

HIGHLIGHTS

- More people in Afghanistan need humanitarian/protection help in 2019 compared with December 2017.
- Top 2019 HRP priorities include restoring livelihoods and rehabilitating trauma victims back into society.
- This year, there will also be an emphasis on rolling back food insecurity and on mitigating risky, negative coping mechanisms.
- Acute food insecurity has risen by 30% in just five years – potentially affecting 13m people in Afghanistan over 2018.
- IDP families living in informal settlements report that they earn on average 20% less than other IDP households. They also frequently don't have the tazkeras (national ID).

2018 HRP FUNDING

77% FUNDED

598.9 million
requested (US\$)

459.6 million
Received (US\$)

<https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/645/summary>
by 02 Jan 2018



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Conflict and drought are leading to increased needs in 2019

The recently published [Humanitarian Response Plan \(HRP\)](#) and [Humanitarian Needs Overview \(HNO\)](#) acknowledge that *both* conflict and drought have been negative disrupters to life in Afghanistan, and are significant drivers (though not the only ones), of the current scenarios being enacted in the country. Today there are 6.3 million people in need of humanitarian and protection support.

According to the latest HRP (which is seeking US\$612m in funding), the first nine months of 2018 saw a 46 per cent increase in the number of civilian casualties from suicide attacks; a 39 per cent increase in the number of civilian casualties from airstrikes; and a 153 per cent increase in the number of aid workers killed and injured compared to the same period in 2017. Health partners report that 85,477 trauma-related consultations took place between January and September 2018. Amputations and disabilities are becoming a prevalent concern, with humanitarian partners providing most of the care services.

Meanwhile, the 2018 drought has affected more than two-thirds of Afghans. It has reduced incomes by half, caused serious health issues and prompted negative coping mechanisms. About 13.5 million Afghans face significant (crisis) levels of food insecurity (six million more than last year) while 3.6 million of those people are at an emergency level of food insecurity. In addition, contingencies should be put in place to cope with a potentially destructive El Nino, especially in the north.

Thinking longer term

"We will return only if we get help to start our lives anew, assistance to re-start farming and animals. As is now, we cannot go back. Maybe our houses are still there, but we've lost our animals who died because of drought and lack of fodder. We cannot do any farming as we lost the previous harvest and had no seeds to plant" says Mohammad Shaqi, a middle-aged IDP in the Zaimaty settlement in the outskirts of Qala-e-Naw town, capital of Badghis province.

The Zaimaty settlement is located on the slopes of hills that surround Qala-e-Naw town. Around 1,750 IDP families (an estimated 12,250 people) are sheltering in hundreds of tents that dot the area. IDPs started arriving there from rural parts of Badghis from May-June 2018 following the worst drought in decades. Some families were previously sheltering in Farestan riverbed, an area prone to flooding. To mitigate the risk of floods, the IDPs were relocated to the Zaimaty area and received tents, water and sanitation assistance as well as food from the World Food Programme (WFP) distributed by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

Return is the best solution for drought IDPS – Governor of Badghis

The ongoing full-scale drought response by WFP and partners reached nearly 2.3 million people in drought-affected provinces across the country from October to end of December 2018 - almost one-quarter of them in Badghis province. In total, more than 11,000 metric tons of food were distributed for nearly half a million people



in rural areas of Badghis, and in the informal sites in and around the provincial capital Qala-e-Naw.

Distributions are ongoing, and new families arriving in Qala-e-Naw forced to leave their villages and fields continue to be registered by WFP and partners. They receive the same rations as all other families: these consist of wheat flour, vegetable oil and pulses.

Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Malikzai, the Governor of Badghis province, told a visiting UN delegation on 17 December that while the authorities had been supporting the drought-affected people and IDPs with available resources, ultimately there need to be durable solutions. "For many IDPs in Qala-e-Naw city, the best solution will be the return to their villages of origin so that they can rebuild their lives, livelihoods and prevent the potential ruin of their houses by a natural disaster. We will support them if they voluntarily decide to go back," he said.

He continued: "We need to start planning now regarding how to support those people keen to return, well ahead of the agricultural season."

Drought isn't the only problem say IDPs

"We cannot return to our village, we've lost everything because of drought, and fighting and insecurity made it even worse. Even if the drought is over, we cannot go back as the fighting is still there and we are worried about our families," said Shah Mohammad, an IDP in his late twenties.

"No, no, we will not go back until the security situation gets better and it is safe for us to return. Who will protect us back home if (non-state) armed groups come over and start demanding things and, even worse, when they start demanding our daughters as wives for their fighters?" concurs another IDP.

Debt is another obstacle to returning. "Many of us have debts of over 100,000 Afghanis [about USD\$1,333]. How can we pay such a huge money back? Some families are so desperate that they have to give their daughters as wives to the people they owe to settle their debts. This is how bad it is" points out an IDP in his late 40s.

The Governor stated that for those who cannot go back, the authorities will continue providing support until return becomes possible, or other durable solutions are found. "The immediate challenge for this group of people is land. The land and sites that they currently live in are almost entirely privately owned. The Government does not have land in and around Qala-e-Naw city. It is manageable for the time being. However, it may pose a challenge later on" he said.

Ian Ridley, head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and leading the visiting UN delegation, assured the Governor that UN's humanitarian agencies will continue supporting government efforts to provide humanitarian assistance for drought-affected people, including IDPs. "We realise that there are enormous needs and especially during this time as the winter season is on" he noted.

The next stage

UNHCR's Mais Al Suradi, in charge of planning the Shahrak Sabz site for IDPs in the outskirts of Hirat, says that there needs to be a medium and long-term action plan in accordance with the National IDP Policy of the Government. "We are currently providing humanitarian assistance and emergency shelter, but we need to start thinking about the strategy of how to support them in the longer term... There needs to be close cooperation between humanitarian and development partners" she said.

Protection and communications with the affected communities also need to be escalated says Yanna Thay, head of OCHA's sub-office in Hirat. "While we are all immersed and busy with the response, racing against the clock as winter sets in, we need to ensure the mainstreaming of protection, and that IDPs are consulted and informed."

"We need to have a clear plan as soon as possible. The winter will be over in less than three months and we need to be ready for the next stage."

Preparing for the cold winter months ahead



Photo: Alimbek Tashtankulov/OCHA

Keeping warm around a traditional sandali stove

Winter in Afghanistan for many can mean poor living conditions that lead to negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage and selling off much-needed assets.

According to the [September 2018 – February 2019 Joint Winterization Response Strategy report](#), cluster partners have noted a decrease in child health conditions associated with poor shelter conditions and lack of adequate health care. For instance, in Hirat IDP settlements 48.6 per cent of households experience cases of acute watery diarrhoea and 20 per cent experience respiratory tract, chest and skin infections. The situation is deteriorating and multi-faceted, exacerbated by negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage and labour. [A policy brief published by the Norwegian Refugee Council \(NRC\)](#) on 27 November 2018 indicates that the inability of IDPs to access adequate housing and land, or to find employment matching their skillsets, generates a cycle of other needs and negative coping strategies. “In Afghanistan today, 63 per cent of respondents to the NRC survey rated their housing conditions as either poor or very poor. Poor quality shelter may lead to other concerns, including illness and injury,” says the policy brief ‘Returning to What? The Challenges Displaced Afghans Face in Securing Durable Solutions.’

Struggling to make ends meet in Mazar

Alima’s small two-room rented semi-finished house is in Istiqlal township near Azadi neighbourhood, in the outskirts of Mazar-e-Sharif. The crying of her one-year-old niece Shabana pierces through the calmness of the house. Shabana has been sick for the past few days, she has a fever and chest infection. “We do not have money to take her to the doctor and buy medicine. Actually, we do not know where the nearest doctor or clinic is” Alima says.

"I have a younger sister (aged two) and a brother (five years old) and I need to look after them," says 11 year-old Ozain

It is not only little Shabana who is sick. Alima's elder daughter Mawlod, 18, suffers from seizures that developed as a result of constant fear of fighting and bombing when they were back home in Kurchi village in Faryab province.

"She has been lying like this for the past 40 days. She also needs doctor's help, but we have no money," Alima notes. "We need help to get her to a doctor."

After Alima, her children and her nephew's family found a place to rent in the Istiqlal settlement, Alima's husband left for Iran to earn income and support his family back in Mazar-e-Sharif. However, he has not been able to find a steady job and last time he spoke to his wife he said that because of the economic issues in Iran, and reduction in the value of the Iranian currency, he can barely send any money.

Meanwhile, Alima and her nephew are struggling to pay the rent, buy food and cover other expenses. They pay 2,000 Afghanis (about US\$28) for the two-room house.

It was much easier when newly arrived. They received 12,000 Afghanis (about \$160) one-time cash assistance from the international NGO ACTED. "I had a lot of debts and used half of that money to pay them" Alima recalled. They also received food assistance from the World Food Programme (WFP), non-food items from Save the Children as well as water, sanitation and hygiene kits from the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR).

Developing mobile health clinics

As an immediate response measure, health cluster partners on the ground are arranging mobile health clinics in informal settlements like Istiqlal township. While the recent two campaigns of polio and measles vaccinations covered the informal settlements, UNICEF and WHO are working with the Balkh Department of Public Health and the basic health service provider NGOs to mobilise outreach teams, to regularly visit the informal IDP settlements and provide the displaced people with some health services.

Double burden of conflict and drought

Tilla, a mother of four children, is patiently waiting her turn to receive cash assistance. She arrived from Sarmarz village in Ghor province, which borders Badghis province, about eight months ago. Her husband died five years ago, and she is struggling to look after her children after they left their village, because of the drought that has decimated their livelihood and what little livestock they had. In addition, the conflict between the government and non-state armed groups in their area made their lives even more difficult. They had no option but to flee.

"With this money, I will buy warm clothes for my children, a blanket and other things such as a kitchen kit" she says holding the cash in her hand. "This money is important to us as we don't have any income. I am a widow and my eldest son is only 10 years old. He helps me by collecting plastic and other scraps to burn to keep us warm at night." Night temperatures are reaching close to freezing.

Omid Salamyar, monitoring manager with the national NGO Coordination of Rehabilitation and Development Services for Afghanistan (CRDSA) who oversees the cash distribution process, explains that this is the second instalment the IDPs receive as part of a project funded by the AHF. The first installment about a month ago was 3,750 Afghanis (about US\$50). The cash assistance is meant for essential non-food supplies: beneficiaries can purchase anything from the standard list of NFI kits for their immediate needs.

"We bought blankets, plates, a small gas stove and other necessary things when we received the first cash [instalment]," Tilla said. "Our life became much better and easier when we bought those items."

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in 2018 about 258,500 people were displaced as a result of drought across Afghanistan, mainly in the western region, of which Hirat is the regional centre. This includes about 105,000 IDPs in Hirat province who arrived there due to drought. Some of them, like Tilla and her family, have fled because of both drought and conflict.

The Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) provided about \$37 million to support 48 projects this year for the drought response across the country, benefitting 2.1 million drought-affected people.



Twitter handles to follow:
@WHOAfghanistan
@DavidLaiMD



Meanwhile, inside the CRDSA tent, there is one unexpected beneficiary: 11-year-old Ozain from Kaleyán village, Delayne district of Ghor province. Despite being very young, he is the head of a family that includes his sick mother, his brother and sister. "We arrived here three

months ago as there was fighting in our village," he said, recalling the turmoil with a trembling voice. Ozain is getting the 2,640 Afghani cash assistance on behalf of his family as his father left for Iran about a month ago and his mother cannot move because of her poor health.

"I have a younger sister [aged two] and a brother [five-years-old], and I need to look after them," he says, securing the cash he just got within the inner pocket of his jacket. "I will buy some winter clothes for my sister and brother with this money," he adds.

He has had just 20 days of schooling in recent times. The local school was closed because of the insecurity. Every day he looks for plastic scraps and other flammable scraps to use as fuel to heat the tent they are living in. "My father has managed to send only 1,000 Afghani [about USD \$13] so far, so I need to look after my family" he adds.

A day in the life of a humanitarian call centre operator

Aliya (not her real name) remembers back to earlier in the year and her training to become a call handling agent for Awaaz Afghanistan. Awaaz is a Kabul-based inter-agency accountability mechanism that functions as a call centre, fielding calls from across Afghanistan on any issue related to the humanitarian response. "I learnt the script by heart to be ready for calls. Initially, even outside of working hours when somebody would call me I would immediately start answering with the script. I was repeating the script even when I was sleeping," she says, smiling.

She starts work at 7am and on an average day receives more than 30 inbound calls. Follow up constitutes around 60-70 outbound calls. On some days she might handle up to 150 calls from Afghans asking for help. "The most difficult cases are from Hirat, from people who fled their homes because of conflict or drought, requesting food, shelter and job opportunities. Some of them shout, some complain that they have not received any assistance for the past eight months, some use bad words" she says.

"In one case, a woman was crying on the phone saying that her children are collecting food scraps from garbage in the camp [for displaced people] because they are hungry and there is nobody to help them. She had no idea that assistance was available, let alone how to access it."

Awaaz has been handling more than 32,000 calls from across the country since its launch on 28 May 2018. It provides information to, and processes complaints and feedback from, people affected by humanitarian crises. It is able to help programmes become more targeted by circulating the needs and priorities for humanitarian partners to action. Notes Aliya: "it is tough psychologically to hear such stories, sometimes people who call have high expectations. We listen to their concerns and provide them with the information they need to register for available assistance in their area. In some more complex cases, we refer their cases to our partners and follow up with them later to ensure that people who called us received the help they need."



“In one particular case, there was a call on behalf of 500 families [an estimated 3,500 people] from Badghis - they had no water. We informed humanitarian organisations on the ground. After they had confirmed the need for water, they started drilling a borehole in the area and eventually those people had water. When we followed up, they thanked us and were very grateful. It is during these moments that I feel that we can help people in difficult situations and bring change to their lives. This is what motivates

and inspires me.”

“When I finish my work and go back to spend time with my family in my comfortable, safe and warm home, I reflect on how difficult it must be for all the people who I spoke with during the day. I can feel their pain and it strengthens my commitment to continue helping all these people.”

To find out more about Awaaz Afghanistan, please visit: <https://awaazaf.org/>

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