

Flash Update 8 – Fighting, displacement and civilian casualties in Southern Afghanistan (11 November 2020)

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Heavy fighting continues in southern Afghanistan across Hilmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces, affecting thousands of people.
- Assessment teams are continuing their work to gauge the humanitarian impact of the situation. To date, 13,970 IDPs have been verified in Hilmand, 2,811 IDPs in Uruzgan and 2,652 IDPs in Kandahar provinces, with assessments ongoing.
- Partners have mobilised assistance to all 13,970 IDPs in Hilmand. This includes food, NFIs, WASH items and multi-purpose cash with accompanying COVID-19 prevention support. In Kandahar, partners have provided food, emergency shelter and NFIs, WASH items and multi-purpose cash to 1,574 IDPs, while plans are underway to deploy additional assessment teams in Uruzgan.

SITUATION OVERVIEW:

Hilmand: Fighting that started on 11 October between the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and a non-state armed group (NSAG) continues in Nawa-e-Barakzai and Nahr-e-Saraj districts. Military operations and airstrikes are also ongoing in Bolan, Basharan, parts of Babaji in Lashkargah and along the key access road - Route 601 - that connects Lashkargah in Hilmand with the city of Kandahar. The security situation remains volatile. The road between Lashkargah and Nawa-e-Barakzai; the Lashkargah-Kandahar highway and the roads connecting Lashkargah to Nawa-e-Barakzai, Nad-e-Ali/Marja and Nahr-e-Saraj also remain closed due to the presence of NSAG checkpoints, IEDs and culvert damage. People continue to use alternate routes in NSAG-controlled areas to avoid IEDs. Phone networks have been partially restored, albeit with limited coverage and this is still challenging the smooth flow of information.

Kandahar: Military operations and airstrikes are ongoing in the north and the southwest of Kandahar with a focus on Maywand, Zharey and Panjwai districts. Reportedly, several civilian homes have been damaged in Arghandab district. Three IED explosions were reported between 7 and 11 November which were believed to have resulted in civilian deaths and injuries. Telephone networks mostly remain down and the key roads between Kandahar city and Arghandab, Panjwai and Zharey districts are partially open but with a high threat of IEDs – especially in Deh Lavour, Nagahan and Shohen – and many culverts destroyed. People are still unable to use these roads and are instead using alternative routes for movement. Demining efforts, led by ANSF Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams, are currently underway in affected areas.

Uruzgan: Sporadic armed clashes are still ongoing in Dehrawud and Gizab districts. All of the major routes to Dehrawud and Gizab districts are currently closed due to the presence of IEDs and destroyed culverts. People are using alternative routes through NSAG-controlled areas for movement. Moreover, the presence of IEDs remains a concern with three civilians killed and one wounded in Dehrawud district on 8 November. Telephone lines remain down in the affected districts.

HUMANITARIAN IMPACT:

Hilmand: While no new displacement has been reported in Hilmand since the last flash update released on 5 November, some IDPs residing in NSAG-controlled areas have gradually started to return to their place of origin, according to initial reports. Some 13,970 IDPs have so far been verified as being in need of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian assessments have been temporarily suspended due to verification issues. The Operational Coordination Team (OCT) in Hilmand has agreed to resume assessments on 15 November once an agreement has been reached with the Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) on how to resolve verification challenges. Reports of increased IED incidents in Lashkargah continues to be of grave concern for humanitarian organisations operating in the area. Three health facilities remain closed, while ten others are reportedly partially open, although this is to be confirmed. The closure of health clinics due to insecurity is directly affecting more than 87,000 people, with thousands more indirectly affected by limited services at health facilities that are only partially open.

Kandahar: Initial reports suggest in excess of 16,000 people have been displaced into Kandahar city and Dand district, however this is yet to be confirmed. To date 2,652 IDPs have been verified as being in need of humanitarian assistance. According to initial reports, IDPs residing in Arghandab district and other parts of Kandahar city have begun returning to their place of origin.

The presence of IEDs and ongoing clashes continue to threaten civilian movements as well as the humanitarian response in Kandahar. As of 11 November, five humanitarian partners' activities in Zharey, Panjwaiy, Mawyard and Arghandab districts remain suspended. The five Mobile Health Teams (MHTs) in Maywand and Zharey districts remains temporarily suspended, depriving some 20,000 people of essential health services. Communities have also self-reported the closure of several health facilities.

Uruzgan: As of 11 November, more than 1,000 IDPs have been displaced from Gizab and Dehrawud districts to Tirinkot district. Additionally, humanitarian assessment teams have verified 1,800 IDPs displaced within Dehrawud district to NSAG-controlled areas due to the recent fighting, with assessments still ongoing. Some humanitarian partners operating in Dehrawud district have temporarily suspended their activities due to active fighting and the presence of IEDs, whereas other humanitarian partners continue to operate in the NSAG-controlled areas of Dehrawud district. The suspension of humanitarian activities in the district will leave people unable to access WASH, protection and shelter support, or receive key COVID-19 prevention messages that promote virus mitigation measures. As previously reported, a health facility able to serve 30,000 people remains closed due to ongoing clashes.

COORDINATION AND RESPONSE:

OCHA is closely coordinating with the Government to provide assistance to IDPs based on need, ensuring efficient information flows and avoiding duplication of efforts.

As of 11 November, humanitarian partners in Hilmand have provided assistance to all 13,970 verified IDPs. IDPs received food, NFIs, WASH items and multi-purpose cash with accompanying COVID-19 prevention support. IDPs also received water through water tankering. As previously mentioned, assessments have temporarily been suspended until 15 November due to verification issues. The Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) in Hilmand has provided cash assistance to 674 IDP households, with each household receiving AFN 5,000.

In Kandahar, humanitarian partners have been deployed to Dand and Kandahar districts to assess IDP needs. As of 10 November, 2,652 IDPs have been verified, with assessments ongoing. OCHA coordinated the humanitarian response to 1,574 IDPs, while the response for the remaining 1,078 verified IDPs will be coordinated with clusters over the coming days. Moreover, partners have provided food, emergency shelter and NFIs, WASH items, multi-purpose cash and water through water tankering.

In Uruzgan, 2,811 IDPs have been identified as having humanitarian needs as of 11 November, with assessments ongoing. Humanitarian partners anticipate additional displacement from Dehrawud and Gizab districts to Trinkot district over the coming days.

The next update will be issued in a week unless the situation changes.