

HIGHLIGHTS

- Humanitarian community prepares for a new wave of returnees as spring season begins. UNHCR and IOM estimate that between 864,000 and 1.5 million people could return in 2017.
- Results from the first round of IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), recently completed in Nangarhar, Laghman and Kunar provinces, indicate that 1 person in 5 across the three provinces is a returnee.
- NRC constructs transitional shelters in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces for 8,000 undocumented returnees.
- In March, the Pakistan Humanitarian Country Team visited Kabul to better understand the issues surrounding the return of refugees and undocumented Afghans. Moving forward, a cross-border HCT Working Group will develop common messaging to inform advocacy efforts with both governments.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLAN FUNDING 21% FUNDED

550 million
requested (US\$)

117 million
Received (US\$)



An undocumented returnee family in front of their makeshift home in Jalalabad city, 4 April 2017. Photo: IOM

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Spring preparations for a new wave of returning Afghans

As the harsh Afghan winter draws to a close and spring brings with it more temperate conditions, the humanitarian community expects to see an increase in the number of Afghans once again returning from neighbouring Pakistan. As the rate of return is influenced by a number of political, security and other related factors both in Afghanistan and neighboring countries, another surge in returns could occur at any time. UNHCR and IOM have provided high level returnee estimates for 2017, with a lower case scenario of over 864,000 people and higher case scenario of over 1.5 million people.

Already the number of undocumented returns is starting to rise following a lull during the winter months and IOM is responding to a substantial increase in the return of undocumented Afghans from Pakistan and from Iran. More than 25,000 undocumented Afghans have spontaneously returned or been deported from Pakistan since January 2017. In the week 2-8 April 6,628 returned through Torkham border (Nangarhar province) and Spin Boldak border (Kandahar province) representing a 14% increase on the previous week.



Afghans arrive through Torkham border crossing_5 April 2017. Photo: IOM

After the winter break, UNHCR's facilitated voluntary repatriation operation from Pakistan resumed on 3 April, 2017. 18,000 registered refugees have indicated an intention to return within the month and so far 1,591 have arrived from Pakistan between 03 – 08 April; of which 69% returned from KPK, 15% from Baluchistan, 11% from Punjab and smaller numbers from Islamabad and Sindh provinces). According to the Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF) information, 56% (886) of the returnees from Pakistan intend to return to Nangarhar and Kabul provinces. These provinces remain consistently among the top five provinces of return since 2002.

Returning refugees from Pakistan are assisted at three encashment centers in Kabul, Samarkhel in Nangarhar and Jamal Mayna in Kandahar provinces. Upon arrival, returning refugees are provided with a one off cash grant, an average of USD 200 per person to assist in covering travel costs and immediate re-integration needs including food, rent, and other basic commodities. Basic health services are also provided by a UNHCR implementing partner as well as vaccinations by MoPH supported by WHO and UNICEF and Nutrition assessments and provision of basic medicines including Vitamin A and

IOM is also responding to a substantial increase in the return of undocumented Afghans from Iran. 9,315 undocumented Afghans also spontaneously returned or were deported from Iran through Milak border in Nimroz between April 2-8, bringing the total number of undocumented returnees from Iran since 1 January 2017 to 74,992.

Community Response Map (CRM)

IOM Cross Border Return and Re-integration (CBRR) post-distribution monitoring gauges the usefulness of the immediate assistance given to the returnees upon arrival, as well as measuring the level and effectiveness of reintegration over time. The feedback visualized on Community Response Map also assesses current and future needs of returnees to better inform project interventions.

For more information visit <https://goo.gl/tuVuFm>

deworming by UNICEF's implementing partner. Mine awareness is also targeted at the returning refugees carried out by the Danish Demining Group supported by UNMAS.

Protection monitoring teams have conducted sample interviews with newly arrived returnees in the encashment centers both to assess return trends including motivating factors and to further identify persons with specific needs for additional support or referral. Interviewed returnees stated that they were happy to return to their homeland and expressed appreciation for the assistance provided by UNHCR, particularly the USD 200 cash grant. However, they raised concerns about how long the money would last, until they found work opportunities. Returnees were aware of the level of the cash grant before they returned, and said they would be using the cash grant to pay transport costs, rent, settle existing debts and medical expenses, as well as to meet immediate needs, such as food and clothing.

For 2017, IOM is working to scale up its support to undocumented returnees in coordination with the Government of Afghanistan and other humanitarian partners (see page 6) and critically, is continuing its support to the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, providing technical expertise and expanding digital registration of undocumented returnees at the border through the newly-established Afghan Returnees Information System (ARIS).

IOM has implemented a significant expansion of its presence at the Torkham border and doubled the size of the Transit Center where it receives vulnerable undocumented returns. In the week 2-8 April IOM assisted 5,001 (75%) undocumented Afghan returnees from Pakistan, including 627 single parents, 16 special cases and two unaccompanied migrant children. Assistance for undocumented returnees has also been extended to Kandahar province since late 2016, with IOM opening a Reception Center at Spin Boldak border and a Transit Center in Kandahar city. IOM's assistance package for undocumented returnees has been revised to account for prolonged border closures, and will include in-community assistance as well as cash to replace certain NFIs.

IOM has launched the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), (see page 3) a mechanism for tracking population movements, and the Community Response Map (CRM), a tool for project monitoring and communication with communities. These tools will also better understand the needs and intentions of returnee families both at the border and once they have reached their final destinations, as well as identify gaps and assess the efficacy of assistance provided. In close collaboration with UNHCR and other partners, IOM is also seeking to harmonize data collection efforts and assistance provision at the community level using a targeting mechanism via the DTM that would assess communities based on the presence of vulnerable populations and implement humanitarian quick impact projects with individual assistance for Persons with Specific Needs.

WHO on behalf of the Eastern Region Health Cluster contributed the following article

Mass awareness campaign targeting returnees and internally displaced persons

Low levels of awareness and knowledge about disease prevention as well as health service delivery to help avoid risks is one of the main public health concerns among returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In order to tackle this problem, WHO and the Ministry of Public Health designed and deployed a mass public health awareness campaign throughout March, 2017 - aiming to raise awareness of the returnees and IDPs as well as the general public regarding prevention and control of major public health concerns in emergencies, namely acute respiratory infections (ARIs), diarrhea, cholera, measles, infection prevention (IP), tuberculosis (TB) and trauma. The campaign also sought to inform newly arriving vulnerable groups of returnee and IDPs about the existing healthcare facilities and services being provided in high risk districts of Nangarhar province.

The awareness campaign consisted of a wide range of activities including airing of audio and video spots through mass media channels, radio and TV; production and dissemination of information about ARIs, diarrhea, cholera, measles, IP, TB and trauma through awareness materials (brochures, posters and banners for billboards); and training and orientation sessions to community health workers in concerned districts. The awareness campaign was successfully conducted and resulted in improved understanding and sensitization around the major health concerns and higher demand for health services among targeted groups.

Ebadullah, a teacher originally from Rodat district in Nangarhar province, recently returned to Afghanistan with his family after more than 20 years living in Peshawar in Pakistan. Being heavily pregnant at the time, his wife – a Pakistani national – initially had deep reservations about returning to a country that she had not previously stepped foot into. Like many returnees, she was concerned about the future job prospects of her family, how they would build a sustainable life for themselves and, as an immediate priority, the kind of health care that would be available to her and her unborn child.



A child from an undocumented returnee family looks out from their makeshift home in Jalalabad city, 4 April 2017. Photo: IOM



MoPH & WHO health awareness campaign for returnees & IDPs

Like many returnee populations, the family eventually decided to settle in Behsud district, in Hada Akhonzadgan village, where they were informed by a community health worker of nearby health care facilities and services available to them. Ebadullah and his wife were surprised to find out that they would not have to pay the regional hospital in Jalalabad to help deliver their son, who arrived safely in March, a cost they could not afford. Speaking following the safe delivery of his sixth child, Ebadullah

said: “I had no idea that free health services were available in Afghanistan. I would like to thank the hospital staff and management for their support in delivering my son.”

IOM contributed to the following article

Better understanding population movements and needs with the Displacement Tracking Matrix

Between January 2016 and March 2017, over 775,000 undocumented Afghans have returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran. While a proportion of these households have been assessed and assisted at the border entry points the vulnerability of many families only becomes apparent when they reach their final destination and attempt to secure accommodation and a means by which to provide food, water and security for their family.

For humanitarian partners working to meet the needs of the most vulnerable families, locating them has been a complex task. At the border crossings information is collected on districts of intended return. However, as the joint HEAT assessment undertaken in the Eastern Region in September and October 2016 found, humanitarian partners have encountered significant disparity in the intention to return information compared to the actual presence of returnees. The reasons for these discrepancies vary; some families are unable to return to their planned destination due to ongoing conflict, others are forced

into secondary movement when they are unable to find accommodation or livelihood activities. Some families are also initially cautious and reluctant to share accurate destination information with authorities.

As a consequence of the dramatic increase in returns over the past 9 months, as well as record levels of internal displacement, the increase in population movement within the country has been considerable. In response, IOM launched the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) in Afghanistan in January 2017. The main objective of the DTM in Afghanistan is to enhance the ability of the Government of Afghanistan and humanitarian partners to provide effective, targeted, cost-efficient assistance to returnees, IDPs and the communities that host them.

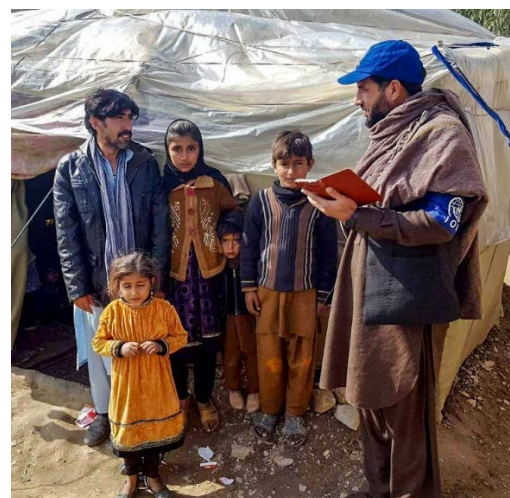
The DTM utilizes a variety of tools and processes to track and monitor population movement during crises. It regularly and systematically captures, processes and disseminates information to provide a better understanding of the movements and evolving needs of vulnerable populations, whether on site or en-route.

The system draws on over a decade of IOM experience in tracking vulnerable populations and helping ensure the targeted delivery of aid in Syria, Iraq, South Sudan and other countries facing both conflict and natural disasters.

“There is an urgent need to know where people in vulnerable situations are living and what their needs are,” said IOM Afghanistan Chief of Mission Laurence Hart. “With the DTM in place to clearly track these concerns, assistance and services can be delivered to the families and communities that need it most.”

Under the DTM’s first phase in Afghanistan, IOM sought to put a framework in place to track populations of concern in Nangarhar, Laghman and Kunar, three provinces with the highest rate of return in eastern Afghanistan. Data was collected in a total of 42 districts and 1,368 settlements with existing returnee and IDP populations between January and March 2017. Teams in the field worked with community leaders, local and national authorities and other knowledgeable sources to gather information on demographics and reasons for migration at the district and village level.

As of 16 March 2017, the DTM identified 544,364 returnees from abroad, which in relation to the total base population of the three provinces (2,456,500) indicates that 1 person in 5 is a returnee. Migrants that left Afghanistan for another country, however, only amount to 65,771 (3% of the base population). These displacements occurred between 2012 and March 2017. The DTM exercise also recorded internal movement of IDPs, including those fleeing districts in the provinces, arriving to districts in the provinces, or returning after having previously been displaced (see table).



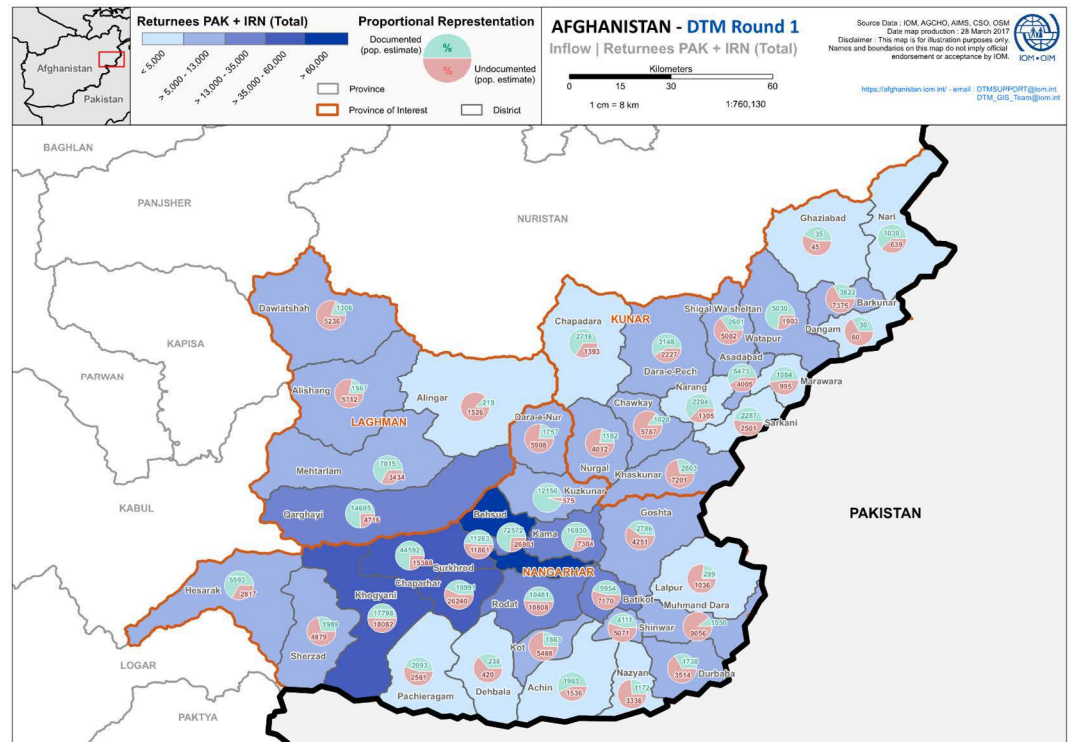
IOM staff interview an Afghan family in Kunar as part of the Displacement Tracking Matrix activities in Afghanistan. Photo: IOM

| Population category | Kunar | Laghman | Nangarhar | Total |
|---|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| Undocumented Returnees from Iran & Pakistan | 44,430 | 20,264 | 172,122 | 239,176 |
| Documented Returnees from Iran & Pakistan | 34,273 | 24,804 | 238,409 | 297,486 |
| Returnees from Other Countries | 590 | 2,055 | 5,057 | 7,702 |
| Total returnees from abroad | 79,293 | 47,483 | 417,588 | 544,364 |
| Returnee IDPs | 12,830 | 12,315 | 158,280 | 183,425 |
| Arrival IDPs | 32,747 | 20,197 | 193,373 | 246,317 |
| Departing IDPs | 28,399 | 31,199 | 221,929 | 281,527 |
| Out migrants | 13,973 | 14,325 | 37,437 | 65,771 |

Source IOM DTM, 27 Mar 2017

Following this first phase, IOM will expand the DTM's coverage to Baghlan, Balkh, Kabul, Kunduz, Paktya and Takhar – six provinces with predicted large displaced populations. During the course of collecting the demographic data some additional qualitative information on vulnerabilities and priority needs was also collected through narrative reports and observations. With further development, the DTM could provide a comprehensive platform for much improved humanitarian data collection across the country.

IOM DTM round 1, number of Afghan returnees by district (Mar 2017)



To learn more and download the full DTM Afghanistan Round 1 Report, visit <http://www.globaldtm.info/afghanistan>

NRC contributed the following article

Shelter for the most vulnerable, unregistered returnees in Nangarhar and Laghman

Fazel Rahim, 60, and his brothers' families suddenly returned to Afghanistan after three decades as refugees in Pakistan, although they were never registered as such. They originally fled in the 1980s during the Soviet era, and then had simple jobs and homes and children whilst as refugees.

But when they felt forced to return last December, they had little to survive on. It did not take long to spend their savings, and then had little to eat and nowhere to live.

"No one in the family has an income. Nobody can find work in this area," said Fazel Rahim.



Transitional shelters built with funds received from the CHF. Overall, NRC has assisted 8,000 returnees in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces with transitional shelter support. Photo: NRC

But their biggest concern was their lack of a place to live. The winter was harsh, and they were sleeping mostly in makeshift shelters on a distant relative's land in Behsud District, Nangarhar.

Women and girls from all families were put into the only, tiny structure on the land, whilst the boys and men had to sleep outside, on the floor. The children were often bitten by insects, and scared of wild dogs and snakes.

"It was incredibly unsettling to see unregistered returnee children sleeping outdoors, in mud or worse, in distress, on our visits around eastern Afghanistan," said Will Carter, Head of Programme for Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Afghanistan. "You could speak with families and sense that not everyone would make it through."

With the help of the Common Humanitarian Fund, NRC assisted Fazel's family with shelter, protecting them from the elements and restoring their dignity.

"It was very difficult before, but now at least every family has their own room to stay in," said Fazel Rahim.

NRC rapidly erected 68 transitional shelters in the area, and overall more than 1,100 in eastern Afghanistan during the mass influx of returns.



Photo: NRC

Shelter has consistently been reported by returnees as their priority need.

The CHF-funded transitional shelters are larger and more comfortable than tents, will last much longer, are also movable (in case land is allocated for the family), and (if the family has secure tenure) can also be upgraded into permanent structures if the family wishes to build brick walls around its frame.

"We're very grateful to the CHF for rapidly releasing its emergency reserve last year, to help us quickly put roofs over 8,000 of the most vulnerable unregistered returnees," said Carter.

DiREC - Joint planning for the response and reintegration of IDPs and returnees endorsed by cabinet

In response to the surge in returnees and the rising number of IDPs, in November 2016 the Government of Afghanistan, led by the Offices of the President, the CEO and the Ministry for Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), established the Displacement and Returnees Executive Committee (DiREC) to coordinate national and international humanitarian response efforts to IDPs and returnees to ensure immediate needs are met and durable solutions facilitated.

Chaired by H.E. Minister Balkhi, H.E. Minister Mastoor, Special Representative and Senior Adviser to the CEO, and Toby Lanzer, the Humanitarian Coordinator, the DiREC brings together, in a unique coordination structure, core government ministries, the main UN operational agencies as well as donor representatives through the World Bank and the EU, to jointly determine a way forward on core issues of humanitarian and development concern for IDPs and returnees.

Supported in its decision making by three working groups (policy, technical and finance) set up to provide policy analysis and recommendations, guidance on technical standards and instruments, including beneficiary selection criteria for land allocation, and a costing of the short, medium and long-term actions required to support IDPs and returnees, since being established, the DiREC has made considerable strides in forging consensus and

delivering leadership in key areas of work. In January, the DirREC finalised a Policy Framework for Returnees and IDPs – the first joint strategy of its kind – aimed at minimising the time IDPs and returnees spend in transitional arrangements. The framework is built on nine basic operating principles, including: redressing current inequities in humanitarian assistance packages provided; the registration of all undocumented Afghans; the need to fast-track the provision of identity documentation, and settlement based on voluntariness.

As of mid-March 2017, a comprehensive Action Plan has also been endorsed by DiREC and the National Cabinet. Efforts will focus on six key response areas, including: the provision of immediate humanitarian assistance (at the border, at the place of settlement and during the winter), documentation, access to basic services, land allocation and adequate housing, and livelihoods and job opportunities—with a focus on urban areas, many of which have seen increased pressure on services as a result of the convergence of IDP and returnee populations on a few provincial hubs. A costing exercise outlining the financial requirements of each goal is in the process of being completed by the Finance Working Group. A housing model, establishment of beneficiary selection criteria for land allocations and revision of Presidential Decree 104 are also underway.

Pakistan Humanitarian Country Team visits Afghanistan to discuss returnee crisis

The Pakistan Humanitarian Country Team, led by the RC/HC for Pakistan Neil Buhne, and composed of representatives from UNHCR, IOM, WFP, UNICEF and the Pakistan Humanitarian Forum, visited Kabul in March for a two-day mission. The purpose of the mission was to better understand the issues surrounding the return of refugees and undocumented Afghans from Pakistan to Afghanistan and to ensure that future returns are informed, voluntary, and facilitated in such a way that their vulnerability is minimised and likelihood for sustainable integration is maximised. During their mission, the Pakistan HCT met with the Afghanistan HCT, the Humanitarian Donor Group and INGOs. Key issues discussed, included: concerns related to ongoing protection violations in Pakistan, contingency planning in advance of the resumption of UNHCR's repatriation programme in early April, the implications of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border closure, and harmonisation of assistance for returnees. At the conclusion of the visit, it was agreed that a cross-border HCT Working Group would be established to develop common positions for messaging and support advocacy efforts with both governments. Priorities for immediate follow up include: the gathering and sharing of practical information on the situation of Afghans intending to return to Afghanistan (such as the issuance of school leaving certificates and immunisation of children) with a view to addressing these prior to their departure, and registration for the undocumented.

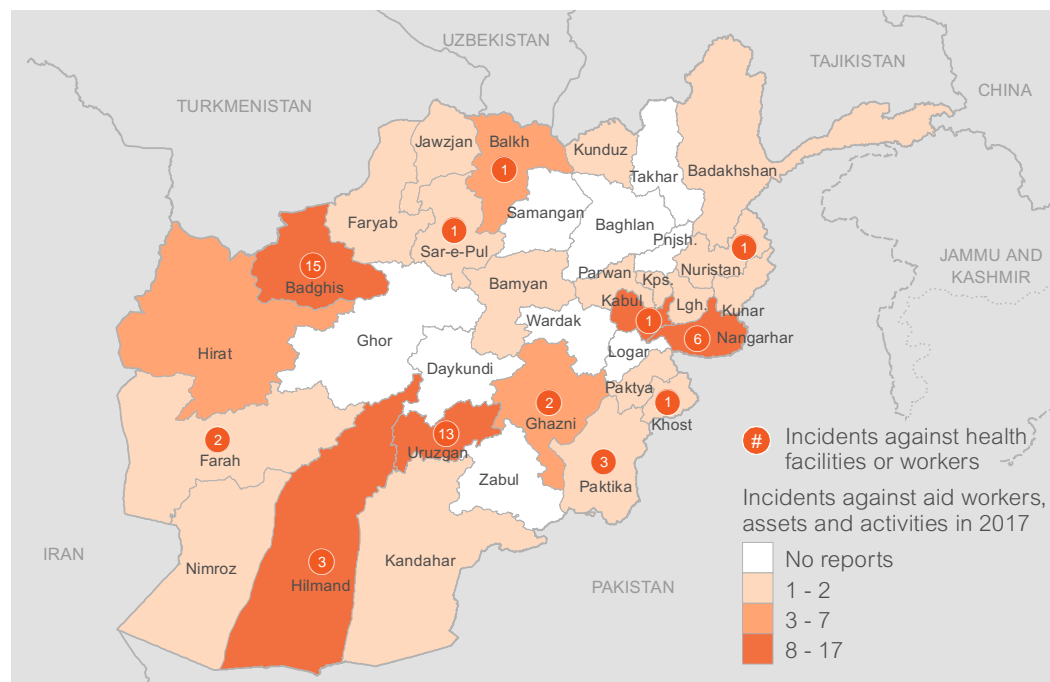
Humanitarian access: aid worker incidents

The total number of reported incidents relating to aid workers for the month of March 2017 is 25. UN security continues to report increasing levels of insecurity with incidents reaching their highest averages ever in the Eastern Region for the 1st quarter of 2017. The imminent announcement of the annual Spring Offensive is expected to lead to heightened insecurity and consequent access constraints which will require diligence and determination to overcome. In March a significant rise in cross border shelling was reported in the Eastern Region causing displacement and access issues.

There were 12 incidents against health facilities and workers during the month and greater advocacy for respect of International Humanitarian Law is called for from all sectors to all parties to the conflict to reverse this trend.

INCIDENTS IN
JAN-MAR 201792
Incidents7
Aid workers killed4
Aid workers wounded7
Aid workers abducted49
Incidents against
health facilities and
workers

Incidents against aid workers, assets and activities (Jan-Mar 2017)



Source: various

Humanitarian funding

The humanitarian community in Afghanistan benefits from steadfast support of donor governments dedicated to a strategic and coordinated humanitarian response. More donors are providing information to the global Financial Tracking Service (<https://fts.unocha.org>) regarding their 2017 Afghanistan funding intentions totaling US\$152.7 million thus far (as of 13th April 2017), of which US\$116.6 million (or 76 percent) are contributions towards the 2017 HRP. The 2017 HRP outlines the planned delivery of humanitarian assistance over the 12-month period and aims to reach US\$550.2 million in contributions to serve at least 5.7 million of those in need.

2017 CHF First Standard Allocation

The First Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) Standard Allocation was launched on 22 February, with c. \$22 million in funding available to address four key priorities: increasing access to life saving basic health and nutrition services; addressing basic needs of undocumented returns and their hosts; response to neglected needs exacerbated in a deteriorating humanitarian and protection environment; and emergency response preparedness.

The allocation process is still ongoing for the 75 submitted project proposals. The Humanitarian Coordinator makes the final funding decisions based upon recommendations from the Strategic and Technical Review Committees comprised of Cluster Leads, UN Agencies and experienced NGOs. Specialized working groups evaluate the projects' justifications for Security-Access Strategies, Protection Mainstreaming and the Gender Marker Score, while OCHA's Humanitarian Financing Unit (HFU) and Funding Coordination Section-New York conduct the review of project budgets. In addition, US\$7 million will be set aside for the CHF Reserve Allocation to enable flexible response to new, unforeseen humanitarian emergencies, activated by the Humanitarian Coordinator as and when the need arises.

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