direction of displacement changes and families chose to leave the centres: in August, more than 50,000 people were reportedly temporarily displaced from district centres, often finding shelter with relatives in neighbouring villages.

The high numbers of displaced people from Balamurghab and Ghormach, Badghis, are due to the fact that the defence of both district centres relied mostly on Afghan Local Police (ALP) or local, pro-Government armed groups. Their families fled pre-emptively in fear of retribution and punitive actions, in case the members of the NSAG should gain control.

| Date | District centres attacked or fighting reported over | IDPs* |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------|--------|
| 14 August | Ghormach, Badghis | 21,000 |
| 15 August | Janikhel, Paktya | 7,700 |
| 16 August | Taywara, Ghor | 5,300 |
| 21 August | Balamurghab, Badghis | 14,000 |
| 21 August | Khamyab, Jawzjan | NA |
| 24 August | Zanakhani, Ghazni | NA |
| 25 August | Gomal, Paktika | 3,500 |
| 26 August | Baraki Barak, Logar | NA |

*Maximum temporary displacement reported
Source: OCHA, media, local sources

Residents fled Janikhel and left elderly family members to look after the houses

The embattled district centre of Janikhel, Paktya, changed hands already three times since it was first attacked by members of an NSAG in September 2016. Mid-August, fighting broke out again and two weeks later, fighting was still ongoing with both parties to the conflict using heavy weapons targeting each other's positions from high ground.



Most families went into displacement and left behind elderly family members to look after the house, tend to livestock and the fields.

“Most families got out of Janikhel,” says Taiza Khan, who left his home close to the centre of Janikhel beginning of August. He is one of around 2,800 people who fled to Khost City, Khost. “Both the soldiers and the fighters told us to leave our homes because they do not want to see us killed in cross-fire.”

According to information from displaced families and sources in Janikhel, most families went into displacement and left behind elderly family members to look after the house, tend to livestock and the fields.

Taiza Khan knew the risks of staying in Janikhel: in 2016, shrapnel from an airstrike lodged itself in his son Karzai’s face. The boy survived, but lost his left eye.

With little hope to return, humanitarian assistance brings some relief to families

Now, he lives in an empty court yard in Khost City belonging to a distant relative. Upon arrival, he bought an old tent from a refugee family in which he lives and sleeps with his wife and eleven children. “I had a good house in Janikhel. Here I sleep in a tent. At night, it becomes unbearable and kids are crying.”

His was one of more than 100 families who recently arrived from Janikhel who received cash assistance and emergency household items via the NGOs International Relief Committee (IRC) and Solidarités International (SI). While the assistance will cover the needs of the family for one month, Mr. Khan has little hope to return and rebuild his life: “We have left everything behind,” he says. “The only destiny we have is to save the lives of our children. If we had stayed there, we would have been killed, so we came here.”

Armed groups fighting each other further compound the conflict

Growing insecurity in Afghanistan is not only characterised by increased attacks on district centres but also by a doubling of attacks attributable to NSAG Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK) to more than 230 in the first half of the year. ISK-activity expanded to seven provinces, as opposed to only one province, Nangarhar, in the first half of 2016. While some analysts see ISK punctually cooperating with Taliban – [like in the attack on Mirzaloang village in Sar-e-Pul in early August](#) – the two NSAGs reportedly are also fighting amongst each other over control of areas, notably in Nangarhar.

Insecurity and intimidation by one or both NSAGs have become near-constant for communities in some districts of Nangarhar and Kunar and have created a slow but regular flow of displaced families to Jalalabad and other areas deemed safer. Stepped up clearing operations by ANSF in Hilmand, Kunduz, Nangarhar and Uruzgan provinces have also caused sizeable displacements during the last month.

Little hope for a seasonal lull in fighting with mild winter and upcoming elections

Insecurity is likely to increase and further expand over the remainder of the year following the recent announcement of next years’ parliamentary elections. In this context, the eroding military stalemate looks set to continue with no seasonal lull in fighting anticipated as winter arrives later and is expected to be more mild.

The recent decision by Donald Trump to surge additional troops to Afghanistan may also result in a more volatile landscape over the coming months. The US-President also announced less political oversight over commanding airstrikes and increasing the leeway of military leaders which increases the likelihood of airstrikes on members of NSAG that affect civilians, like those on 28 and 30 August, in which [at least 28 civilians were killed and 16 injured](#) – all of them women and children – according to the UNAMA.



An OCHA staff member talks to Taiza Khan who fled Janikhel to Khost in early August. Photo: OCHA/Philippe Kropf

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Afghan forces have intensified clearing operations in several provinces, here in Helmand. Photo: RS/USMC/Sgt. Lucas Hopkins



Dominic Parker has been Head of Office of OCHA Afghanistan since July 2015. He first worked in Afghanistan in 1998 and has spent close to a decade in country with various NGOs, a major donor and for the UN. The opinion presented in this article is his personal one.

Acknowledging the facts in Afghanistan

Op-Ed by Dominic Parker, Head of Office OCHA Afghanistan

Afghanistan seems to be, once again, at a cross-roads. Many within the humanitarian, development and diplomatic community seem to have reluctantly concluded that the opportunity for peace in the country will only worsen, before it can improve. This loss of confidence is fuelled by the changing military and political landscape and control of territory. Where a decade ago it was safe to work across the country, this is no longer the case. The huge explosion in Kabul on 31 May 2017 carried the conflict right into the heart of the capital.

Armed parties to the conflict are increasingly abusing health facilities as fighting positions, abducting and intimidating health workers, and in some cases demanding health staff at gunpoint to provide emergency treatment for their wounded combatants. Earlier this year, armed groups forced many health facilities to close, depriving more than half a million people from services. Such coercion is contrary to the Humanitarian Principles of Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence as well as International Humanitarian Law.

Incidents against humanitarian workers, facilities and activities, including violent attacks on NGOs, health service providers and international organizations including ICRC, have led to a substantially reduced presence by the international aid community, not because of a lack of good will, but by sheer pressure from the bloody conflict.

The need to respect the humanitarian imperative

A re-assessment of the changing military, development and humanitarian situation is taking place. President Trump has announced a new strategy for Afghanistan, and is sending more troops to continue the United States' longest war in history. The United Nations has recently acknowledged the changes in the country and now characterizes Afghanistan as a country in conflict rather than one emerging from post-conflict. This means that life-saving humanitarian action is poised to become ever more important.

The latest UN common humanitarian funding decision by the Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan, Toby Lanzer, allocates US\$25 million to so called "hard to reach areas", notably districts where active fighting over territorial control has occurred, or where opposition groups are firmly in control. Many of these districts have been underserved in the past due to the conflict and humanitarian needs have not been assessed. The humanitarian community is firmly committed to access people in need across the country, regardless of which party to the conflict controls the area.

Humanitarians operate based on the Humanitarian Principles and require their acceptance by all parties to the conflict. Yet the respect for International Humanitarian Law seems to erode further: Afghanistan is one of the deadliest countries in the world for aid workers to provide assistance, with 15 colleagues killed, 12 wounded and 39 abducted this year alone.

Humanitarians need guarantees that exceed policy statements and lip-service

As humanitarians, we urgently and explicitly renew our calls to all parties to the conflict in Afghanistan to respect the Humanitarian Principles and abide by their obligations under International Humanitarian Law. This means to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, to stop targeting aid workers, to leave all health facilities and health staff unfettered to do their work, to protect civilians and to allow humanitarians access to people in need as well as allowing communities to access assistance.

In their message to the Afghan people on the occasion of Eid al-Adha, the Taliban leadership renewed their earlier call on NGOs to work in all the areas under their control. The statement also called on their fighters to cooperate with the NGOs and provide them with security and reminded their fighters to prevent civilian casualties.

With growing conflict across the country, humanitarian partners urgently need security guarantees that exceed policy statements and go beyond lip-service. The trend of attacks on health facilities and humanitarian workers needs to be reversed. All parties to the conflict need to protect civilians and allow humanitarian aid and health services to reach whoever across the whole country needs them.

"Where a decade ago it was safe to work across the country, this is no longer the case. The huge explosion in Kabul on 31 May 2017 carried the conflict right into the heart of the capital."

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"With growing conflict across the country, humanitarian partners urgently need security guarantees that exceed policy statements and go beyond lip-service."

Agree or disagree?
Share your comments or opinions on this Op-Ed with kropf@un.org.

Situational monitoring of people in need in the first six months of the year 2017:

CONFLICT DISPLACED

 160k

NATURAL DISASTER AFFECTED

 40k

AFGHAN RETURNEES

 103k

Source: OCHA MYR

| Revisions: | HRP | MYR |
|-------------------------|--------|--------|
| People in need | 9.6M | 7.4M |
| People targeted for aid | 5.7M | 3.6M |
| Funding requirements | \$550M | \$414M |

Source: OCHA MYR

Why conduct a Mid-Year Review?

The HRP Mid-Year Review is conducted by OCHA and the Cluster coordinators as part of the [Humanitarian Programme Cycle](#). It provides an overview of the development and changes in the crisis and humanitarian needs, financing, achievements and response challenges to adapt and guide humanitarian action.

2.2 million people reached in first half of 2017

From January to end of June 2017, the humanitarian community assisted a total of 2.2 million people via the Cluster system in Afghanistan, according to the [Mid-Year Review](#) (MYR) of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). The 2.2 million girls, boys, women and men reached with life-saving assistance represents just below two fifths of the number of people initially targeted for assistance in 2017.

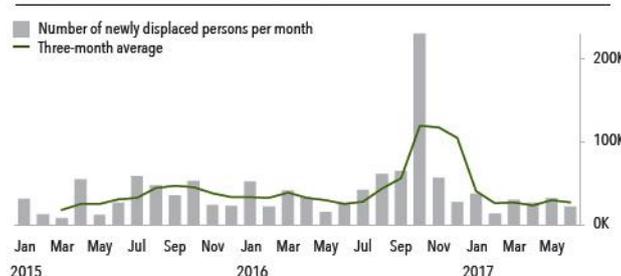
Less people in need in Afghanistan notably due to fewer returns

Looking forward to humanitarian programming over the remainder of the year, the MYR shows that the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan has decreased by 20 per cent compared to the planning figures of the HRP, from 9.3 million to 7.4 million people.

This is mainly due to the significantly lower arrival of registered refugees and undocumented returnees in Afghanistan. Less than 34,000 registered refugees returned compared to the annual projection of 550,000 and less than 70,000 undocumented returnees compared to the 500,000 initially anticipated. Further, Afghanistan has been spared a large-scale natural disaster in the first half of the year, with some 40,000 people affected by floods, rains and avalanches, less than one third of three-year average of 110,000 people affected by natural disasters per year.

Conflict displacement remains the key driver of humanitarian needs in the country: over 160,000 have been forced to flee their homes due to conflict in the first half of the year, some 30,000 people or 15 per cent less compared to the first six months of the previous year. Despite this reduction, the planning figure for displaced people remains unchanged with 450,000 in view of displacement trends in the second half of last year and the intensification of conflict across the country.

CONFLICT INDUCED DISPLACEMENTS



Despite lower displacement numbers in 2017, the planning estimate has not been reduced in view of intensified conflict and displacement peaks end of last year. Source: OCHA MYR

Reduction of people targeted for assistance and funding requirements

Based on the mid-year analysis, the number of people targeted for assistance has been reduced by 37 per cent from 5.7 million to 3.6 million. Consequently, the funding needs have been reduced by \$136 million from initially \$550 million to \$414 million.

This reduction is principally a result of changes to the Refugee and Returnee Chapter (-\$151 million), the Protection Cluster (-\$39.9 million), the Food Security Cluster (-\$65.5 million), the Health Cluster (-\$23 million), the Nutrition Cluster (-\$18.5 million), the WASH Cluster (-\$11.5 million), the ESNFIs Cluster (-\$2 million) and Multi-Purpose Cash (-\$26.6 million), despite the addition of education in emergencies (+\$45 million).

The budget revisions also reflect funding constraints which have impacted the ability of the Cluster partners to implement planned programmes in the first half of the year – particularly for communities in prolonged displacement and living severely food insecure – and realistic absorption capacity and capability to deliver in the coming six months.

Humanitarian planning and development planning go hand in hand

The HRP MYR was conducted at the same time as UNDP is undertaking a mid-term review of their five-year cooperation framework between the UN's development actors and the Government, the so called UNDAF 2015 – 2019. In order to avoid duplications and enhance the coherence between the development and humanitarian agendas in Afghanistan, OCHA represented the humanitarian community in this exercise.

Girls and boys face brutal levels of violence

Nine out of ten children in Afghanistan experience violence at home and in school and often endure physical punishment, neglect, psychological and sexual violence. A [study conducted by NGO Save the Children International \(SCI\)](#) in five provinces draws a bleak picture of the lives of girls and boys that can be considered representative for that of most children in Afghanistan.

“We have been working in child protection for many years across the world,” says Paul Barker, Interim Country director of SCI in Afghanistan, “but these stark results of widespread violence against children in Afghanistan nevertheless shocked us.”

Slapped, spanked, shook, hit and kicked

A staggering number of children surveyed reported experiencing physical violence, notably being slapped in the face or on the back of the head (54 per cent), spanked on the bottom (51 per cent), shook aggressively (43 per cent), hit on the head with knuckles (41 per cent) or kicked (40 per cent). Surveyed parents overall confirmed these results, although fewer admitted to spanking their children (41 per cent) or hitting them on the head with their knuckles (34 per cent).

Corporal punishment of children at home is a common practice in Afghanistan but prohibited in schools. This does however not make class rooms violence-free spaces for the majority of pupils. They report experiencing the same kind of punishments as at home, in addition of having their fingers twisted with a pencil in between (39 per cent) or being forced to stand or kneel in a painful position (36 per cent).



At school, punishment of pupils includes having their fingers twisted with a pencil in between or being forced to stand or kneel in a painful position. Photo: SCI

Psychological victimization and sexual violence

More than half of all children reported being called dumb, lazy or other names or were blamed for their parents' misfortune (44 per cent) or told by their parents or caregivers that they wished they never had been born (32 per cent).

Gender-based violence is a pervasive problem in Afghanistan, stemming from complex inequalities and cultural practices. Despite general underreporting and stigmatisation, many more of the surveyed adults reported on cases of sexual violence than children did which is probably based on lack awareness.

Some 59 per cent of adults reported children being forced into sexual relations, sexual harassment (69 per cent). *Bacha bazi*, keeping of boys or “boy play”, was reported by 68 per cent of all adults and only 22 per cent of children. Children most at risk of sexual abuse, according to children's answers, were either orphans (61 per cent), girls and boy from poor families (57 per cent), street children (45 per cent) or kids from displaced families (30 per cent).

Child protection in Afghanistan needs to gain momentum

The study's results further support earlier findings that nearly one third of all school-age children do not attend school because they have to work or perform child labour. One fifth of all parents mentioned that children under 15 years contribute to the family's monthly income as did nearly double of all children surveyed. Only 14 per cent of all adults and seven per cent of children surveyed explicitly said that children are not allowed to work.

“Lack of proper policy and strategy to protect and promote children are some of the factors for increasing violence against children,” says Samirullah Popal from SCI. The NGO calls on the Government, other NGOs, civil society and media to enhance their support to child protection to help girls and boys across the country to be able to enjoy their rights.”

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*Some 69 per cent of adults reported children being sexually harassed and *Bacha bazi*, keeping of boys or “boy play”, was reported by nearly as many adults.*

Civilians and aid workers are #NOTATARGET

On 19 August, people across the globe stand together on World Humanitarian Day to rally support for people affected by humanitarian crisis and pay tribute to aid workers who have risked and lost their lives in humanitarian service.

This year's World Humanitarian Day sought to reaffirm the message that civilians caught in conflict and aid workers are not a target and to demand action to protect them. In Afghanistan, the event came only three days after the killing of three NGO-workers in Ghor Province by unknown gunmen (see *Humanitarian access section below*).

"We are standing here in solidarity with all the civilians around the world who are caught up in conflict. We are here to tell the world: Civilians in conflict are not a target," said UN Secretary-General (SG) António Guterres. "To see humanitarian workers be a target is something that was horrifying. And to see some of my colleagues losing their lives in the line of duty has been one of the most horrible experiences I had in my life."



UN staff in New York, SG Guterres and the-then ERC O'Brien participating in the global #NOTATARGET -campaign. Photo: UN/Evan Schneider



My home is #NOTATARGET. (Pashto)

Perpetrators get the message that violence against humanitarians is permissible

In a joint opinion article titled "[In the line of fire](#)", Jan Egeland, Head of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the-then UN Relief Chief (ERC) Stephen O'Brien denounced that the respect for the rules of war has collapsed in too many places and that delivery of aid is hampered by fighting parties, as a tactic to prevent life-saving relief reaching communities living on the 'wrong' side of the frontlines, leaving communities deprived for years on end. Medical personnel and health facilities are often singled out for attack.

"Many incidents have never been investigated, and in the rare instances when investigations have been carried out, they have often failed to meet international standards," they write. "This sends a direct message to the perpetrators; that violence against humanitarians is permissible, and that fighting parties can flout their obligations to respect international humanitarian law with virtually no consequence. So few people have been held to account that no official recorded number exists."

World Humanitarian Day in Afghanistan

The global #NOTATARGET social media campaign also gained traction in Afghanistan with the participation of UN entities, national and international NGOs with localised messages in English, Dari and Pashto (see *Tweet-cards on the left*).

The Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan, Toby Lanzer, appeared on a popular TV programme, reiterating the messages of the day:

"Whether you are a state or a non-state actor, it is your responsibility to protect people. To enable health workers to carry out their programmes, to make sure that an ambulance is never attacked, to ensure that aid workers can reach the people who need protection and assistance the most."

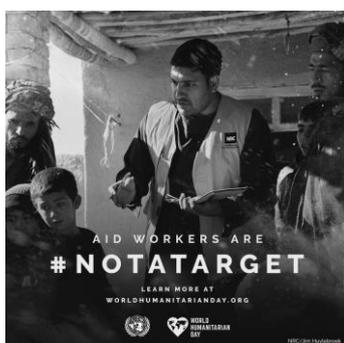
In memory of the Canal Hotel bombing

World Humanitarian Day was designated by the General Assembly in 2008 to coincide with the date of the bombing of the UN headquarters in the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, Iraq.

The attack killed 22 UN staff, including the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello, on 19 August 2003.



Our village is #NOTATARGET. (Dari)



My classroom is #NOTATARGET.



The global social media campaign #NOTATARGET was also projected at Times Square in New York. Photo: OCHA

Earning power buys women new liberties

ACTED contributed to this article

“I want to be a doctor here in Mazar-e-Sharif; I want to do a service for my country,” says Naeema, an 18-year old woman who attends a free computer course at one of 22 Youth Development Centres established by the French NGO ACTED in Afghanistan. The centres provide women with literacy classes and training in vocational skills which improve women’s employment prospects and demonstrate their capacity to break out of traditional gender roles.

“Girls are often only allowed to study until ninth grade. However, with the Youth Development Centres we can convince families that a higher level of education can bring economic benefits, while the girls get to stay at school for longer,” says Afsana, an English teacher at the centre in Mazar-e-Sharif.

She is seconded by a vocational skills teacher: “It is this improved earning power which motivates conservative families to grant their girls and young women new liberties.”

An important element for overcoming the tradition of keeping female family members inside the house, is the all-female staff in the centres: “Their families are strict and often do not let their women study or work, due to the sensitivities of the male members. But here, as the trainers are all female, this is no longer a problem,” explains Sahar, an embroidery teacher.

Every week, around 80 women participate in classes in the centre in Mazar-e-Sharif and since the start of the programme three years ago, more than 1,300 women have taken courses at the centres. The project is financed by the European Commission through EuropeAid with a total budget of €1.3 million (\$1.56 million).

Some of the students at the centres even have gone to university - particular impressive given Afghanistan’s wide gender disparity in tertiary education, with only half a per cent of girls from rural or marginalised backgrounds progressing beyond secondary school.



Sahar teaches embroidery in one of 22 Youth Development Centre run by ACTED.
Photo: ACTED/Joseph Shawyer

Families are strict and often do not let their women study or work, due to the sensitivities of the male members. But here, as the trainers are all female, this is no longer a problem.

Humanitarian access and aid worker incidents

In August, 19 incidents against humanitarian workers, facilities and activities were reported, bringing the total number of such incidents to 226 in 2017. Sadly, three national staff members of the NGO Catholic Relief Services (CRS) were **killed and two wounded** by unknown gunmen on 14 August 2017 in Ghor Province.

In total, 15 aid workers in the line of duty have been killed this year in Afghanistan, 12 injured and 39 abducted.

Seven incidents were recorded against health workers or health facilities in August, bringing the total of these incidents to 86 this year (see *map*).

Key access issues

Key access issues for the humanitarian community are notably 185,000 displaced people in areas deemed hard to reach due to conflict, notably in Badghis, Hilmand, Kandahar, Kunduz, Nangarhar and Uruzgan. The majority of these families have been displaced already in 2016.

INCIDENTS FROM JAN TO AUG 2017



226
Incidents



15
Aid workers killed
(by 14 Sept.)



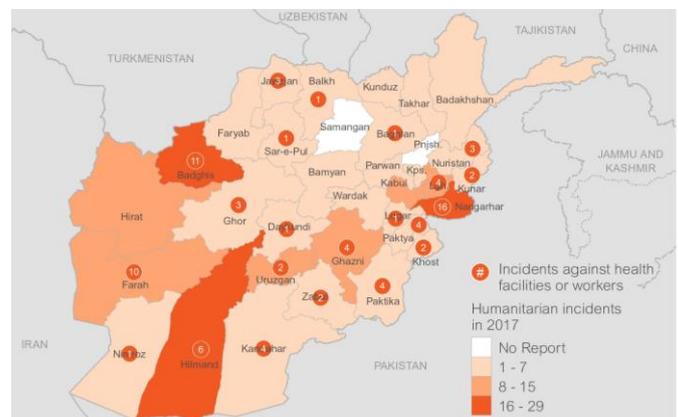
12
Aid workers wounded



39
Aid workers abducted



79
Incidents against
health facilities and
workers

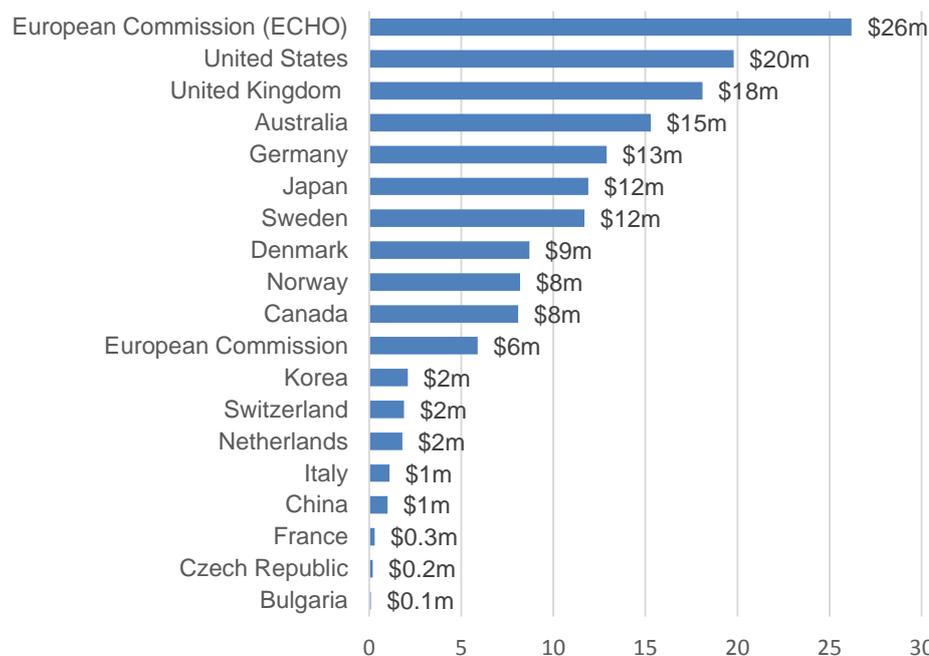


Incidents against health facilities and health workers.
Source: OCHA, Health Cluster

Humanitarian funding

As of 11 September, a total amount of humanitarian funding for Afghanistan of \$238 million was reported in [OCHA's Financial Tracking System \(FTS\)](#), of which \$179.5 million is against the 2017 HRP. This represents 32 per cent of the HRP initial request of \$550 million, or 43 per cent of the reduced request of \$414 million following the Mid-Year Review. Nearly 20 Government entities have funded the HRP this year (see left chart).

Funding towards the 2017 HRP



Enabling Action (\$2 million). A total of 24 projects by 12 national NGOs, 11 international NGOs and one UN Agency are currently under review.

\$10 million from the CERF for underfunded emergencies in Afghanistan

The ERC selected Afghanistan to receive \$10 million from the Underfunded Emergencies (UFE) Allocation of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). This money will be used to address the needs of people who could not be considered to date due to funding gaps, notably undocumented Afghan returnees from Iran arriving through the Milak border crossing, Nimroz, and flood-affected communities living in Khashrood and Chakhan-soor districts in the same province.

Further, winterization assistance for displaced families, returnees and host communities in 21 high-altitude provinces will be increased and small farming families and livestock farmers in ten provinces assisted to help them get over the peak hunger season. Receiving UN entities receiving the CERF UFE funding are IOM, FAO, WHO, WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF.

Second allocation over \$25 million by the CHF-Afghanistan

For the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF)-Afghanistan, nearly \$25 million is currently available, less than half of the amount of \$55 million targeted for 2017. Recently, Sweden and Switzerland deposited funding for the CHF-Afghanistan and support has been pledged by donors, notably Great Britain and the Republic of Korea.

The Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan, Toby Lanzer, decided to make up to \$25 million available for the second Standard Allocation of the CHF-Afghanistan this year.

The focus of the allocation is on delivering assistance in 45 hard to reach districts with acute humanitarian needs. The envelopes are for Health (\$7 million); Nutrition (\$5 million); Protection (\$5 million); WASH (\$4 million); FSAC (\$2 million), and

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