

HIGHLIGHTS

- Mr. Mark Bowden, who finished his posting as Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan in February, farewells the humanitarian community, reflecting on his successes and challenges as HC, and what still needs to be achieved.
- Undocumented returnees receiving cash assistance under an NCRO program prioritised spending on food, rent, debt repayment and health expenses, according to a recent post distribution monitoring survey.
- With a possible 500,000 undocumented Afghans to return from Pakistan, IOM asks: after basic humanitarian assistance is distributed, what happens next?
- Samuel Hall calls for greater investment in psychosocial programming, reflecting on the findings of their new report *Urban Displaced Youth in Kabul: Mental Health Matters*.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLAN 2017 FUNDING

550 million
request (US\$)

73.4 million
received (US\$)

HRP 2016 FUNDING 72 PER CENT FUNDED

491 million
request (US\$)

356 million
received (US\$)

For more see: <http://fts.unocha.org>



Undocumented returnee children in Nangarhar. IOM project up to 500,000 undocumented Afghans could return from Pakistan in 2017. Photo: IOM

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Mark Bowden farewells Afghanistan

UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan, Mr. Mark Bowden, departed Afghanistan in February. He penned the following farewell letter to the humanitarian community.

As I depart Afghanistan, I look back on an extraordinary four and a half years as the UN Humanitarian Coordinator. When I arrived, I was aware I would be engaged with humanitarian colleagues in one of the world's longest and most protracted humanitarian crises. While I fear the humanitarian crisis will continue to deepen, I leave with a respect for all those organisations and individuals who continue to work tirelessly to provide humanitarian support and have done much to improve the way in which assistance is provided. I also remain deeply troubled that yet more families, more women and more children will face upheaval, the disruption of their lives and their future as a result of this prolonged conflict.

The challenges posed by Afghanistan's emergency have been immense and continue to confront the humanitarian community with difficult challenges and choices in the delivery of our assistance. Over the years, I have been involved in a number of the world's protracted crises and experience has taught me that one of the major challenges in these situations has been to both maintain and sustain the support that those affected by crisis deserve as of right. For this reason, I must first commend the wider humanitarian community in Afghanistan for their tireless commitment to humanitarian action.

Around the country, every day thousands of men and women dedicate themselves to Afghan families with one common goal: to prevent and alleviate suffering and to save lives. They do this in difficult circumstances and often at great personal risk. Violence, threats, intimidation and kidnappings against aid workers remain unacceptably high. Yet I am heartened at the collective and enduring commitment of the humanitarian community to stay the course.

While the humanitarian community plays a critical role, I also know it is the Afghan people who are in the front line when it comes to providing assistance. It is Afghan families who support their displaced relatives. It is local communities that take in the victims of earthquakes or floods or who absorb the returnees from neighbouring countries. As I leave, I remain concerned that we have not paid enough attention as to how we better sustain the resilience of the Afghan people who continually have to face and cope with crisis. We must ensure that we do not overstretch their capacity and willingness to provide support. That is why we must seek to better manage the flow of



Mr. Mark Bowden in Afghanistan. Photo: UNAMA

returnees and ensure that there are practical programmes in place this year that better support the integration of both displaced and returnee populations.

From my arrival in Afghanistan in November 2012 until now, there has been a striking change in the humanitarian dynamic. Conflict continues to be the predominant driver of humanitarian need, inflicting a toll on the civilian population that includes casualties, forced displacement, and disruption of services. The shift in the last year from a largely asymmetric conflict to a war with more numerous and larger scale ground engagements have increasingly affected the civilian population. When I arrived, 2011 was seen to be the high water mark for civilian casualties. Since then there have been year on year increases in the number of civilian casualties and ever-increasing numbers of people newly displaced. The last year was significant not only in the record number of people affected by the conflict, but also in the changes in the pattern of displacement. The large IDP caseloads that now exist in Kunduz, Baghlan, Faryab, and Farah, means displacement can no longer be seen as just a phenomena of the south.

Each year when we hear of the ever-increasing civilian death toll, we must ensure we do not get numbed by the statistics or we take as normal or inevitable that civilian casualties will increase. We must guard against these numbers being used as a scorecard to determine relative blame. Instead, we must realise our advocacy on the protection of civilians into concrete policy and action by parties to the conflict. As a humanitarian community, we must determine what could and should be done to reduce the devastating impact of this conflict on the civilian population. The scorecard has to be changed to demonstrate actions that have reduced the deaths and needless civilian casualties. It is not an impossible goal. The main parties to the conflict have shown an increasing engagement on humanitarian issues and an acceptance of humanitarian principles. Afghanistan is one of the few countries with a protracted conflict where the language of international humanitarian law is widely accepted, if not always practiced. While I have seen progress in the broader acceptance of the role and tasks of humanitarian organisations, I have also seen major setbacks in the effects of the conflict on health facilities. What I hope for in Afghanistan is not just a greater respect for IHL but positive plans to reduce the number of civilian casualties.

In the last month, Afghanistan has again reminded us that the country is prone to natural disasters. These recurrent disasters have an intensified impact due to the weak response systems in place. Going forward, it is critical that disaster risk reduction and mitigation measures be realised and taken beyond planning stages. As disaster risk systems are built, short-term humanitarian interventions must be complemented by long-term investments in capacity building and in early warning and mitigation systems.

Mitigating the impact of natural disasters is one area that highlights how the right balance between humanitarian and development assistance must be struck. Interventions can too often expand definitions of humanitarian assistance, which can result in the creation of parallel, unsustainable structures. To truly commit to changing lives in Afghanistan and move from delivering aid to ending need, the humanitarian community has a role in moving beyond a response triggered by shock-induced events – by addressing vulnerability and risk; reinforcing rather than replacing local and national systems; and overcoming the humanitarian-development divide by working towards collective outcomes.

In January, with the Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, H.E. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, I launched my fourth Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan. I am pleased that during my time in Afghanistan, in the context of a protracted emergency, humanitarian appeals have been consistently better supported. As the Humanitarian Coordinator, I have promoted a focused approach to humanitarian assistance with clearly defined humanitarian objectives, leading to a significant broadening of the donor base and ongoing, robust support.

Afghanistan will continue to face important challenges and will require sustained donor assistance for the coming years. Despite heavy investment, the lives of millions of Afghans have not substantially improved and the number living in absolute poverty has increased. In 2017, we anticipate a year that 9.3 million Afghans will be in need of humanitarian assistance. While the needs and challenges are undoubtedly formidable, I believe I say farewell to a humanitarian community that is better prepared and with



Mr. Mark Bowden speaking to press; 2014 Badakhshan landslide



Visiting refugee populations in Khost; 2015



With Dr. Abdullah Abdullah at the 2017 HRP Launch in Kabul

humanitarian structures that will continue to be strengthened in order to meet such a daunting task.

In doing so, we must never forget that behind each statistic is a human life: an Afghan woman, man or child. Each deserves protection and a right to a life of dignity. The solutions to the crises that have plunged so many Afghans into such hardship are neither simple nor quick, but we must continue to work towards it. I am confident that my successor, Mr. Toby Lanzer, will provide strong and energetic leadership to the humanitarian community in Afghanistan, and I wish him – and all with whom I have worked alongside in Afghanistan – every success.

OCHA extends our sincere appreciation to Mr. Bowden for his dedicated service to Afghanistan, and wishes him well for the future. We warmly welcome the new Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Toby Lanzer, who took up his position in early March.

Assistance to Undocumented Returnees

Post distribution monitoring has revealed undocumented returnees receiving cash assistance are prioritising spending on food, debt repayment, shelter and health.

In September 2016, in response to the sharp and substantial increase in the number of “people on the move”; including Afghans internally displaced by conflict and the large volume of registered refugees and undocumented returnees arriving from Pakistan, the Humanitarian Coordinator activated the Afghanistan Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) reserve allocation. Nine projects were ultimately approved, of which four focused upon distribution of cash assistance to returnees from Pakistan, located in districts of high return in Nangarhar province.

In December, under this CHF allocation, New Consultancy and Relief Organisation (NCRO) commenced distribution of cash for shelter (\$120 for two months) and cash for food (\$156 for two months) assistance to undocumented returnees in Behsud, Jalalabad and Surkhrod districts in Nangarhar, with 570 beneficiaries targeted. Post distribution monitoring subsequently carried out with 139 beneficiaries interviewed by OCHA staff has revealed some interesting statistics about the returnee caseload and humanitarian response.



As many as 500,000 undocumented Afghans may return in 2017 Photo: Jim Huylebroek for NRC

Of the 139 interviewed, the majority (56 per cent) had between 5 and 10 family members, with a small number (5 per cent) living with more than 2 families in the same house. The majority (57 per cent) had no type of employment, with the next highest group (33 per cent) relying on daily labour income. 66 per cent reported having no income at all, with a further 20 per cent reporting between \$1 and \$50 monthly income.

Of the assistance provided, 36 per cent stated that the amount received had not met their household requirements, citing large family sizes and lack of or low income. Of particular note, the majority of those interviewed used the cash assistance to purchase food. Other common uses were for rent, paying back loans and for health costs. Beneficiaries also expressed a strong preference (138 out of 139) to receive cash instead of in-kind items or other forms of support stating that cash provided dignity and empowerment to choose what they really needed, to purchase directly from the market, and to have control over the quality of food or other items.

Also of note, it was found that more than half of the beneficiaries had already received assistance, with a small number receiving duplicated assistance. This issue has already been addressed by OCHA, with partners pledging to ensure better coordination and future sharing of beneficiary lists.

IOM contributed the following article

Life After Return: Undocumented Returnees

Decades of conflict and the search for better economic opportunities have pushed millions of Afghans into neighboring Pakistan. While an estimated 1.3 million Afghans are registered refugees, a possibly equal number of Afghans live in Pakistan without legal refugee status. These undocumented Afghans are particularly vulnerable both in their host country and upon their return to Afghanistan either voluntarily (“spontaneous return”) or through deportation.

Last year, over 248,000 undocumented Afghans returned from Pakistan through Torkham and Spin Boldak borders. This was more than double the number of returns in 2015 and the highest level since at least 2008. It is possible that 500,000 more undocumented Afghans could arrive from Pakistan in 2017.

Many of those returning have lived outside of Afghanistan for decades, and need support from government, humanitarian and developmental actors both on arrival and as they seek to reintegrate into a country already contending with conflict and record levels of internal displacement.

At the border, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and its partners provide undocumented returnees with basic humanitarian assistance, including temporary accommodation, food, medical care and onward transportation. But what happens next?

On a dusty, noisy street in Jalalabad city lined with car repair shops and scrap dealers, Mohammad Amin and his family of ten live in a single room with a bare concrete floor. They returned to Afghanistan in August 2016, after living in Pakistan for 25 years.

“After my eldest son was arrested and detained for four months, I knew we had to go back,” said Mohammad Amin. When the family arrived at Torkham border, they received basic assistance from IOM, including household supplies and transportation to Jalalabad. But six months on, their needs remain substantial.

The family is originally from Nangarhar’s Kama district, but they have neither land nor a home there. Like many returnees, they decided to settle in Jalalabad where there are more opportunities for work. The city is struggling to absorb the thousands of returnees and displaced families that have arrived in the past year.

Despite the challenges, Mohammad Amin’s neighbors have been generous. Like many Afghans, they too lived in Pakistan at some point during the last thirty years, and know the difficulties returnees face. But with the added pressures placed on limited resources such as healthcare and education, tensions could rise if the needs of communities as a whole are not taken into consideration when delivering assistance.

While some returnees bring trade skills acquired in Pakistan, IOM surveys show that over 75 per cent of undocumented returnees from Pakistan are seeking work as unskilled daily laborers, putting an additional strain on the already crowded labor market. Right now, the only work Mohammad Amin can find is collecting scrap metal. It barely pays enough to feed the family. Instead of going to school, Mohammad Amin’s 10-year-old daughter collects metal with him.

Like the substantial majority of returnees surveyed by IOM, Mohammad Amin says that his most urgent needs are land, a house and job opportunities. Without durable solutions from the government and humanitarian community to address these needs, Mohammad Amin and thousands of other returnee families like his face an uncertain future.

For the latest returns figures, visit IOM’s website at <http://afghanistan.iom.int>



An Afghan returnee at her rented home in Nangarhar.
Photo: IOM

AFGHAN RETURNEES FROM PAKISTAN: QUICK FACTS

- In 2016, 620,000+ Afghans returned from Pakistan.
- 370,102 were registered refugees.
- 248,189 were undocumented Afghans returning or deported.
- In 2017 so far, nearly 10,000 undocumented Afghans have returned or were deported.
- The winter pause in UNHCR’s repatriation programme continues until 1 April.

Samuel Hall contributed the following article

Urban Displaced Youth in Afghanistan: Mental Health Matters

By Hervé Nicolle, Co-Founder, Co-Director and Resilience Pillar Lead; Dr. Nassim Majidi Co-Founder, Co-Director and Migration Pillar Lead; and Diane Bolme, Resilience Project Officer.

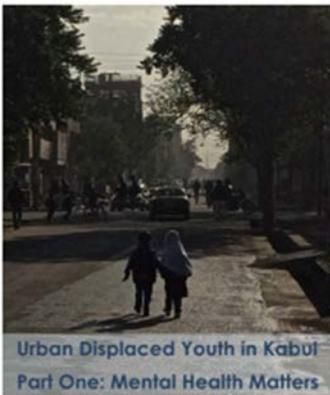
Conflict, disasters, and other humanitarian emergencies have broad reaching consequences, but often lost in emergency responses are the psychosocial impacts of these events. Yet such crises can have a detrimental effect on psychosocial wellness, with consequences including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression. This area is overlooked in both humanitarian and development programming, with only one per cent of all global health assistance from 2007-2013 allocated for mental health programming. As research by Samuel Hall uncovered, this is partially because of the lack of a clear and measureable value for money of these programmes.

As our recent research in Afghanistan shows, the need for psychosocial assistance touches a majority of Kabul's youth. Only 29 per cent of respondents to our survey for the *Urban Displaced Youth in Kabul: Mental Health Matters* report indicated never having experienced an event that could result in psychological problems. All remaining respondents had experienced traumatic events such as the loss of a close family member, forced displacement, and experiencing firing or shelling. Youth reported symptoms associated with trauma, such as difficulty performing daily tasks (34.3 per cent), difficulty sleeping (31.4 per cent) and difficulty eating (22.6 per cent). As one youth commented in a focus group discussion, “[I experience] sweating, bad dreams, difficulty sleeping... [I get] angry fast. I have flashbacks. My mind does not work anymore – I grew up in war.”

Afghanistan has only one psychiatrist, four psychologists and one social worker per 10 million people. While this survey assessed symptoms associated with psychosocial issues, it is not an official diagnostic tool. However, it does suggest the need for greater investment in psychosocial programmes, especially at a time when violence is on the rise, the economic situation is getting worse, and when migration is unfortunately at the centre of the humanitarian spectrum.

The demand is voiced by the younger generations, yet supply gaps need to be filled by humanitarian actors to ensure the negative and wide-reaching effects of psychosocial trauma – from individual suffering to the hampering of economic development – are ameliorated. Our data shows that the mental health of these youth should absolutely be considered a priority – the time for action is now.

Samuel Hall is an independent think tank providing research and strategic services, expert analysis, tailored counsel and access to local knowledge for a diverse array of actors. For more, read their report ‘Urban Displaced Youth in Kabul: Part One – Mental Health Matters’ or see their website: www.samuelhall.org



With 60 per cent of Afghanistan's population under the age of 24, Samuel Hall argue that the mental health needs of the country's youth cannot be ignored.

Their study, ‘Urban Displaced Youth in Kabul, Part One: Mental Health Matters’ is available on the Samuel Hall website www.samuelhall.org



71 per cent of those interviewed by Samuel Hall had experienced a traumatic event with youth reporting symptoms associated with trauma.

ACBAR contributed the following article

Media and the humanitarian community: fostering understanding

In Afghanistan, the relationship between aid organisations and local media varies widely, from close collaboration, to lack of understanding of each other's work or even hostility and suspicion leading to inaccurate or limited reporting of humanitarian stories. Yet in times of humanitarian crisis, both groups are essential in supporting local communities, by raising awareness about unmet needs and by alerting decision makers.

In order to promote humanitarian principles and dialogue between media and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), ACBAR and news organization Nai Supporting Open Media recently trained 60 local journalists on 'Humanitarian principles and Humanitarian Reporting' in Kunduz, Herat, Jalalabad and Mazar. The collaboration allowed young radio, TV and print reporters to meet and visit local NGOs and to debate the key principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence as well as to focus on the role of media in raising awareness on neglected humanitarian issues.



Journalists visit a children's library run by national NGO NCRO in Jalalabad. Photo: ACBAR

"The topic was completely new to me and "humanitarian" had always sounded very abstract," explained Farzana, who works for Baktar News Agency in Herat. "Being confronted with real life humanitarian dilemmas and discussing them with NGOs made me understand that we share similar principles. For example, we too strive to report while doing no harm and remaining neutral."

The training encouraged journalists to report on humanitarian issues, by mentoring each reporter and organizing a competition between the participants overseen by a jury of senior journalists and Nai. A TV report on IDP families in Herat and a radio story on people with disabilities in Balkh are amongst the favorites. The prize-winning story will be published on ACBAR's website.

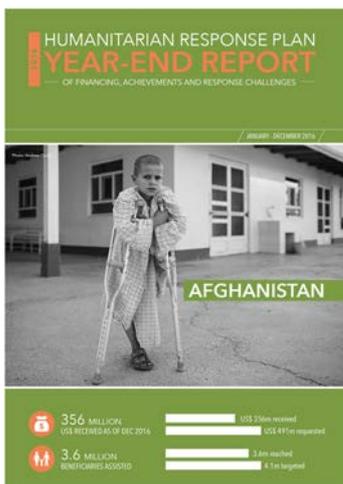
"We understand as well the challenges for journalists, whose stories often get refused by editors because they are not breaking news," explained Nawid, Nai's trainer, "so we mentor them in finding the right hook in a humanitarian story. We are also conscious NGOs have a role to play in alerting the media and sharing their success stories better."

2016 HRP End-of Year Report

OCHA has just published the 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan Year-End Report, outlining the financing, achievements and response challenges for last year.

Of the 4.1 million beneficiaries targeted through the 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), approximately 3.6 million were reached with life-saving emergency humanitarian assistance, according to information compiled by OCHA and published in the 2016 HRP Year-End Report. These individuals – comprising around 11 per cent of Afghanistan's total population – were assisted by the collective efforts of the humanitarian community and thanks to the generosity of donors, who provided over USD\$538 million towards humanitarian programming in 2016, including USD\$356 million towards the HRP.

2016 was another challenging year for Afghanistan: more than 653,000 Afghans fled their homes due to conflict, 620,000 returned to Afghanistan following a deterioration in the protection environment in Pakistan, and 11,418 civilians had been either killed



(3,498) or injured (7,920) as a result of the fighting. While natural disasters did not occur on the same scale seen in past years, 70,000 people were still affected.

The majority of humanitarian assistance was through the provision of life-saving medical care and emergency medical supplies of food, water and shelter. Of note, partners responded to one million conflict IDPs, including some displaced in 2015, and 600,000 returnees from Pakistan. Following the trend of recent years, significant humanitarian resources addressed major gaps in the provision of basic services in health care and nutrition, with funds primarily targeted towards the 9 million people affected by insufficient coverage of nationally-led systems or living in conflict-affected white areas.

Taking into account the mid-year revised financial requirements of USD\$339 million, and the USD\$152 million Flash Appeal One Million People on the Move, the Afghanistan HRP was 73 per cent funded – an outstanding result that placed Afghanistan in one of the two best funded appeals globally for the second year in a row. As in previous years, the HRP's well-defined parameters, which focus on the provision of life-saving assistance only, continued to resonate with donors who recognise the need for immediate emergency humanitarian assistance to those who have no alternative lifeline.



Significant humanitarian resources were allocated towards addressing gaps in health care and nutrition in 2016. Photo: EMERGENCY

Another milestone of note in 2016 was the endorsement of the single rapid assessment tool (the HEAT) by the Humanitarian Country Team in June, and its subsequent roll out nation-wide. 275 HEAT assessments were carried out in 2016, accounting for 60 per cent of all assessments conducted. While the HEAT resulted in substantial progress in determining needs at the household level, the mass influx of returnees exposed the need for the development of an alternative tool to assess group or family-based needs in the context of a large-scale emergency, which will be taken forward this year. The establishment of a common assessment repository will also be prioritised in 2017.

Other challenges have also been highlighted. The unprecedented numbers of IDPs combined with the massive influx of returnees has also increased the need for more coherent registration and tracking systems, as well as long-term solutions for civil documentation, as highlighted by the significant variance in the numbers identified and assisted in areas of settlement and border intention surveys. As the conflict expands and humanitarian needs increase, it calls into question the sustainability of humanitarian funding being used to bridge gaps in public services. It is clear that greater cooperation between humanitarian and development actors are required to mitigate humanitarian crises developing due to the interplay of entrenched poverty and sudden onset shocks.

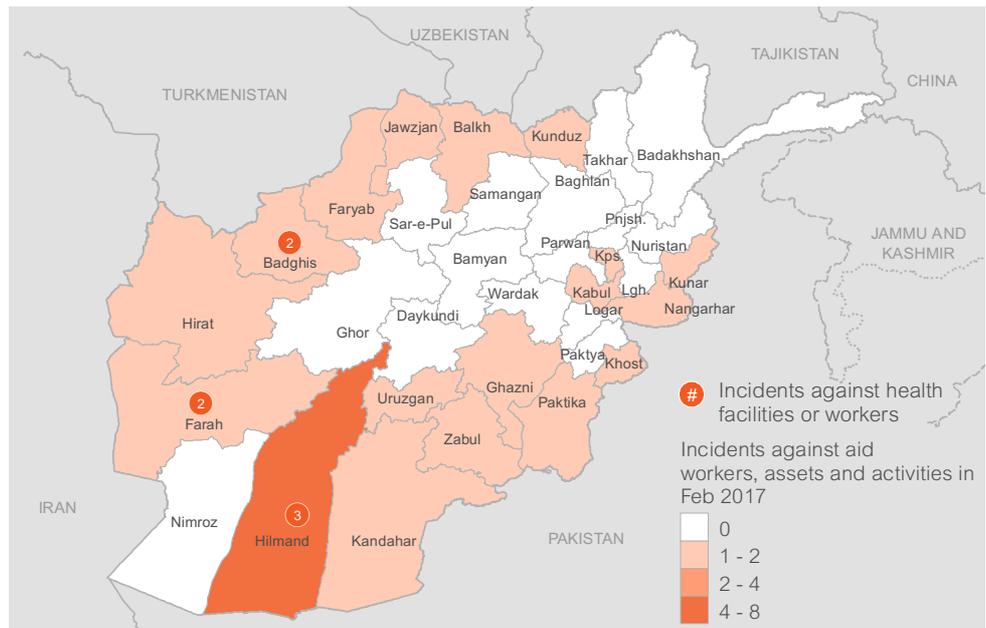
To read the full report, go to: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info>

Humanitarian access: aid workers incidents

In February 2017, there were 29 incidents relating to aid workers, compared to the three-year average of 19 incidents for the same month. Of particular note, six International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) staff were tragically killed when a convoy, enroute to deliver livestock materials, was ambushed in Jawzjan province. That brings the year total to seven aid workers killed up to end February, in comparison to 15 killed over the entire of 2016.

Threat reporting remains significant, and as conflict incidents continue to rise around the country with the improvement of weather conditions, the humanitarian community will face a challenging year ahead with access constraints and access challenges for aid workers to respond and deliver.

TOTAL INCIDENTS FOR JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2017



Health facilities and workers in Afghanistan also continue to be affected with 36 incidents occurring up to the end of February countrywide. These incidents ranged from intimidation of staff, closure of clinics due to intimidation, occupation of clinics by pro-government forces, theft of an ambulance, arrest of an NSAG-affiliated person by NDS while receiving treatment, and several clinics unable to access resupplies.

Humanitarian Funding

The humanitarian community in Afghanistan benefits from steadfast support of donor governments dedicated to a strategic and coordinated response. More donors are providing information to the global Financial Tracking Service (<https://fts.unocha.org/>) regarding their 2017 Afghanistan funding intentions totaling USD\$102.5 million thus far, of which USD\$73.4 million 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 USD\$550 million in contributions to serve 5.7 million of those in need.

2017 CHF First Standard Allocation

The First CHF Standard Allocation was launched on 22 February, with USD\$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.

74 project proposals for a total ask of USD\$54.3 million were received by the submission deadline on 14 March from 47 partners (5 UN, 25 INGO, 17 NNGO). 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 and Funding Coordination Section-New York conduct the review of project budgets.

More information about the CHF is available at: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info>

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