

Where do we go from here:

Update on population movements in displacement sites in Qala-e-Naw, Badghis province

April 2019 witnessed a rise in the number of families moving out of displacement sites in Qala-e-Naw, Badghis. Since the end of 2018, NRC estimates that more than 10,000 households have elected to leave these displacement sites, while approximately 6,000 households remain in these sites. Following this peak movement, NRC's Camp Management Team¹ conducted a series of Focus Group Discussions in addition to household counts of the 10 sites in Qala-e-Naw in the first weeks of May to understand the key drivers of the recent movement and the reasons why a significant number of families have chosen to remain in the displacement sites.

Key Findings:

- There are remaining displaced households in nearly every displacement site. An estimated 6,000 households (approximately 28,200 individuals²) remain in displacement sites across Qala-e-Naw.
- Poor livelihoods prospects as well as conflict and insecurity in areas of origin were all cited by displaced families as reasons for staying in Qala-e-Naw.
- There is no single driver that prompted families to return. Some families said they returned to tend to and harvest their crops whilst others said they returned due to insufficient assistance in the displacement sites.
- The flow of returns is expected to slow as there is no indication that the situation for those that have remained will significantly change in the near future. As such, it is likely that a sizeable number of households will remain displaced in Qala-e-Naw, or will move on to a third location e.g. Herat – depending on what prospects for employment or assistance are found in this third locations)
- It is likely that these families who are unable to return to their area of origin are particularly vulnerable.

¹ Comprising of 18 national staff and 1 international staff permanently based in Badghis

² Based on an average household size of 4.7

Population Changes in Qala-e-Naw Displacement Sites:

Following reports of population movements out of Kharistan and Zaimati camps, NRC Camp Management teams initiated a household count in displacement sites across Qala-e-Naw. In total, it is estimated that more than 10,000 households have left. In all sites, a large share of the movements stemmed from the departure of families living in makeshift tents. In some sites, the number of those who have left who were living in makeshift tents is higher than those who had received shelter assistance. For example, Zaimati camp has witnessed a 34% decrease in its displaced population, compared to a 66% decrease in the population of those living in makeshift tents.

Displacement site	Household Count – Jan 2019		Household Count - 10 – 15 May	
	NGO tents	Makeshift tents	NGO tents	Makeshift tents
Zaimati	1,704	618	1,064	132
Kharistan 1	1,050	1,195	760	495
Kharistan 2	1,037	903	352	120
Sanjidak	4,500*		249	450
Baqlar	4,421*		549	494
Qadis Abad and Shamal Daraya	6,45*		168	204
Jari Khoshk	2,207*		81	240
Jari Haji Sakhi	2,040*		26	109
Chakaran	933*		40	230
Frestan	0	1,350	0	0

*Estimated total figure

The majority of displaced families who left the sites returned to Muqur district, followed by Qadis district, and rural areas of Qala-e-Naw district.

Why did people move?

In addition to the quantitative household count, NRC's structured focus group discussions with communities in the sites indicated a number of reasons why families chose to leave – as well as why families chose to stay:

Reasons for leaving:

- **Livelihoods:** In all sites families reported returning to pursue farming work in their areas of origin.
- **Ramadan:** In 5 out of 10 sites, families claimed they were leaving to make better preparations for Ramadan as they felt that life in the displacement sites, with little assistance was less dignified than being at home without food during the month of Ramadan.
- **Insufficient assistance:** Many families across all sites reported they had hoped to receive more assistance than had been provided. In particular, a number of IDP households were not registered due to challenges with registration in the initial months of the response, and have therefore been excluded from subsequent humanitarian assistance – in particular the ongoing NRC/WFP food distributions.

Reasons for staying:

- **Lack of livelihoods opportunities:** Many respondents specifically mentioned that they had not planted in time for this year's harvest or that floods had destroyed their crops and farming infrastructure, and they therefore had nothing to return to.
- **Insecurity:** Many respondents reported insecurity and increased conflict in their area of origin as the reason for not being able to return. There has been an escalation in fighting throughout the province in 2019 – notably in Muqur, Qadis, Ab Kamari and Bala Murghab districts - including attacks on two District Administrative Centres in 2019.

Whilst some families have been able to return to their areas of origin in order to pursue livelihood activities, there is currently no evidence to suggest that these families would have left earlier if they had not been receiving assistance. Many families from the same area decided to remain displaced, claiming that there are no opportunities for them in their areas of origin. This underlines the diversity of household socio-economic profiles and decision-making factors – even if they are from the same area of origin. It is likely that families who remain displaced will be extremely vulnerable, given they have likely already exhausted all non-harmful coping strategies in the past few months of displacement (including selling productive assets and borrowing), and have no realistic livelihood prospects in the near future.

“If we return we will be forced to be armed by armed groups and we do not want to join their line”

FGD Participant

The findings of NRC's structured field data collection also confirm the complexities of displacement dynamics in Badghis – and that many people were displaced by a combination of drought (Badghis had experienced a five-year long prolonged dry spell) and conflict. As a result, many of the displaced families who remained indicated that they were unable to return because of ongoing conflict, in addition to fears of forced recruitment, harassment and taxation by Non-State Armed Groups upon their return.

Given this insecurity and the fears expressed by many displaced people, the dynamic between lack of assistance and return movements is also concerning. In particular, many displaced families were not captured in during the initial challenging registration completed in late 2018, and were therefore subsequently excluded from some humanitarian assistance. Unable to access food assistance these households have effectively been forced to leave and look for food sources elsewhere, which brings into question the voluntariness of their return movement. In addition, there has yet to be a comprehensive village level analysis on whether it is currently safe for displaced families to return to their areas of origin. In addition, despite the best efforts of food security partners – food assistance in areas of origin remains infrequent and it is currently impossible to guarantee that individual displaced families will be able to receive food assistance in their areas of origin. This is likely to be a critical issue as funding is yet to be secured for the majority of livelihood activities and targeted food assistance in areas of origin past June. In the words of one focus group discussion participant “In case of no assistance, you should kill us to get rid of this life”.

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Given that the main drivers of return are the upcoming harvest (in July-August) and Ramadan, it is expected that the rate of returns will decrease over the next months – although messaging by the humanitarian community that assistance will end at the end of June will likely sustain some movement as a negative ‘push’ factor. There is currently no evidence to suggest that the conditions that have caused those families that have remained in Qala-e-Naw will change significantly enough to see another spontaneous movement. Those that have elected to stay appear to be those who have nothing to return to, or are blocked from returning due to armed hostilities that flared

in their home districts. At least 18 families have already returned to the camps having returned to find that harvest prospects for this year were insufficient to sustain their return. **Whilst movements remain unpredictable, it is likely that a significant number of displaced people will remain displaced in Badghis – with these families likely to be among the particularly vulnerable.**

Recommendations to the humanitarian community:

1. The Government of Afghanistan bears the primary responsibility for protecting and assisting all IDPs, including seeking an end to their displacement through durable solutions³. As such, the Government should ensure that resources are made available to continue to support Internally Displaced Populations and ensure that those who remain displaced are able to locally integrate.
2. Given the large contextual changes, the humanitarian community should consider further targeted assessments around July 2019⁴ to assess the needs of the fewer remaining IDP communities against international or national benchmarks, such as SPHERE standards or other measures, and mobilise additional resources to ensure continued response – particularly WASH, Health and Protection. In particular, joint and forward humanitarian planning in advance of the winter/lean season will be necessary to avoid further loss of life and suffering.
3. Strengthened referral pathways are required to ensure that those who have been missed during initial SCOPE registration are able to receive necessary assistance. This should be complemented by increased protection case management services focused on extremely vulnerable individuals who are unable to support themselves.
4. Clusters or the inter-cluster coordination team should develop durable solutions strategies in line with IASC guidance and in consultation with government and development partners including the World Bank. Strategies should focus on local integration (including livelihoods support in areas of displacement) and voluntary, informed and safe return, as well as potentially temporary relocation into planned / managed sites (if such sites are deemed appropriate and are resourced). Such activities should be reflected in the forthcoming update to the Humanitarian Response Plan, which should also make adequate provisions for full and effective camp coordination and camp management.
5. Both long and short term funding should be mobilised to support continued assistance where required, as well as durable solutions for displaced families who chose to remain displaced and for those who are willing to return but need support to do so.

³ National IDP Policy, p18

⁴ Assessments should take place in July to avoid confusion with the dissemination of messages to IDPs regarding the cessation of assistance in displacement sites, and to avoid raising expectation whilst funding for this response is not yet secured.