

Afghanistan

January – May 2017

Afghanistan acceded to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees in 2005, but has not implemented a national asylum framework.

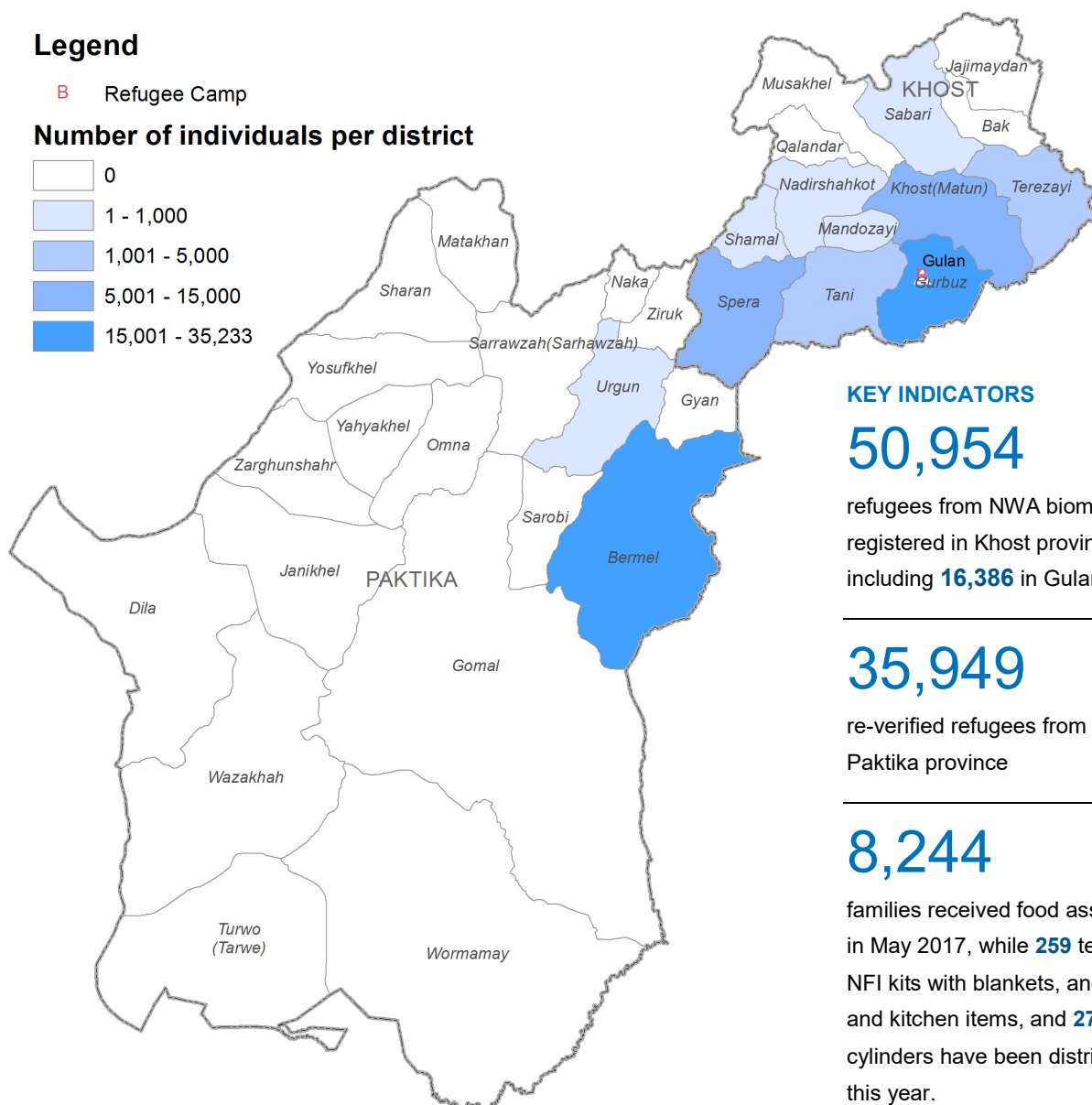
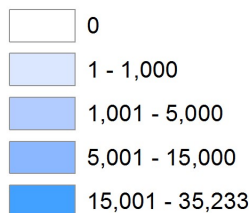
In 2014, Afghanistan received an influx of refugees from North Waziristan Agency; an estimated 125,000 individuals remain in a protracted refugee-like situation.

Under its mandate, UNHCR has registered 349 asylum-seekers and refugees of various nationalities in Kabul and other urban centres.

Legend

B Refugee Camp

Number of individuals per district



KEY INDICATORS

50,954

refugees from NWA biometrically registered in Khost province, including **16,386** in Gulistan camp

35,949

re-verified refugees from NWA in Paktika province

8,244

families received food assistance in May 2017, while **259** tents, **359** NFI kits with blankets, and sanitary and kitchen items, and **27** gas cylinders have been distributed this year.

Operational context

The Government of Afghanistan acceded to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees in 2005. UNHCR continues to advocate with relevant government ministries and executive leadership for the enactment of a Refugee Law, and to offer technical support and training; however, at present there is no national asylum framework to regulate registration and issues of refugee protection.

UNHCR registers asylum-seekers and refugees in Afghanistan as a protection tool to identify and assist persons with specific needs (PSN), support access to essential services including education and health care, promote freedom of movement, and provide a minimum safeguard against *refoulement*. UNHCR conducts Refugee Status Determination (RSD) in cases where individual recognition of refugee status would offer an added protection value, such as a durable solution.

Urban asylum-seekers and refugees

Afghanistan currently hosts 349 asylum-seekers and refugees of various nationalities in Kabul and other urban centres, who are registered under the UNHCR mandate in the absence of a national asylum framework. For this population of concern, local integration is largely unattainable as many do not have valid passports and other documents necessary to regularize their legal status in Afghanistan. Many remain socially marginalized, with only limited access to jobs in the informal economy. Resettlement opportunities are increasingly scarce, while the nature of certain refugee claims prevents voluntary return to the country of origin in safety and dignity.

UNHCR provides humanitarian assistance (cash-based, and in-kind) to the most vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees enabling them to pay for housing, food and utilities. Additional financial assistance is provided during the winter months to mitigate heightened protection risks and minimise reliance on negative coping mechanisms. In May 2017, UNHCR distributed subsistence allowance to 91 individual asylum-seekers and refugees.

Agreements with public education and health care providers have been established to ensure access to services for asylum-seekers and refugees in Kabul and other urban centres. However, a volatile security environment, restricted freedom of movement, and limited services and livelihoods opportunities contribute to a challenging protection environment, particularly as the country struggles to absorb record numbers of Afghan refugees repatriating from Pakistan, and undocumented returns, while managing large-scale internal displacement resulting from escalating armed conflict and rising civilian casualties.

Pakistan Refugees from North Waziristan Agency

Afghanistan hosts a protracted population of Pakistani refugees, who fled North Waziristan Agency (NWA) in 2014 as a result of a joint military offensive by Pakistani government forces against non-state armed groups which left the civilian population of Miranshah and surrounding villages forcibly displaced.

As at 31 May 2017, UNHCR has biometrically registered over 50,000 refugees in Khost province and re-verified registration data for almost 36,000 refugees in Paktika province, where access remains a challenge.¹ Cultural barriers also impact on efforts to comprehensively register the refugee population, particularly women.

Some 16,386 refugees receive shelter and essential services in the Gulan camp in Khost province, while most live among the host population in various urban and rural locations. NWA refugees benefit from the generous hospitality of the provincial Afghan government authorities and host communities, due in part to tribal affiliations and shared understanding of the trauma of forced displacement, with some hosted by Afghan relatives. After inclusive community consultations, most refugees state that they are currently unwilling to return to Pakistan.

UNHCR, in coordination with other humanitarian agencies, provides targeted assistance to persons with specific needs (PSN) among the refugee population, and community-based support to build the capacity of refugees and the host population and reduce their vulnerability. Protection interventions include livelihoods, shelter, and WASH projects, and other community protection measures to increase resilience and self-reliance.

Achievements and Needs – NWA Refugees



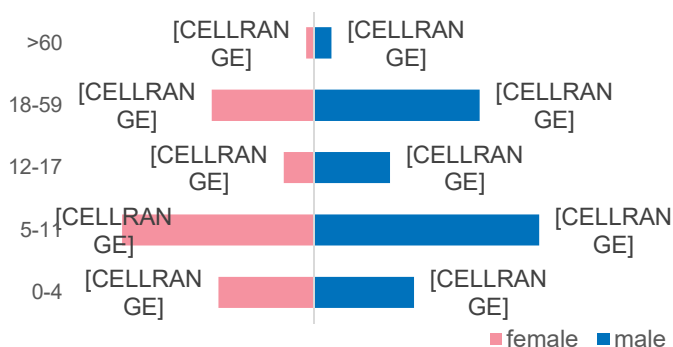
PROTECTION

■ After the conclusion of a second round of biometric registration in Khost province on 30 April 2017, and re-verification of refugee data from Paktika province, UNHCR issued household ration cards for nearly 87,000 refugees (nearly 70% of the estimated NWA refugee population). This facilitated greater freedom of movement within provincial borders as well as access to humanitarian assistance and essential services. The impact of this activity increased the proportion of registered refugees by 45%, as compared to 2016, supporting more effective advocacy in relation to food security for the affected population and other humanitarian needs.

■ Approximately 71% of the registered NWA refugees are children, while 10% are women; due to cultural barriers, access to the female population remains challenging. UNHCR and partners identify and assist women and girls at risk, including survivors of SGBV, through the PSN programme.

■ Registered NWA refugees do not yet receive an individual certificate or ID card. This is a need which UNHCR continues to highlight with government authorities at provincial and national levels in ongoing advocacy to ensure official recognition of UNHCR documentation, as dependent family members including adult children may be restricted in their movements

Age and gender (Khost and Paktika)



Note: Paktika data for age and gender are extrapolated based on age and gender of the registered population in Khost.

¹ Security conditions in most districts of Paktika province do not allow for UNHCR missions to be safely undertaken; consequently, biometric registration has not been possible. Estimated population figures for refugees in Paktika are based on level 1 registration, re-verified in 2016 and 2017.

when the head of household is absent. Individual registration documents are necessary to complement the existing system of issuing household ration cards, and could provide the primary identification required for NWA refugees to move outside Khost and Paktika provinces, eg. for medical treatment in cities with specialist health care services, or job opportunities to reduce dependency on WFP food assistance and humanitarian aid.

■ The lack of official birth registration for refugee children by Afghan government authorities is another protection gap, with potential to create a risk of statelessness, long-term disadvantage, and discrimination. As a child protection measure, health partners including Health Net International (HNI) and Afghanistan Center for Training and Development (ACTD) assist UNHCR to mitigate risks by providing written birth notifications to NWA refugee mothers, facilitating the registration of new-born children with UNHCR in Afghanistan, which may in turn support future birth registration with relevant government authorities in their country of origin, Pakistan.



EDUCATION

■ The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) provides primary education to 4,966 students (including 2,094 girls) at 144 schools in Khost province, ensuring minimal disruption to their learning and promoting the social development of NWA refugee children during displacement. Meanwhile, UNHCR and CoAR provide secondary education to 545 students (including 160 girls) at 20 schools for NWA refugees in Khost. Access to education, particularly for girls, has significant protection dividends for the safety and well-being of refugee children and their ability to exercise economic, social, and cultural rights in the longer term. Integrating NWA refugee children in Afghan government schools is not viable. This is due to limited classroom and teaching capacity, as well as differences in language and curriculum as compared to Pakistan schools.

■ There are currently more than 45,000 school-age children (5-17 years of age) registered with UNHCR among the NWA refugee population, including some 36,000 between 5-11 years of age. The low rate of school attendance (only 12% of registered school-age children) represents a critical need for mobilising additional resources, raising community awareness about the importance of education, and empowering parents with income-generating activities to reduce the reliance on child labour and other negative coping mechanisms.



HEALTH

■ With one clinic and one mobile medical team, Afghanistan Center for Training and Development (ACTD) provides primary health care services to NWA refugees in Gulan refugee camp. In April 2017, some 41 births were attended, 197 pregnant women received antenatal care, and 145 women received post-natal care, while therapeutic food was served to 429 children under 5 years of age to meet their immediate nutritional needs. Up to 1,340 children and 1,399 women have received vaccinations so far this year.

■ Health Net International (HNI) is implementing a primary health care programme for the NWA refugee community in four districts of Khost province: Alishir, Tani, Spera, and Matun. The HNI project includes similar

services in natal care, vaccinations, and nutrition for infant children, as well as psychosocial counselling. In April 2017, around 55 births were attended, 218 patients received antenatal care and 173 received post-natal care. Some 2,063 children and 1,125 pregnant women have received vaccinations in 2017. HNI also provided medical treatment for cases involving trauma, mental illness, and 38 suspected cases of tuberculosis. The impact of health interventions by humanitarian agencies is life-saving, and essential for the NWA refugee community, due to the limited resources of public health care providers in Khost and Paktika provinces.



WATER AND SANITATION

■ To address protection risks for the NWA refugee population arising from a lack of potable water and poor sanitation, UNHCR and partners have implemented WASH projects including the construction of 62 wells and 2,200 latrines. UNHCR and partners have distributed almost 9,000 emergency hygiene kits, and conducted hygiene education classes, benefitting close to 10,000 refugee families at a community level.



SHELTER AND NFI

■ In 2017, UNHCR and humanitarian partners in Khost have distributed 259 new tents (42 in the month of May) to replace makeshift shelters and old tents which had deteriorated. Some 359 NFI packages have been distributed (35 in the month of May) to provide soap and hygiene items, kitchen utensils, buckets, and blankets, together with 27 gas cylinders for cooking. As refugees are sometimes not permitted by the local landowners to collect firewood, providing an alternative source of fuel promotes peaceful co-existence.

■ NWA refugees have identified a need for mosquito nets to be included in future NFI distributions, and solar-powered generators for electricity, as well as additional support for livelihoods. An assessment of PSN in Alishir, Gulan Camp, Lakan, Matun and Tani districts has identified 93 families in need of NFIs and tents.

■ Given the protracted nature of displacement, and lack of foreseeable prospects for voluntary return to Pakistan in safety and dignity, winterization assistance targeting the most vulnerable persons of concern among the NWA refugee population is likely to be needed in late 2017.



FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

■ In May 2017, more than 8,200 refugee families received food assistance from the UN World Food Programme (WFP), thereby meeting their immediate needs for food security. The beneficiaries included 179 acutely malnourished pregnant and lactating women, and 668 acutely malnourished children. Whereas food distributions were conducted comprehensively for the registered refugee population in 2016, a large increase in registration in 2017 has meant that food supplies for the previous planning figure are no longer sufficient.

■ To determine future needs relating to food security, in light of livelihood opportunities and vulnerabilities among NWA refugees as well as the host population, UNHCR and WFP undertook a joint assessment in Khost



and Paktika in May 2017 with support from APA. The results of the survey will support evidence-based analysis, and inform humanitarian and development strategies.



CAMP COORDINATION AND CAMP MANAGEMENT

■ There is one refugee camp (Gulan camp), in Khost province, accommodating more than 16,000 individuals. Camp management and coordination is led by UNHCR, with participation by NRC, Solidarités International, ACTD, Afghan Planning Agency (APA) and Coordination of Afghan Relief (CoAR), and the active inclusion of refugee women from four tribes in camp coordination committee meetings to ensure their protection concerns are identified and addressed. UNHCR consults closely with the provincial government authorities represented by the Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) with a goal to gradually transfer the responsibility for refugee protection to the Government of Afghanistan. The Gulan camp provides safe and dignified shelter and essential services, including primary health care, WASH, and education. Refugees are not obliged to remain within the camp limits, however, they have limited freedom of movement beyond Khost.



DURABLE SOLUTIONS

■ Ensuring participation as a core protection principle, UNHCR and partners conduct regular *shura* meetings with tribal elders from the NWA refugee community, and where possible with women and youth, to design an inclusive and solutions-oriented protection strategy. In 2017, approximately 200 NWA families have spontaneously returned from Khost province to Pakistan where they must register at the Baka Khel IDP camp in Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province; however, while intentions regarding return to Pakistan differ between tribes, the majority of NWA refugees in Afghanistan are not willing to repatriate, at present. Beyond concerns about destruction of infrastructure, lack of services, unexploded ordnance and restricted freedom of movement, there is a significant trust deficit between the NWA refugee population and the Government of Pakistan.

■ UNHCR offices in Afghanistan and Pakistan are coordinating to monitor the situation in NWA and the prospects of a safe and dignified return for refugees and IDPs, based on *ad hoc* assessments by local partners with no permanent presence in NWA. The right of refugees to return to their place of origin in NWA will depend on issuance of a *Watan* card by the Pakistan National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) for access to Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

Working in Partnership

■ In Khost and Paktika provinces, UNHCR coordinates with a number of other humanitarian agencies including the UN World Food Programme (WFP), as well as national and international NGO partners including Afghanistan Center for Training and Development (ACTD), Afghan Planning Agency (APA), Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DaCAAR), Health Net International (HNI), Coordination of Afghan Relief (CoAR), Solidarités International, HALO Trust, Mine Detection Center (MDC), and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

■ UNHCR also coordinates with the Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) at provincial levels and with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) at a national level, noting that the responsibility for

refugee protection primarily rests with the Government of Afghanistan, as a signatory to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. Through ongoing dialogue with MoRR, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and Ministry of Interior (MoI), UNHCR will continue advocacy and provide technical support to develop a government registration process for asylum-seekers and training in refugee status determination (RSD), subject to passage of a national Refugee Law, to maintain and enhance the asylum space for refugees in Afghanistan.

UNHCR Partners in Khost and Paktika

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|---|---------------------------------|
| ■ World Food Programme | ■ Afghan Planning Agency |
| ■ Afghanistan Center for Training and Development | ■ Coordination of Afghan Relief |
| ■ Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees | ■ Solidarités International |
| ■ Health Net International | ■ HALO Trust |
| ■ Mine Detection Center | ■ Norwegian Refugee Council |

Financial Information

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Algeria | Australia | Austria | Belgium | Bosnia and Herzegovina | Canada | China | Chile | Costa Rica | Denmark | Estonia | European Union | Finland | France | Germany | Iceland | Indonesia | Ireland | Japan | Korea | Kuwait | Lithuania | Luxembourg | Malta | Monaco | Morocco | Netherlands | New Zealand | Norway | Qatar | Singapore | Sri Lanka | Sweden | Switzerland | Thailand | Turkey | United Arab Emirates | United States of America | Uruguay | Zambia | Private Donors |

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