

information becomes available, particularly with regard to the risk of displacement. This plan factors-in displacement due to conflict but it does not yet cover any potential additional displacement driven by the likely drought and other related needs. Further analysis is needed to identify potential high-risk locations for displacement and likely host communities.

All numbers and activities outlined in this plan are a sub-set of the 2021 HRP. Funding towards requirements identified in this plan should be channelled through HRP partners. Total funding requirements for this plan are drawn from the HRP and are a sub-set of the overall ask for \$1.3 billion. Given the lack of funding commitments for the 2021 HRP, early funding is urgently needed to allow the distribution of spring assistance that is aimed at preventing displacement.

Planning scenario

Drought Risk: After low winter rainfall and high temperatures associated with a La Niña weather event, initial indicators suggest that drought-like conditions are likely over spring and will have significant impact across all regions of the country. Thin snowpack indicates there is likely to be less water available as a result of snow melt over the months ahead. A drought has not yet been officially declared and advocacy continues around the need for an early, evidence-based decision on this by the Government. Contingency planning is proceeding on the basis of worsening humanitarian need as a result of the La Niña weather pattern and is not dependent on a declaration, although it is likely that this would unlock additional funding opportunities.

It is anticipated that the situation will have impact on both rain-fed and irrigated agriculture/livestock, as well as on availability of water

for drinking, washing and sanitation. Mid-March through to the end of July will likely be the peak period during which drought impacts on crops and livestock (agricultural drought) would manifest. The wheat production deficit is expected to be -16 to -27 per cent this year as a result, requiring increased top-up from international suppliers. Current analysis indicates that 25 provinces, which are home to 27.7 million people, will see 13.2 million people in humanitarian need during the spring planning period. Humanitarians plan to reach 7.4 million of those people with assistance, if funding is available.

Flood: Given the current climate outlook, flood risk will likely be reduced compared to normal years. While the likelihood of heavy river flows is lower than previous seasons, flash flooding due to sporadic spring storms remains a risk. It is anticipated approximately 120,000 people will be flood-affected from March to June 2021.

Conflict: Spring is expected to see a volatile and unpredictable pattern of conflict. Continued and potentially escalating fighting is anticipated, in line with seasonal patterns of conflict each year, and dependent on progress with the peace talks and the planned draw-down of international military forces. Access challenges are expected in many affected areas due to active conflict and safety risks for staff. Approximately 250,000 people are projected to be displaced due to conflict from March to June, which represents 50 per cent of those projected for all of 2021.

COVID-19: The immediate and longer-term effects of the pandemic in Afghanistan will continue to be felt throughout spring. Community transmission of COVID-19 due to widespread complacency in the community regarding protective measures such as mask wearing and social distancing threatens to prolong the pandemic and may result in additional waves of infection over the planning period. This may lead to increased morbidity and mortality rates, as well as a return to local and/or regional lockdown measures. The spring response will be implemented simultaneously with the roll-out of

the Government's national vaccination campaign, although the exact timeline for reaching vulnerable people in affected areas remains to be confirmed. Due to limited public health resources and testing capacity, as well as the absence of a national death register, confirmed cases of and deaths from COVID-19 are likely to be under-reported overall in Afghanistan and it is not currently possible to approximate how many people will be impacted by the pandemic between March and June.

Anticipated impact on the humanitarian situation

The impact of the potential drought, sporadic flooding, conflict and COVID-19 will vary across regions based on the degree to which these phenomena manifest and interact with pre-existing vulnerabilities in a given area. However, the following general trends are anticipated.

Food Insecurity and Malnutrition: There is a strong correlation between areas affected by potential drought and existing food insecurity and malnutrition. It is anticipated that the current dire food insecurity situation will be exacerbated by drought, making the existing support already planned under the HRP more urgent. To varying degrees, all current IPC 4 provinces will be impacted by the dry conditions. It is also possible that drought conditions will push a portion of the people currently living in IPC 3 into IPC 4, although this will need to be confirmed by the upcoming IPC analysis, with results due in April. There is a heavy overlap with high-risk provinces for malnutrition among both children and pregnant and lactating women (PLW). Increasing food insecurity and limited water availability will likely complicate current treatment for Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) and Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM), pushing additional children and PLWs into severe need. Food affordability, rather than

availability, may push families further into increased debt or to adopt other negative coping mechanisms. Prices are already elevated above pre-COVID prices and will likely rise further, while markets remain largely functional and accessible, suggesting that cash-based interventions should be an important part of the response. Price monitoring is a critical component of this plan.

Water and Health: A water scarcity crisis is unfolding. Water availability for livestock and agriculture, as well as for drinking and hygiene will be a challenge for impacted communities. This may involve walking longer distances to reach water sources that are available. Affected communities may need to expend additional resources to compensate for limited local water availability and/or poor water quality. Those who cannot afford to purchase water through private vendors may de-prioritise water for sanitation and hygiene, which in turn will increase risk of infectious and waterborne diseases, including COVID-19 and AWD. At the same time, limited existing or accessible healthcare is a high risk in the affected provinces. Scale-up of mobile health teams and health surveillance to deal with the health implications of the likely drought, disease and malnutrition in these locations will be important. This need will increase in the event of displacement.

People on the Move: It is too early to say whether additional displacement caused by the climate situation will be seen. The triggers for displacement in 2018-2019 included a combination of water availability, food affordability, interruptions to livelihoods, debt burdens and conflict. While it is not yet possible to accurately predict how these factors will manifest over the 2021 spring, these dimensions will be closely monitored. Given both historical trends and indications of intensifying conflict, half of this year's projected conflict-related internal displacement (250,000 people) is expected to be recorded between March and June. Just over 230,000 undocumented and refugee returnees are expected to cross

Afghanistan's borders during this time and will require humanitarian assistance. Already, historically high numbers of people have returned from Iran through the Milak and Islam Qala border crossings in 2021 with additional surges anticipated over the Nawroz holiday in March and the Iranian election period in June. These returns will have implications for both COVID-19 transmission and the loss of remittances flowing back into Afghanistan.

Mine risk education will be critical for people who are on the move in unfamiliar areas, as will early action to prepare rental support options for those who displace into urban centres or who are at risk of eviction. Early efforts to secure land allocation agreements for those who are displaced will be critical if/when potential hot spots are identified.

Protection: High levels of poverty are likely to prompt the increased adoption of negative coping mechanisms presenting serious dangers for vulnerable people including women and children: GBV, early marriage, child labour, begging and recruitment by armed groups and additional debt accumulation. Children displaced into urban areas face increased risks from abuse. Displacement and economic stress may increase the risk of school drop-outs, in turn exposing children to further risks such as child labour as families struggle to survive. There are also additional risks posed by family separation and splitting. Adolescents may be sent abroad to work, exposing them to trafficking risks, while women and children may be left in displacement sites while family members return to their land to check on crops, exposing them to GBV and other safety risks. An early, coordinated GBV response that is mainstreamed across all sectors is essential, especially in overcrowded informal settlements. Mine risk education will be a life-saving tool to protect people on the move in new areas, where they are not familiar with the local dangers. The La Niña situation is expected to create new financial stress or displacement trauma, leaving people in increased need

of psychosocial support. Many displaced people, and women more generally, may not have identity documents, affecting their ability to access services. Well-communicated referral pathways and service mapping are a priority. Exclusion of ethnic and minority groups from services must be monitored and mitigation measures introduced.

Flooding: While the impact of snow-melt flooding is expected to be lower than normal, spring storms are still expected to cause significant needs. People's needs in the event of floods are usually shelter support to make their affected homes watertight (tarps, repair kits) and NFIs to replace household items that are lost or damaged. Availability of safe drinking water is often affected by flooding and water purification supplies are often needed. Reduced water quality also aids in the spread of disease, particularly AWD. Food is also needed by many when household supplies are lost and agricultural inputs often need to be replaced so as to allow for replanting after crops are destroyed. Animal fodder may also be required if destroyed by floods. The regions with the highest number of flood-affected people are expected to be the West and North, followed by the North East, East and South.

Summary of planned preparedness and response activities

Please note that all activities are a sub-set of each sector's plans as outlined in the HRP.

FSAC: Food assistance (in-kind and cash), livestock protection support and livelihood assistance. Continued monitoring of precipitation, snowpack, soil moisture and other phenomena. Routine evaluation of the Normalised Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) and Agriculture Stress Index (ASI) to gauge the real-time severity of La Niña impact and drought-risk.

Nutrition: Delivery of essential nutrition treatment supplies through health facilities and mobile teams, community screening and referral systems, cash incentives to cover the transport costs of mothers and caretakers of SAM children, blanket supplementary feeding (BSF) for undernourished children, counselling on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) and optimal maternal and child care practices, and micronutrient supplementation.

WASH: Access to adequate and safe drinking water through rehabilitation of water wells and boreholes, repair of handpumps and providing water kits with purification tablets. Access to gender-appropriate sanitation facilities and safe waste disposal. COVID-sensitive hygiene promotion and hygiene kits.

Health: Routine surveillance of and response to COVID-19, AWD, measles and other diseases. Emergency health services through mobile and static clinics. Provision of mental health, GBV (health) and psychosocial support.

Protection: Individual protection assistance (both in-kind and cash), referrals, psychosocial support through static and mobile approaches, clearance of explosive hazards, child protection and GBV case management, dignity kit distribution, tracing of unaccompanied and separated children, psychological first aid, HLP information sharing and legal support to those under threat of eviction, and protection monitoring of the evolving situation, where possible.

ES-NFI: Provision of household items, emergency shelter kits and self-reconstruction tool kits. Provision of tools and materials (both cash and in-kind) for shelter repair and upgrade. Advocacy for increase funding towards transitional shelter solutions.

Education: Temporary learning spaces and provision of teaching supplies/resources. Provision of water and hygiene supplies in

schools, school feeding or cash and voucher assistance, remedial classes, rehabilitation and expansion of learning facilities to absorb any new influx of displaced children, and psychosocial support through teachers.

Other complementary activities: Pipeline Tracking (ICCT), Access Strategy (HAG), gender analysis (GiHA), displacement analysis (DTM), community information needs analysis (AAPWG)

Cross-cutting issues and specific vulnerabilities

AAP: It is vital that the spring response includes two-way communication channels with impacted communities to address needs, risks and increased vulnerabilities. Ensuring that information is exchanged in accessible languages and formats with affected people, especially those with vulnerabilities, is crucial. Two-way communication channels and processes will be established to promote accountability and enable communities to ask questions and give feedback about assistance. Awaaz Afghanistan will be a key feedback and referral channel with people able to share their needs and issues by phone, where a phone is accessible. A process will be established for creating and disseminating clear, timely messages before, during and after the drought to ensure that the most important information about assistance is provided in languages and ways that Afghans say they prefer. ANDMA will be a key partner in this work. Input also will be sought from people living in drought risk areas to ensure community engagement in the response and to meet information needs. Coordination of communications with communities will be led by the Afghanistan Accountability to Affected People Working Group. The Working Group will collaborate with the REACH Initiative on a rapid information needs assessment of

people impacted by the 2018-2019 drought to learn what kinds of information would have been useful for them to get at that time.

Disability: People with severe disabilities make up at least 8.5 per cent of people in need in Afghanistan. In the event of flooding or displacement, they face safety risks due to mobility constraints. They may also find it more difficult to access services and will require additional support as a result of increased vulnerabilities from the possible drought. The 2020 Whole of Afghanistan Assessment affirmed the complex needs profile of people with disabilities in Afghanistan, particularly in relation to debt. This will only worsen if the dry spell continues and food becomes more expensive.

Gender: Women's and girls' rights and needs are often neglected during natural disasters. The GiHA will work on a gendered vulnerability analysis of needs based on the most affected provinces to guide the overall response as the situation evolves. Cultural norms tend to prioritise the feeding of male family members in times of stress, with negative consequences for women and girls. The impact is not limited to hunger but also has ramifications in health issues, child development and livelihoods. Gender-sensitive design of sanitation facilities in potential displacement sites is critical, as well as support for culturally-appropriate menstrual hygiene management. Consideration of the gendered implications of choosing cash modalities will be incorporated across the response, with the option of mixed responses to ensure women's agency. Facilitating the participation of female staff in the response in all affected areas is essential to ensuring women's needs are fully reflected in assessments and that assistance is available to all.

Access and Logistics: Active conflict is expected to be the main impediment to access across impacted areas. Conflict intensity, frequency and complexity may push the risk tolerance of partners and the situation will need to be regularly monitored. Impediments posed by parties to the conflict will continue to require collective approaches

to advocacy and negotiation, guided by the Joint Operating Principles (JOPs). To maximise access opportunities, it is imperative that the humanitarian community engages with all parties to the conflict in a coordinated and systematic fashion. It will be vitally important that engagement with NSAGs is made under the 'Do No Harm' principle.

Logistics: Given the scope of needs, it will be critical to ensure that pipelines for core supplies (particularly NFIs) are well maintained and quickly replenished, with procurement lead times fully taken into account. Front loading of funding for this is essential. Pre-positioning of stocks close to the most acutely affected areas will speed up response times. Up-to-date tracking is critical to providing early warning of potential pipeline breaks. See March-June Pipeline Tracking Snapshot for a cluster breakdown of supplies and imminent breaks.

Cash: With expansion in the use of cash and voucher assistance (CVA), its growing acceptance and preference by communities, and its relative speed in reaching affected people, it is anticipated that CVA will be an important modality through which multi-sectoral humanitarian needs will be met during spring. Enhanced market monitoring, including through WFP's Monthly Price Bulletin and the Cash and Voucher Working Group (CVWG)/REACH Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI), has shown that while there have been shocks related to the supply of goods in the market, the majority of markets in the areas prioritised in this plan have ultimately remained functional. Market monitoring also shows that cash agents are present and active in these provinces. The CVWG will continue to work closely with clusters to support quality CVA approaches when these are determined the best-fit. The CVWG will also utilise ongoing market monitoring data to inform necessary adjustments to the Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) should market volatility warrant a revision as a result of price rises. Continuing to invest in technical capacity of organisations to design and implement CVA and in partnerships with development actors to align cash-based

programming approaches will be crucial to ensuring the modality's efficiency gains are maximised.

Coordination guidance

Coordination with the Government: The ICCT will continue to work with the First Vice President's Office, ANDMA, MoRR, NSIA, MAIL, MRRD, NWARA and other government stakeholders to identify common priorities and resource gaps, as well as strengthen strategic and operational coordination in the months ahead. Government and humanitarian counterparts will work to ensure planning documents are fully aligned as well as based on the latest evidence and projections of need. Joint action will also be taken to coordinate messaging to ensure that a common understanding of the evolving environmental situation and corresponding humanitarian needs is communicated to all relevant stakeholders. Regular coordination meetings will be held with ANDMA and other government counterparts to update plans as the humanitarian situation develops over the coming months.

Links with Development Actors: More detailed, sector-specific plans identifying linkages with development programming will be articulated in future iterations of the spring plan. However, lessons from previous drought situations unequivocally indicate that early, comprehensive responses in places of origin, which prevent displacement, are preferred. Flexible early funding and programming to support anticipatory action by development actors is critical to mitigating suffering, especially in light of COVID-19 economic pressures.

Funding Requirements: The total requirement to meet urgent needs over the spring period and prevent worsening humanitarian need is \$390 million. The 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan is less than

4 per cent funded. While clusters currently have \$126 million in carryover funds from 2020, this is mostly earmarked funding that may not be available to meet new drought-related needs. Several clusters have virtually no carryover funds at all (Health, WASH, Nutrition). Urgent front-loading of funding is needed to pre-empt needs, avert the need for a more complex and prolonged response to displacement and to reduce suffering among an already distressed population.

Ongoing Monitoring and Further Updates: This iteration of the spring disaster contingency plan has been developed based on available data at the end of February. The climate and needs outlook is expected to evolve over the months ahead, requiring revision of this plan. Key data sources to track food insecurity (IPC analysis), nutrition (SMART surveys), displacement (DTM), market fluctuations and price trends (VAM, JMMI), and key environmental indicators (VHI, ASI) will be utilised to monitor the unfolding situation and update the plan as necessary.

Cluster/Sector Summaries

Education in Emergencies



PEOPLE IN NEED

883k

PLANNED REACH

468k

FUNDING REQUIRED (MARCH-JUNE)

\$13.3M

Capacity:

- The EiE Working Group (EIEWG) has a network of partners who are able to operate in 14 of the 25 provinces that are likely to be most affected by the dry-spell, flood and other conditions. Partners have the capacity to scale-up to new areas with additional funding.
- Of the 10 high priority provinces, EiE partners have pre-positioned supplies in 6 (Ghor, Faryab, Badghis, Kunar, Badakhshan and Hirat) which can be quickly distributed to address children's immediate education needs in these areas. WASH in Education supplies are, however, only available four of the provinces (Ghor, Faryab, Kunar & Badakhshan). Of the 12 medium impact provinces, EIEWG partners have already pre-positioned supplies in 8 (Farah, Nangarhar, Sar-e-Pul, Hilmand, Wardak, Kandahar, Uruzgan and Baghlan) while WASH in Education supplies are only available in 3 provinces (Faryab, Wardak and Baghlan).

Anticipated Sectoral Needs:

- Shocks anticipated over spring are likely to disrupt already fragile access to education for many children. Children often drop out of school in times of financial and displacement shock, placing them at higher risk of being forced to work. This is especially true when food and livelihoods are disrupted by drier than normal weather conditions, as well as when floods and displacement occur. With COVID-19 remaining a persisting threat, WASH in Schools needs will continue. Continuity of schooling and retention of teachers in times of displacement will be another area the EIEWG will be closely monitoring.

Priority Preparedness Activities:

- The EIEWG will undertake a regular mapping of schools and Community-Based Education (CBEs) that do not have adequate access to WASH to inform response preparedness. The WG's coordination

with the Ministry of Education and overall response preparedness will be informed by key lessons learned and resilience strategies from the 2018-2019 drought.

- In line with the Working Group's CBE policy, partners will agree on parameters for children to be enrolled or integrated into existing formal schools. In key locations, EiE partners will continue to pre-position educational supplies (such as teaching and learning supplies and classroom kits). Partners will try to recruit additional teachers in areas where any new waves of displaced children are in need of schooling. The Working Group will pre-map areas where school extensions with tents may be required.

Priority Emergency Response Activities:

- The EiE response is dependent on collaborative work with other clusters for its planned interventions.
- The primary priority for the EIEWG is to support children in their places of origin and ensure they continue their education. EiE partners plan to distribute water to schools using local solutions (such as existing animal transport instead of costly and unsustainable dedicated water trucking) and will provide WASH supplies to reduce transmission risks for COVID-19, AWD and other communicable diseases in schools.
- In partnership with FSAC partners, the WG will plan for school feeding or cash and voucher assistance to the most vulnerable children.
- To ensure that class time lost because of displacement and other disruptions is compensated, EiE partners will plan to provide remedial classes.
- Light rehabilitation and expansion of learning facilities for IDP and host community children is also a focus area for the EIEWGs planning. Where integration into existing facilities is not possible, EiE partners will establish temporary learning spaces (TLS) and will form community education councils (CECs) where possible to oversee these learning spaces. In collaboration with Child Protection partners, child protection referral pathways will be strengthened, and teachers will be trained on psychosocial support.

Challenges, Risks and Constraints:

- Security and access constraints (especially in hard-to-reach areas) are expected to challenge the timely delivery of teaching and learning materials.
- If displacement as a result of the possible drought or other drivers (disaster, conflict) becomes prolonged, a longer-term solution, beyond an EiE response, will be required to ensure continued access to education.

Emergency Shelter and NFI



PEOPLE IN NEED

2M

PLANNED REACH

216K

FUNDING REQUIRED (MARCH-JUNE)

\$16.6M

Capacity:

- The ES-NFI Cluster's in-country stockpile is presently able to cover 129,000 people with emergency shelter, 634,500 people with emergency NFIs and 106,000 people with shelter self-construction/repair toolkits. However, given the likely scale of needs, it is critical that the pipeline is constantly replenished and that funding is provided in enough time to allow for procurement.
- The Cluster has presence in all 25 provinces projected to be most -affected by La Niña weather patterns during spring and with early mobilisation of resources, these partners are ready to provide assistance in all of these provinces.

Anticipated Sectoral Needs:

- The Cluster estimates that some 120,000 people are likely be affected primarily by flash/storm-related flooding – below the overall disaster impact forecast of 200,000 people projected in the 2021 HRP. The highest numbers of people are expected to be affected by flooding in the West and North, followed by the North East, East and South.
- Conflict and potentially drought-related displacement are expected to create both shelter and NFI needs in displacement sites.
- The Cluster estimates that almost 2 million people will need ES-NFI assistance across the 25 provinces.

Priority Preparedness Activities:

- The Cluster will pre-position stocks of household items, emergency shelter and shelter repair tool kits in all regions and has the flexibility to further support regions from the national stockpile or neighbouring regions in case of depletion and urgent need.
- In preparation for potential displacement, the Cluster will strengthen preparedness in high-risk locations that may host people on the move, ensuring site management and planning guidelines

are in place and sub-national cluster coordinators are guided on appropriate response modalities. This will be done in close coordination with the Government and HLP partners based on lessons learned from 2018-2019. Exploration of rental options in at-risk host locations for people who may be displaced as a result of the drought shock is also another critical preparedness action.

Priority Emergency Response Activities:

- The ES-NFI Cluster will rely on market assessments to understand people's ability to access construction materials and NFI items in local markets, as well as the evolution of rental markets and skilled and unskilled labour markets.
- Partners will primarily distribute standard household items, emergency shelter kits and self-reconstruction tool kits to households whose homes are destroyed. Partners will also provide tools and materials (both cash and in-kind) for shelter repair or upgrade to households where their home has been moderately or severely damaged. Assistance will also be provided to those displaced by conflict depending on their shelter situation and other needs.
- The ES-NFI Cluster continues to advocate for an increase funding towards transitional shelter for families whose houses are destroyed to better support them towards recovery. As part of this effort, the ES-NFI Cluster will coordinate with the HLP Taskforce and the Government on available land for possible relocation, resettlement, reconstruction, and rehabilitation programming incorporating 'build back better' and resilience principles, in line with SO3 of the HRP.

Challenges, Risks and Constraints:

- While insecurity continues to challenge partners' ability to operate in some hard-to-reach areas, difficult weather and road conditions may also present a hurdle to movement of relief supplies, humanitarian staff for assessments and distributions.
- While Cluster partners will rely on locally available materials, where possible, delays in funding have a ripple effect on transport lead times even for domestic procurement.
- Continued limited funding for transitional shelter solutions (as seen in 2020) will mean that many people will continue to rely on constant replacement of emergency shelters which are not durable and last a much shorter time.
- Lack of access to land and HLP rights may drive the creation or expansion of existing informal settlements, prolonging suffering for those who remain in these sites, often in undignified living conditions.

Food Security and Agriculture



PEOPLE IN NEED

13M

PLANNED REACH

6.3M

FUNDING REQUIRED (MARCH-JUNE)

\$266M

Capacity:

- FSAC capacity remains at scale and partners can access all districts in the country. A large proportion of the Cluster’s response is delivered through a few of its largest partners who report that they have further capacity to deliver greater volumes of assistance, if funding is provided. FSAC’s ability to scale-up was also demonstrated during the COVID-19 response in 2020 with partners tripling their delivery of cash-for-food assistance and employing double ration food distribution approaches to get ahead of COVID-19 related movement restrictions and supply chain challenges.
- The Cluster has 6,500MT of food in country, some of which are in transit to warehouses in the capital. However, this is not sufficient to reach people with the multiple rounds of assistance required to weather the food insecurity situation ahead.

Anticipated Sectoral Needs:

- The provinces forecast as most affected by the dry spell are all areas that are experiencing high food insecurity and malnutrition. All IPC 4 provinces will be impacted by the dry conditions to varying degrees. While reduced production of food will not be felt immediately given that Afghanistan’s import pipeline from neighbouring countries still remains strong, speculative price hikes that make food less affordable are expected to be the biggest challenge in the immediate term. This is particularly concerning as household income dropped and debt deepened as a result of the socio-economic pressures of the pandemic, making it more difficult to cope and recovery farther from reach. Reduction in water availability may further erode livelihoods for those who rely on livestock as their primary productive assets. Death or selling of livestock often requires multiple years to recover.

Priority Preparedness Activities:

- As part of its preparedness activities, FSAC will continue to evaluate the scale of the impact of La Niña in real time. FSAC will work with partners and government colleagues to regularly monitor precipitation, snowpack, temperature and soil moisture to understand the scale of the meteorological and hydrological drought-like conditions that are forming. The Cluster will continue to

monitor the normalised difference vegetation index (NDVI), agriculture stress index (ASI) and other agriculture-related indices to analyse the impact of the developing weather conditions on dryland/ rain-fed and irrigated agriculture, livestock health, pasture vegetative conditions and rangelands. FSAC will also monitor pests, locusts, livestock body condition and market prices for livestock, livestock feed and meat.

- In March, FSAC will conduct a fresh IPC analysis process which is expected to provide more granular information on the food security situation and areas most impacted by the dry-spell. This exercise will be informed climate outlook monitoring, projected crop production estimates and pre-lean season food security assessment conducted in January. Revised IPC numbers are expected by early April and will play a vital role in future iterations of this plan.

Priority Emergency Response Activities:

- FSAC partners plan to respond in all 25 provinces identified as being most affected by the consequences of the dry-spell and other disasters (floods and conflict). To mitigate against asset depletion and adoption of negative coping strategies, and to protect livelihoods and food consumption gaps in the places of origin, FSAC will provide food and livelihoods assistance to people in ‘crisis’ (IPC Phase 3) and ‘emergency’ (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity and those anticipated to be affected by flood and other risks.
- Livelihoods assistance will be provided to 2.5 million people in IPC 3 and 4 to protect their agriculture and livestock livelihoods and increase their shock absorption capacity. Wheat and other crops are anticipated to be adversely impacted by the dry-spell and potential drought. Farmers are also expected to have reduced income opportunities. This is particularly concerning for small holder farmers who are likely to consume all their harvest during lean season, leaving them without inputs for later cultivation. To enhance cultivation, household consumption and income generation through the sale of crops, FSAC partners will support 678,612 farmers with quality, improved drought-resistant certified seeds for the upcoming spring-summer planting season. Partners will further support some 81,000 flood affected people with livelihoods assistance.
- FSAC partners will further support livestock small holders as several several indicators are already showing severe stress in pasture conditions. To mitigate against distress selling of livestock (often difficult to reverse), FSAC partners plan to reach almost 1.2 million livestock owners with animal feed, deworming, vaccination, and training on livestock rearing.
- Food assistance will be provided to more than 3.9 million vulnerable people in IPC 4 and the most food insecure pockets within IPC 3 areas, as well as IDPs, returnees and disaster-affected people.

Households without income or those relying on daily wage labour and similar unsustainable sources of income, and households with poor asset holdings will be prioritised for food assistance given their vulnerability.

- FSAC partners will further provide asset creation activities for some 600,000 people. By implementing food and cash assistance for asset rehabilitation, FSAC partners will construct, protect, and rehabilitate livelihoods infrastructure for agriculture and livestock, such as karezes, check dams, water channels and reservoirs, and drinking water storage for livestock by capturing the snowmelt water, local level flood protection, better water harvesting, conservation and management. These activities combined with emergency assistance will help mitigate against the impact of continued dry conditions into the spring and summer months and improve resilience in the face of disaster risk.
- As part of its beneficiary selection criteria, FSAC will ensure woman and child-headed vulnerable households; households headed by the elderly and people with disability; households with one or more members having disability or chronic illness; and vulnerable households referred by the Protection Cluster are prioritised. FSAC will also work closely with Awaaz Afghanistan and the AAP Working Group to incorporate feedback from affected people in its response.

Challenges, Risks and Constraints:

- So far in 2021, FSAC has received only \$7.5 million of \$553.8 million required in 2021. The livelihoods funding situation is especially grim with very few resources available for this vital part of the response. Timely funding is critical for the implementation of seasonal and time-sensitive activities (such as lean season, animal feed and seed assistance).
- While active conflict or insecurity may pose a challenge in accessing some areas, FSAC partners are present in all 34 provinces and have the capacity to flexibly get ahead of foreseeable challenges such as movement restrictions.

Health



PEOPLE IN NEED	PLANNED REACH	FUNDING REQUIRED (MARCH-JUNE)
554k	348k	\$13.8M

Capacity:

- Despite the continued threat presented by the pandemic and significant other unmet health needs persisting, the Cluster remains without any new funding in 2021 and almost no carryover from 2020. All key health commodity pipelines are at critical level after being depleted as part of the 2020 COVID-19 and conflict response. The most urgent needs are Inter-Agency Emergency Health Kits (IEHK) able to cover urgent primary healthcare.
- As was demonstrated during the pandemic, humanitarian health partners can scale-up both in presence and capacity to respond to emerging needs when funding is provided. Health Cluster partners can support and complement BPHS partners (development) – who also scaled -up during the health response to the pandemic. The Cluster is capable of delivering services in all 25 provinces, if funds are made with available.

Anticipated Sectoral Needs:

- Health access is poor in many of the affected locations which will be challenging in the face of increased needs caused by poor hygiene, infectious disease and malnutrition. Disease surveillance (especially AWD) will be critical in a water-poor environment. This response is occurring at a time when emergency hospitals are reporting more severe injuries and deaths from the conflict. COVID-19 continues to affect people’s well-being. The pandemic continues to stretch resources and capacity to extend other type health care services and deter many from seeking health-care for fear of contracting the virus. The Cluster expects that in excess of half a million people will have health vulnerabilities associated with the conflict, floods, dry-spell induced disease and displacement risks over the four-month planning window.

Priority Preparedness Activities:

- As part of its preparedness activities, the Health Cluster will prioritise procurement and replenishment of medical supplies in the 25 most at-risk provinces – sequencing according to the weighted inter-sectoral prioritisation among these provinces (high, medium and lower). Available

supplies will be pre-positioned in regional warehouses. An updated mapping of essential health services and referral mechanisms will also be conducted through the lens of potential drought impacts. Simultaneously, risk communication and community engagement activities on COVID prevention and vaccination will continue.

Priority Emergency Response Activities:

- The Cluster has planned to reach some 348,000 people across the 25 most affected provinces. Health partners will provide emergency primary health care to both displaced people and those in their places of origin through both static facilities and mobile health teams. Routine disease surveillance of and response to COVID-19, AWD, measles and other diseases -- will continue. Health partners will also continue to provide mental health, GBV and psychosocial support to address deeper vulnerabilities that may arise as a result of added vulnerabilities and stressors anticipated during spring. The Cluster will work ensure that priority groups identified for the COVID-19 vaccine (displaced people and vulnerable groups among host community) do not miss out on planned COVID-19 vaccinations.
- The Cluster will promote an area-based response model and a community centre approach to response (where multiple services are co-located), and will emphasise the use of feedback mechanisms such as Awaaz.

Challenges, Risks and Constraints:

- The capacity of existing health facilities is limited by severe underfunding and as a result of diversion of resources and focus to the emergency COVID-19 response in 2020. Capacity to scale-up is conditional on new funding commitments.
- COVID-19 continues to threaten the country with new variants emerging globally. The COVID-19 vaccination campaign will take place in 2021. But this rollout will likely divert health workforce away from scaling-up different kinds of emergency response in other areas. Sufficient supplied to cover any additional new drought IDPs in the national vaccination campaign are not guaranteed.
- Increased insecurity on key roads has pushed partners to utilise air services – which are costlier and complex logistically – especially as the presence of airstrips does not guarantee access to places outside town centres.

Nutrition



PEOPLE IN NEED

1.6M

PLANNED REACH

690K

FUNDING REQUIRED (MARCH-JUNE)

\$26.8M

Capacity:

- The Nutrition Cluster has 37 operational partners in the provinces projected to be affected by the dry-spell, floods and other factors during Spring. With additional funding, these partners have the capacity to expand the volume and footprint of their response to meet new or deeper needs during the planning period. Nutrition partners will continue to adopt their delivery approaches through mobile teams to ensure nutrition services reach those who are unable or unwilling to access health centres due to travel costs, movement challenges or fear of contracting COVID-19 from health facilities.
- Since 2020, nutrition partners have also made tangible progress in localising the provision of services at the community level by training mothers to measure the Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) of their children and identify nutrition needs, as well as through the expansion of nutrition services in Sub-Health Centres (SHC), closer to where people live. This eliminates the need for expensive travel and reduces the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- Using funds carried over from 2020, the Cluster has enough in-country stocks of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) to treat 47,000 children with severe acute malnutrition (SAM). Similarly, the Cluster presently has enough Ready-to-Use Supplementary Food (RUSF) stocks in-country to support close to 47,000 women and children suffering from moderate acute malnutrition (MAM).

Anticipated Sectoral Needs:

- Even before the added burden of La Niña, the nutritional status of children under five continues to deteriorate in most parts of Afghanistan. More than two thirds of the country (27 out of 34 provinces) is already at emergency malnutrition levels. One in two children under-five and one in four pregnant and lactating women (PLW) is anticipated to face acute malnourition in 2021.
- Limitations on accessing nutrition services also continue to challenge millions. As of February 2021, some 34 per cent of all health facilities in Afghanistan do not provide integrated management of acute malnutrition (IMAM) services for SAM children and 65 per cent of facilities are not able to

provide this for MAM women and children. This means that about 1.9 million acutely malnourished children under the age of five in 2021 won't have access to treatment services.

- Among the 25 provinces anticipated to be most affected by the dry-spell, 21 provinces have a pre-existing high rate of malnutrition and lower access to nutrition services. Of these, 7 provinces have very poor SAM treatment coverage (less than 30 per cent of the province). This is particularly concerning as acute malnutrition often increases in the immediate aftermath of dry or drought-like conditions mostly due to inadequate diet and the higher burden of disease. The impact is anticipated to be more severe in provinces with pre-existing high rates of malnutrition.

Priority Preparedness Activities:

- The Cluster plans to pre-position nutrition supplies and routine drugs in key locations to ensure sustained provision of nutrition services in a fluid access environment. The Cluster will continue to map its capacity and resources, as well as analyse up-to-date nutrition data, disaggregated at the district level, to inform effective response.
- The Cluster will develop and disseminate joint messages, with the Government and partners, on breast-milk promotion and the use of substitutes where necessary. The Cluster will establish a mechanism through the Cluster and the MoPH for reporting when mothers are not meeting the breast-milk or substitutes criteria
- The Cluster will provide trainings on cash-for-nutrition assistance, as Nutrition partners' expertise on this modality is thin. There is an acknowledgement of the need to scale-up this assistance in the response phase of this plan, particularly to overcome access barrier that is created by the cost of travel to treatment centres. The Cluster will also ensure disability inclusion in its response preparedness and will work in close coordination with FSAC for complementary blanket supplementary feeding (BSF) assistance.

Priority Emergency Response Activities:

- The Cluster plans to reach 21 of the 25 provinces anticipated to be most affected by the dry-spell. More specifically, Nutrition's response will be centred in 9 high priority, 11 medium priority and 1 low priority province.
- Nutrition partners will deliver essential nutrition supplies (RUTF, F-100, F-75, RUSF and super-cereal) to health facilities and mobile teams and ensure maintenance of stocks. The Cluster will continue early detection of cases for treatment of acute malnutrition by strengthening community screening and referral systems. Nutrition partners will continue to provide cash incentives to cover

the transport and other auxiliary costs faced by mothers and caretakers of SAM children with complications who require in-patient medical care to survive. These services are often offered in provincial centres, far away from people's homes, making these trips expensive. Simultaneously, the Cluster also plans to strengthen the in-patient treatment of SAM at provisional and district hospitals, while observing COVID-safe protocols.

- Nutrition partners will also continue the provision of out-patient treatment of SAM and MAM children under-five, and undernourished PLW through mobile nutrition teams and de-centralised health facilities (sub-health centres and basic health centres). The Cluster will also provide BSF support to prevent spikes in acute malnutrition, in coordination with FSAC partners, complementing food assistance. Awareness raising and counselling services on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) and on optimal maternal and child care practices to mothers of children at risk of acute malnutrition will continue. Nutrition partners will provide micronutrient supplementation to children under-five and women of reproductive age to reduce risks of acquiring infections and overall poor development of children.

Challenges, Risks and Constraints:

- Without early funds, the Cluster is warning of imminent pipeline breaks, complicated by longer procurement and transport lead times fueled by COVID-related import delays and lengthy customs and border clearance processes.
- The Cluster will continue to assess the impact of the dry-spell, to monitor the addition of any new acute vulnerabilities, outside the existing scope of the HRP. If this eventuates, additional funds will be requested to avoid diversion of resources to respond to new caseloads, further extending waiting times in receiving treatment, often leading to dropouts.
- With COVID-19 still an active threat, Nutrition partners will continue using the adapted guidance to minimise physical contact, further stretching the capacity of treatment facilities to expand to scale and limiting the number of people that can be reached with nutrition services at any one time.

Protection



PEOPLE IN NEED

3.1M

PLANNED REACH

670k

FUNDING REQUIRED (MARCH-JUNE)

\$27.1M

People in need: General Protection: 3.1m; Mine Action: 1.7m; HLP: 1.25m; Child Protection: 1.6m; GBV: 5.8k

Planned reach: General Protection: 670k; Mine Action: 561k; HLP: 57k; Child Protection: 431k; GBV: 142k

Capacity:

- The Protection Cluster presently has plans and capacity to respond in 21 of the 25 most affected provinces. While the majority of the Cluster partners are concentrated in provincial centres, capacity to extend services to remote districts has been confirmed, mostly through national partners. Child Protection and Mine Action confirmed that they have technical resources available to scale-up on short-notice, if resources are urgently provided. Similarly, GBV partners are present in most of the 'at-risk' provinces although bureaucratic impediments continue to challenge their operations in NSAG-controlled areas. HLP partners have the capacity to respond in the 14 provinces identified as high and medium priority.
- In terms of stocks, there are currently limited PSS kits, concentrated only in the East and South of the country. There are no recreational kits, tents and tarpaulins, which may affect the ability to provide socio-recreational activities, case management, referrals and safe spaces for interviews for children and their caregivers. Stocks of dignity kits are also limited across the country and until they are replenished, partners will prioritise the most vulnerable to receive the existing items.

Anticipated Sectoral Needs:

- In disaster situations (both slow and rapid onset), protection risks are heightened. After a year of vulnerabilities being deepened by conflict and the pandemic, the projected impact of a potential drought and other disasters during spring is expected to add people's mounting trauma and vulnerabilities, with reduced capacity to cope. It is anticipated that there will be increased adoption of negative coping strategies with particular risks for women and children including child labour, early marriage, child recruitment, risky labour and irregular cross-border migration (and associated trafficking). Family separation may ensue as families split to check on crops and GBV risks are likely

to increase, especially in the event of displacement. Debt is already catastrophically high in some affected areas and will worsen. There will be an increased risk of evictions if the economic situation tightens. The Cluster anticipates that 3.1 million people will have acute protection needs across the 25 most affected provinces over spring.

Priority Preparedness Activities:

- As part of the Cluster's preparedness activities, Protection partners will focus on community mobilisation through the local community-based Protection Committees to inform on protection risks and available services. HLP partners will continue information sharing and legal assistance to facilitate people securing identity and civil documentation, particularly for those who may be displaced. Strengthened HLP rights will also be encouraged through verification of ownership claims, meaning that vulnerable households are better prepared to weather economic shocks. Mine risk education in areas of origin and surveys of potential areas of displacement will be explored to assess mine risks prior to people moving. Partners will be trained on specialised case management. For the Child Protection Sub-Cluster, this will include trainings on family tracing and reunification and alternative care, as well as to start new programmes in MHPSS and psycho-social first aid. The Cluster will further pre-position supplies of recreational kits, tents and tarpaulin for the provision of case management, PSS and other protection services, once pipelines are replenished.
- The Cluster is also undertaking a comprehensive mapping of services and referral pathways. Internally, it is taking steps to enhance its coordination capacity through the establishment of a new Strategic Advisory Group to support the GBV Sub-Clusters' ability to prioritise life-saving response.

Priority Emergency Response Activities:

- Protection partners plan to reach some 670,000 people with protection assistance in 21 of the 25 provinces. Partners will provide individual protection assistance (IPA - both in-kind and cash), PSS, referrals, awareness raising and information on available services, as well as any other important information as relevant. Protection monitoring will be conducted, where possible, to have a real time understanding of emerging protection needs.
- Clearance of explosive hazards will be undertaken. Mine action partners plan to deploy Quick Response Teams for explosive ordnance disposal – critical to protecting children who make up majority of the casualties from explosive remnants of war. Partners will provide GBV case management services and distribute dignity kits. In the case of large-scale population movements, it is expected that there will be an increase in family separation, putting children at an increased

risk of violence, abuse, exploitation, and stress. In response, child protection partners will identify unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) and aim to address their needs through specialised case management. Child protection partners will set-up tracing points along key movement routes where USAC can be reported or identified. This will include facilities for overnight care where children cannot be immediately reunified. Reintegration assistance for survivors of child labour, trafficking, and other forms of exploitation will be provided. Partners will also undertake information sharing on HLP matters and legal support to those under threat of eviction.

- The Protection Cluster will ensure and promote access to services and mechanisms to report allegations of bribery, corruption and exploitation of assistance. The Cluster will rely on key feedback mechanisms (such as Awaaz) and ensure community feedback is at the heart of its response.

Challenges, Risks and Constraints:

- Insecurity and access constraints continue to affect protection partners' ability to provide services in some hard-to-reach areas, where protection needs are more pronounced.
- COVID-19 precautionary measures have not only limited group activities and partners' ability to reach large numbers of people at once but have also created limitations in accessing services.
- Levy requests on humanitarian partners continue to hinder the timely implementation of mine action projects across the country.
- The short-term nature of funding for protection activities means that life-saving services are often suspended too early, before people are truly recovered or protected. For example, without additional funding, the deployment of Quick Response Teams to undertake explosive ordnance disposal may cease beyond April 2021. Complex case management activities are also at risk of being discontinued. Without sustained funding, partners' capacity to offer these specialised services will not be built, creating a significant gap especially in remote and hard-to-reach areas where partner presence was already limited.
- More durable solutions – such as land allocation to displaced people – remain a challenge due to regulatory and institutional constraints. A key issue is that the current land allocation mechanism, the Presidential Decree 108, only provides support to people displaced for over five years, thus negating those recently displaced due to climate shocks such as drought.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene



PEOPLE IN NEED

2.7M

PLANNED REACH

1M

FUNDING REQUIRED (MARCH-JUNE)

\$26.6M

Capacity:

- The Cluster has a stockpile of supplies in 45 locations across 27 provinces. With current stocks in-hand and in the pipeline, the Cluster can reach 600,000 people for one month with chlorine tablets to enhance access to clean water and reach 80,000 people with PUR water purification sachets. Adding basic water quality tools to the stockpile (turbidity meters and pool testers) will further assist the Cluster to monitor humanitarian responses.
- The Cluster has 23 partners operating in the 25 provinces anticipated to be most affected by the dry spell. The Cluster is confident it can further scale-up its presence if required, with 13 additional partners indicating their capacity and willingness to operate in the most needy areas, provided funds are made available.

Anticipated Needs:

- The Spring period is expected to see a water availability crisis. Some of the provinces forecast to be most affected by the dry spell are already water scarce – namely Nimroz, Kandahar, Hilmand, Badghis, Hirat, Ghor, Balkh, Takhar and Samangan. Most of the water points in Afghanistan get clear water (78 per cent of the country's water has a nephelometric turbidity unit (NTU) of less than 5³ – considered "clear" as per global quality scales). Chlorine tablets, clarification sachets or family filters can be used to treat turbid water. Awareness of the importance of using these water treatment must be emphasised when water levels are low and water quality is reduced.
- In the areas projected as most in need, the Cluster anticipates that some 2.46 million people will require access to clean and safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.
- Inability to access safe and clean drinking water, sanitation and hygiene will deepen vulnerabilities, especially during the highest-risk period for Acute Watery Diarrhoea (AWD) - April to May each year, contributing to excess morbidity and mortality among children. This is further exacerbated by the flood season where the spread of communicable diseases such as AWD is higher. Flood-affected people are also likely to need access to safe water as their water sources might be damaged and contaminated or they, themselves, become displaced.

Priority Preparedness Activities:

- The Cluster will set up an early warning system on water scarcity for both surface and ground water sources. This will be done through quantitative and qualitative surveillance, measuring both water tables and turbidity (lack of water clarity) levels. WASH partners will also continue to monitor faeco-oral contamination risks to get enable early action in areas at risk of AWD. The Cluster will also map key movement paths (for IDPs or pastoral communities) to understand potential risks of AWD spread and guide mitigation measures.
- The Cluster will strengthen early warning information sharing between the relevant national authorities including the National Water Affairs Regulation Authority (NWARA), and the Afghanistan Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Corporation (AUWSSC), and the WASH Cluster's governmental counterpart, the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD).
- The Cluster will further ensure pre-positioning of purification tablets in key locations across the 25 provinces that are forecast to be most affected by the dry spell and will additionally identify potential water sources for key IDP sites which are most likely to host people on the move. These pre-positioned stocks will also be available for use in flood-affected communities.
- Messaging containing early warning information on the dry spell, floods and other factors to people in affected areas via radio and other means will be critical. The Cluster will closely work with the AAP Working Group to this effect.

Priority Emergency Response Activities:

- The Cluster will focus its planned response activities in both places of origin and potential areas of displacement. It plans to reach all of the 25 provinces forecast to face the most intense impacts from the dry spell . COVID-19 mitigation measures and messages will accompany all of the Cluster's hygiene-related activities.
- In areas of origin, WASH partners will focus on rehabilitation of water wells and boreholes, as well as repairing handpumps. As a last resort, the Cluster will consider water trucking, but this is not currently factored into this iteration of the contingency planning as it is not a preferred approach.
- The Cluster additionally plans to provide water kits with purification tablets (chlorine tablets for clear water and PUR sachets for non-clear water) and basic water quality control tools (such as turbidity meters and pool testers with consumable tablets) for community-based self-monitoring.
- The Cluster will conduct hygiene promotion focusing on handwashing with soap or ash (an accessible yet effective means of cleanliness). WASH partners also plan to provide gender-appropriate sanitation

facilities, latrine slabs (plastic) and promote safe excreta disposal to prevent and mitigate against open defecation.

- In areas of potential displacement, the Cluster will focus on providing drinking water at collective points from protected water sources – boreholes or wells. WASH partners will continue to reconstruct and rehabilitate dysfunctional water pumps and systems in areas which may host displaced people. In urban settings, the Cluster will explore using vouchers for people to purchase water from commercial water vendors. The cost for this is not yet included in the plan but will be considered once the risk of displacement and AWD in an urban setting is better understood.
- WASH partners will provide hygiene kits, as well as gender and culturally-appropriate menstrual supplies and sanitation facilities for women and girls.
- Setting up feedback mechanisms from the onset of the response will be a priority for the Cluster. This will be critical for GBV risk mitigation and to ensure access to assistance for vulnerable sub-groups such as the elderly and people with physical disabilities.

Challenges, Risks and Constraints:

- Lessons learned from the 2018-2019 drought will inform the planned WASH response, including early engagement with the Government; early response before negative coping strategies are employed and displacement occurs, and establishing a clear exit strategy for costly water trucking activities, should the situation deteriorate to this point.
- Regular monitoring of the dry spell in rural and urban settings, floods, population movements, AWD reports, food insecurity, malnutrition, COVID-19 and the conflict is required to ensure that an up-to-date analysis of needs informs the response.
- While WASH partners plan to scale-up assistance, ensuring adequate assistance in hard-to-reach districts is expected to continue to be challenging. Ensuring early funding to mount a logistics-heavy and early response will be critical.

End Notes

- 1 A drought has not yet been formally declared by the Government of Afghanistan.
- 2 Including the current IPC figures, which are in process of being updated.
- 3 DACAAR National Study on Water Point Functionality and Water Quality in Afghanistan