



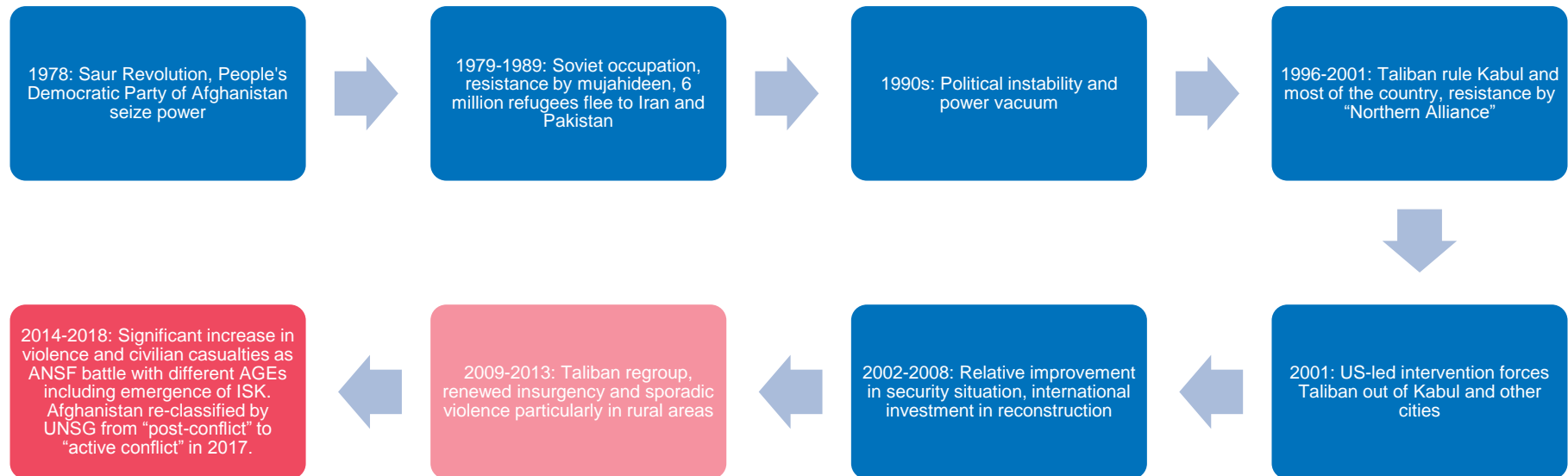
International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan

12 March 2018 – Vienna, Austria

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A brief history...



This timeline is very simplified, but serves to show the evolution of the conflict and displacement over the past 40 years.

1978: The Saur Revolution, aka the April Revolution or April - a coup d'état led by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (communist ideology) against the rule of Afghan President Mohammed Daoud Khan. It marked the beginning of 4 decades of conflict and instability, and a significant deterioration in human rights, from which the country has never fully recovered.

The PDPA implemented a Marxist–Leninist agenda to replace religious and traditional laws. The PDPA imprisoned, tortured or murdered tens of thousands among the traditional elite and the religious establishment.

Many people in cities including Kabul supported or accepted the new order. However, the PDPA remained unpopular with a majority of the Afghan population. Repression plunged large parts of the country, especially rural areas, into open revolt.

1979: Over 100,000 Soviet troops sent to intervene in support of the PDPA (Parcham faction). Resistance by mujahideen, with assistance from US and Saudi Arabia. Soviet forces and their proxies killed between 1-2 million.

About 6 million refugees fled to Pakistan and Iran.

1989: Soviet forces withdraw, although PDPA continued to hold power in Kabul under President Najibullah until 1992, with Soviet support.

1992: Gulbuddin Hekmatyar leads Hezb-e-Islami forces invaded Kabul in April 1992, triggering a civil war among up to 6 different mujahideen factions vying for control of the capital.

1996: The Taliban, predominantly a Pashtun movement at the time, seized control of Kabul and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, controlling up to 70% of the country.

Ahmad Shah Massoud and Abdul Rashid Dostum, two former enemies, created the United Front (Northern Alliance) comprising the Tajik forces of Massoud and the Uzbek forces of Dostum, as well as Hazara factions (Hezb-i-Wahdat) and some Pashtun forces.

From 1996 to 2001, the United Front controlled significant territory in the northern region and Central Highlands, while Taliban controlled the majority of the country, including Kabul.

2001: Following 98/11 Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in the USA, President Bush launched Operation Enduring Freedom to depose the Taliban and capture Osama bin Laden, who was allegedly harbored by Taliban in Afghanistan. US and coalition forces established a new administration in Kabul under President Hamid Karzai.

2002-2013: Relative security enforced by international forces until 2008, while Taliban regrouped in Pakistan.

Millions of refugees returned to Afghanistan, most assisted through a UNHCR voluntary repatriation programme.

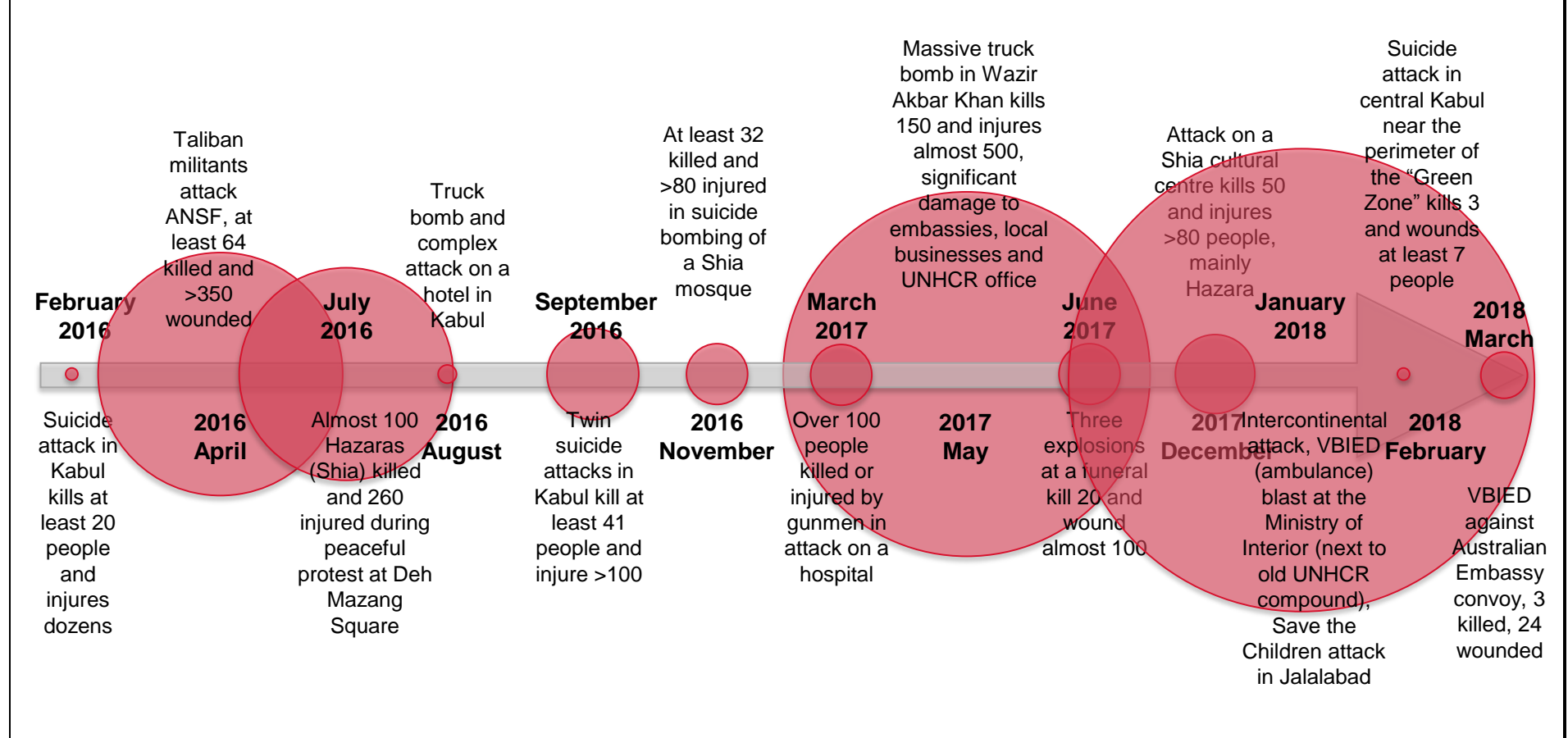
Taliban attack on Serena Hotel in Kabul in 2008 signaled renewed capacity and intention.

By **2009**, a Taliban-led shadow government begins to form in many parts of the country, causing new waves of internal displacement and refugees. Afghan government and coalition forces struggle to maintain control, particularly in rural areas.

NATO ends combat operations in 2014 and draws down international forces. Violence and civilian casualties subsequently escalate, as ANSF battle with different AGEs including emergence of Islamic State-Khorasan (ISK).

Afghanistan re-classified by UNSG from “post-conflict” to “active conflict” in 2017.

Major incidents in Kabul, 2016-2018



February 2016: Suicide attack in Kabul kills at least 20 people and injures dozens

April 2016: Taliban militants attack ANSF, at least 64 killed and >350 wounded

July 2016: Almost 100 Hazaras (Shia) killed and 260 injured during peaceful protest at Deh Mazang Square

August 2016: Truck bomb and complex attack on a hotel in Kabul

September 2016: Twin suicide attacks in Kabul kill at least 41 people and injure >100

November 2016: At least 32 killed and >80 injured in suicide bombing of a Shia mosque

March 2017: Over 100 people killed or injured by gunmen in attack on a hospital

May 2017: Massive truck bomb in Wazir Akbar Khan kills 150 and injures almost 500, significant damage to embassies, local businesses and UNHCR office (leading to subsequent relocation of UNHCR office)

June 2017: Three explosions at a funeral of those killed during the May 31 attack kill 20 and wound almost 100

December 2017: Attack on a Shia cultural centre kills 50 and injures >80 people, mainly Hazara

January 2018: Kabul city, Body Bourne Improvised Explosive Device (BBIED) suicide attacker blows himself up against a group of ANP in the middle of demonstration organized by local shopkeepers protesting against counter-narcotic police operation in that area. While the official media reported 20 killed and 16 wounded the local sources speak about 63 killed and more than 20 wounded (ANSF and civilians). ISK claimed responsibility.

January 2018: one missile impacted in close proximity of the Canadian Embassy and Indian Embassy, no casualties reported.

January 2018: a complex attack was conducted in the early hours against the Marshal Fahim Defence Academy / 111th Division HQ, initiated by the detonation of a Vehicle Bourne Improvised Explosive Device (VBID) followed by four AGEs on foot. It is not clear which entity was the intended target however the premises was breached and the attack resulted in 11 ANSF killed and 16 wounded. ISK, claimed responsibility for the attack.

January 2018: an ambulance rigged as a Vehicle Bourne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) was detonated at an ANSF check point giving access to the “old Mol” street, as a result 103 individuals were killed and 235 Wounded. Taliban claimed responsibility stating the target was the Old Mol compound and was *“in retaliation against the enemy airstrikes on defenseless civilians, razing their houses and their abductions”*. This was next to the previous UNHCR compound.

January 2018, Jalalabad city, the Save the Children compound witnessed a complex Attack, initiated by a Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (SVBIED) while an INGO vehicle was accessing the compound. The detonation was followed by four AGE moving into the office building positioning themselves between the first, second and third floor. ANSF responded to the attack and all AGEs were neutralized at 1830 after a 10 hours engagement. As a result five ANP, four NGO staff, one Civilian were killed, 25 Civilians, six NGO staff, three ANP wounded. ISK later claimed responsibility for the attack.

January 2018: Gunmen storm the Intercontinental hotel, at least 42 killed. One week later, an ambulance delivers a bomb to a hospital, killing >103 and wounding 235 civilians

February 2018: Suicide attack in central Kabul near the perimeter of the “Green Zone” kills 3 and wounds at least 7 people

February 2018: Kabul city, reportedly a vehicle rigged with 1000kg of explosive was seized and rendered safe by ANSF in the vicinity of the Russian embassy premise.

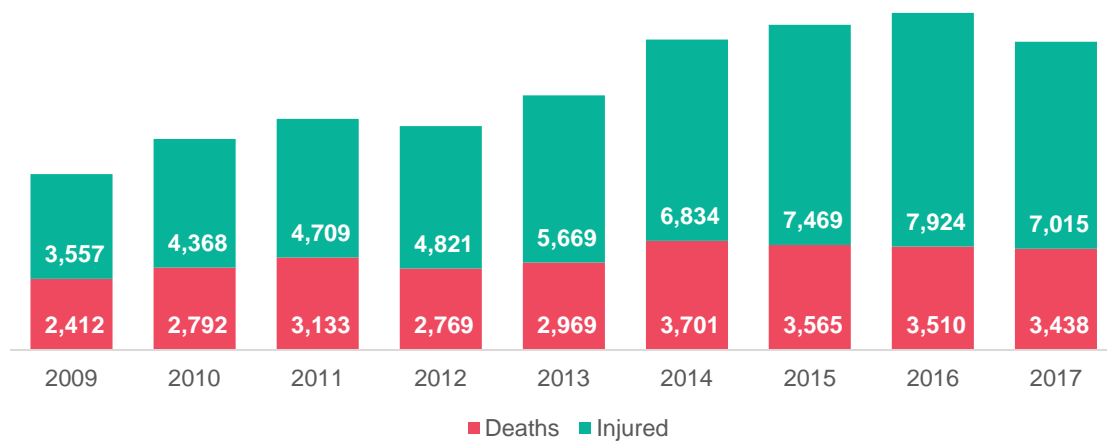
February 2018: Kabul city, a vehicle rigged with 2000kg of explosive was seized by ANSF.

February 2018: Kabul City, suicide bomber detonated his BBIED at the ANSF CP, close to NDS facility. Reportedly 3 ANSF were killed and 7 were wounded. ISK (Daesh) claimed responsibility.

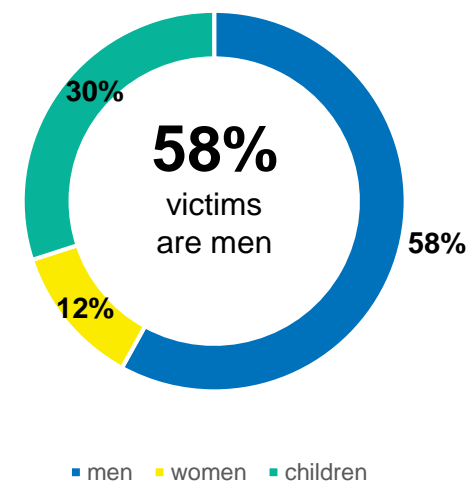
March 2018, Kabul city, VBIED detonated against an Australian Embassy convoy, as a result three civilian were killed and 24 wounded.

Afghanistan at war

Civilians casualties in Afghanistan, 2009-2017



Victim profile



Report of the Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, September 2017: https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_afghanistan_21_sept_2017.pdf: *“The record level of armed clashes seen during 2017 reinforced the shift in the conflict evident since earlier in the year, away from asymmetric attacks towards a more traditional conflict pattern characterized by often prolonged armed clashes between government and anti-government forces.. **Civilians continued to bear the brunt of the ongoing conflict.**”*

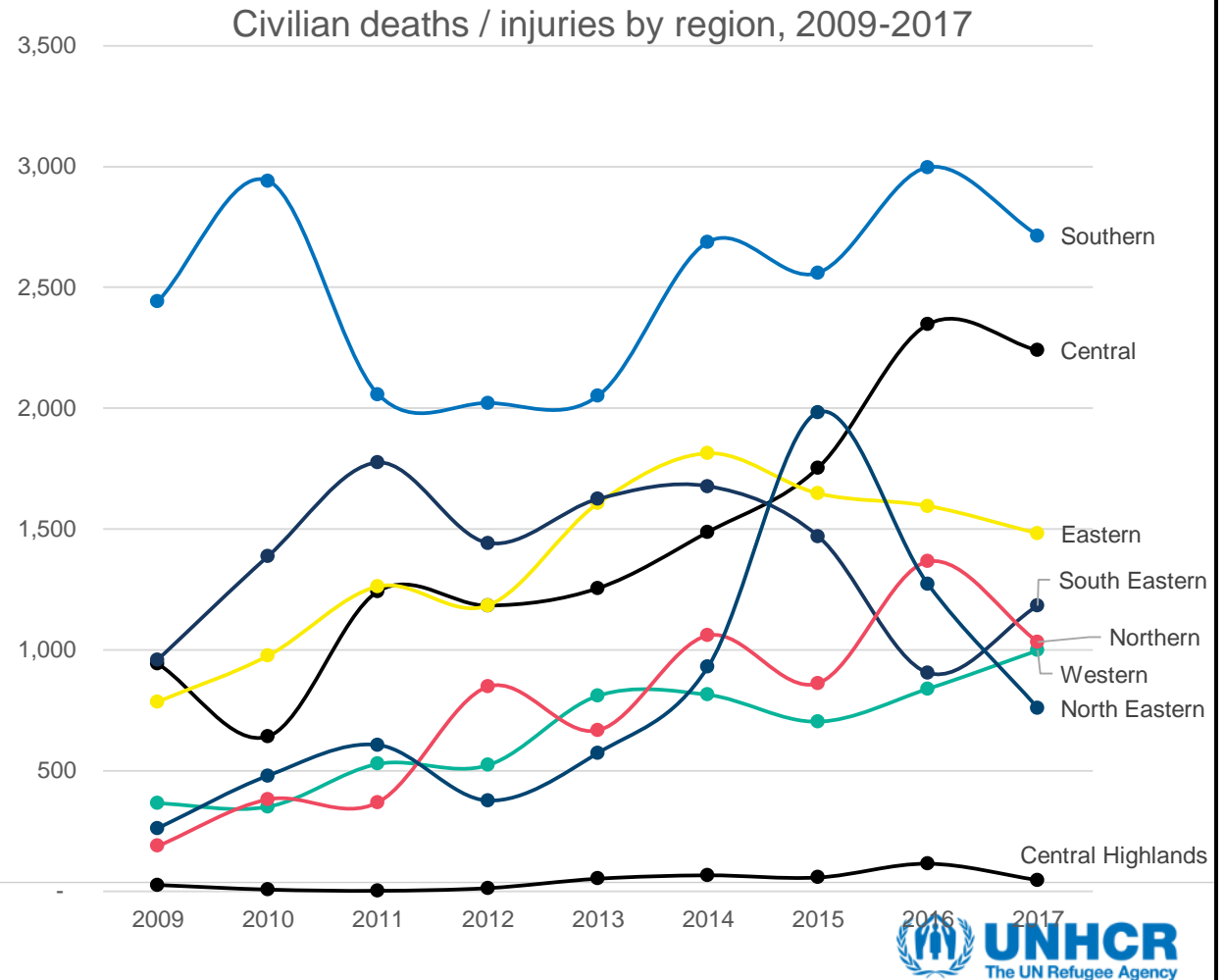
- Between 1 January 2009 and 31 December 2017, the armed conflict in Afghanistan claimed the lives of 28,291 civilians and injured 52,366 others, making a total of more than 80,000 casualties.
- More than 10,000 civilian casualties have been verified each year for the past 4 years. **Important to note that reports by UNAMA under-represent the actual number of civilian casualties due to strict verification methodology, and limited access to verify figures in hard to reach areas.**
- The use of **improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by Anti-Government Elements accounted for most civilian casualties in 2017 (40%)** – including suicide bombs and pressure-plate devices in civilian populated areas, often **targeting specific communities perceived to oppose AGEs**, while a further **11% of casualties were attributed to deliberate killings**. Approximately **33% of civilian casualties were caused by shooting or cross-fire during ground clashes between AGEs and government forces**.
- The proportion of **civilian casualties from aerial strikes by Afghan government and international military forces** was 6% in 2017, although the number of civilian casualties from aerial operations **doubled in 2016 and 2017** compared to 2015.
- Important to note that **Men are disproportionately represented** among civilian casualties, due to the higher likelihood of being present in public places where attacks on civilians occur, or targeted due to their employment with civilian government agencies or NGOs.
- Deaths among women increased by 5% compared to 2016, however, and 12% of total civilian casualties were women.
- The number of children killed or injured decreased in 2017, compared to 2016, but still made up 30% of civilian casualties (boys: 71% girls: 29%).

Regions most affected by conflict

16% of verified civilian casualties were recorded in Kabul city in 2017

For the first time, in 2017, UNAMA recorded attacks by ISK outside of Nangarhar or Kabul, in Herat province

In 2017, conflict caused new internal displacement in 31 out of 34 provinces



- While civilians in the Southern Region have consistently suffered the highest number of casualties since 2009, the **Central Region (including Kabul city)** has seen a dramatic rise in the number of civilian casualties since 2014, becoming the second most dangerous region of Afghanistan for civilians in 2016 and 2017.

- **Neither Kabul nor Herat city were safe for civilians in 2017, with both cities reporting hundreds of civilian casualties** (Kabul city > 1,600, representing a 17% increase compared to 2016).
- Although the Central Highlands has recorded relatively few civilian casualties in recent years, the local population (predominantly Hazara) is effectively isolated. Humanitarian access is possible only by air, as roads leading in and out of Bamiyan province are frequently controlled by AGEs.
- Communities in outlying districts adjacent to other provinces have been displaced by conflict and insecurity. The region is significantly under-developed and largely neglected by the national government, due to weak political influence of the ethnic Hazara community in Kabul. Winters are long and extremely harsh, with most of the population relying on dried animal manure for heating and cooking. Many live in caves for warmth and greater security.

Attacks on religious leaders & worshippers

38 separate attacks on places of worship, religious leaders and worshippers verified in 2017

- 3 x the number of attacks recorded in 2016

500 civilian casualties, predominantly Shia Muslims (Hazara), verified in 2017

- Double the number of casualties with this profile, compared to 2016

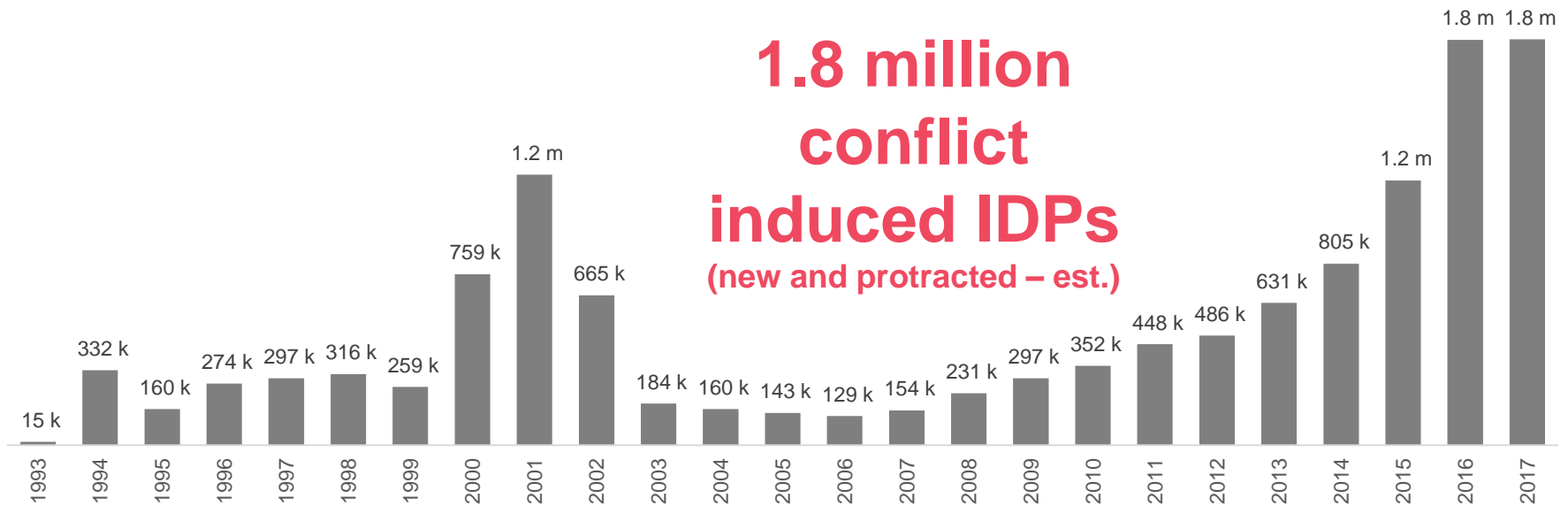


- In 2017, UNAMA documented a disturbing **increase in attacks against places of worship, religious leaders and worshippers, recording almost 500 civilian casualties in 38 separate attacks**. This represented **double the number of casualties attributed to sectarian violence compared to 2016, and three times as many attacks, primarily targeting Shi'a Muslims**.
- UNAMA issued a special report in November 2017 regarding the sharp rise in sectarian violence:
https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_report_on_attacks_against_places_of_worship_7nov2017_0.pdf
- Attacks of this nature were recorded in Kabul, Herat, and other parts of the country.



Portrait of Gulbib, a 70 year internally displaced female from Aliabad district of northern Kunduz province. Gulbib is a widow who lives with her daughter-in-law who has four young children. She lost her only son in a suicide attack after being displaced in Kabul; her daughter-in-law is also a widow. The family does not have a male breadwinner. Gulbib's eldest grandson is six years old and collects garbage to help the family. Gulbib survives through the charity of her neighbors and by begging in Kabul city.

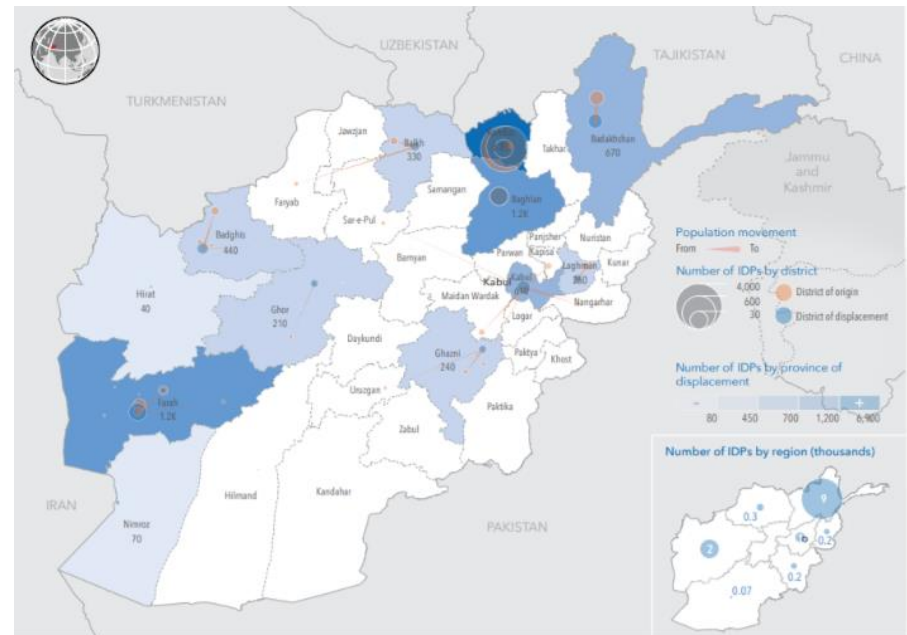
Internal displacement - timeline



- A majority of IDPs live in host community families, in rented/shared accommodation, or in collective shelters.
- Lack of privacy is a major concern raised by women and girls, along with insufficient latrines and potable water, leading to poor sanitation and hygiene as well as tensions with host communities in some areas.
- The burden on urban infrastructure, competition for scarce resources including food, fuel, medical supplies and potable water, and a lack of livelihood opportunities makes it difficult for IDPs to become self-sufficient.
- Negative coping mechanisms include hazardous forms of child labour, street begging, early and forced marriage, and returning to unsafe areas where protection risks remain.
- Deprivation of education among children is commonplace, in part because children work or beg to support their families and in some cases due to lack of nearby schools in areas of displacement, and a lack of female teachers for girls.
- **Explain the transfer of IDP coordination from UNHCR to UNOCHA and consequent change in statistical reporting methodology.**
- From January to December 2017, approximately 500,000 individuals fled their homes due to conflict.
- A total of 31 out of 34 provinces had recorded some level of forced displacement. Constrained humanitarian access hinders assessments, thus preventing verification of the full extent of displacement and undermining the provision of assistance and services.
- Displacement affects all individuals differently with needs, vulnerabilities and protection risks evolving over time due to exhaustion of coping mechanisms and only basic emergency assistance provided following initial displacement.
- Inadequate shelter, food insecurity, insufficient access to sanitation and health facilities, as well as a lack of protection, often result in precarious living conditions that jeopardises the well-being and dignity of affected families:
<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/idps> (OCHA)
- Over 50 percent of people displaced by conflict in Afghanistan have now been displaced twice or more.
- Kabul city only hosts some 70,000 internally displaced people. This is in addition to the informal settlements in Kabul.

Context

- Elections in July 2018, with National Unity Government facing significant political challenges
- Lack of government capacity to fund or implement development programs and basic services
- Deteriorating security, diminishing humanitarian access
- Emergence of Islamic State-Khorasan (ISK)
- Internal displacement
- Economic growth crashed from 14% in 2012 to 2% in 2013 (2.6% in 2017)



Political challenges: The National Unity Government is fragile to say the least; and not very united but rather divided and faces challenges to its credibility in the lead-up to 2018 elections, with disturbing signs of ethnic identity being politicised to suit the agendas of opposing factions.

New political alliances among senior figures (eg, Dostum-Atta-Mohaqiq: “Coalition for the Rescue of Afghanistan”), a controversial peace agreement with Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG, i.e. Hekmatyar), and continuous attacks by AGEs against civilians, undermines the National Unity Government

High expectations on the international community: The Government diverts a large proportion of its resources to security, and after paying the salaries of government employees and other obligatory expenditure, very little remains to invest in development and basic services for Afghan citizens. Notwithstanding the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF), National Priority Programmes such as the Citizens' Charter, IDP policy and action plans, and establishment of the Displacement and Return Executive Committee (DiREC), significant challenges arise in terms of implementation.

In particular, the **land allocation scheme has proven extremely slow and complex**, causing frustration among returnees whose expectations remain unmet, after basing their decision to return to Afghanistan in part on promises of land. (Refer to Refugee Jirga in July 2017)

The Government also struggles to implement its own policy relating to issuance of civil documentation, with returnees and some IDPs reporting difficulty in obtaining a tazkira unless they return to their place of origin. **A majority of returnee children who repatriated with their families in 2016 and 2017 are still out of school.** The Government and international donors continue to place high expectations on UNHCR and other agencies to meet both humanitarian and development needs.

The international community has donated around \$130 billion to Afghanistan since 2002, including \$115 billion from the United States, of which **more than \$72.5 billion – over half the total – has gone to security and counter narcotics** initiatives. **The aid-effectiveness of the remaining billions spent on governance, development, civilian operations and humanitarian aid has yielded modest achievements given persistent budget under-spending and corruption in the country.**

President Ghani has made a lot of effort to combat this, however, this has led to complex and time consuming procedures being put into place.

Deteriorating security situation: As already mentioned Afghanistan is no longer a 'post-conflict' country. AGEs have extended their geographical scope, influence and territorial control, resulting in contracted humanitarian space and limited humanitarian access.

More than 40% of Afghanistan's 407 districts are controlled or contested by AGEs (UNAMA). Security incidents increased in 2017 compared to previous years, and **more than 43,000 civilian casualties have been verified in the past 4 years.** The Hazara/Shi'a community is over-represented among civilian casualties, due to **several attacks on Shi'a places of worship, gatherings and demonstrations by the Hazara/Shi'a community, and targeted killings.**

Emergence of ISK as a threat: The so-called Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK), a provincial division of the IS claiming territory across Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, emerged in 2014 in Nangarhar province of Afghanistan. It comprises diverse splinter groups which are difficult to distinguish and impossible to negotiate with for the purposes of humanitarian access. Although not as large as the Taliban or the Haqqani network, ISK has demonstrated its capacity and intent to conduct spectacular attacks in various provinces and regions. Recent examples include a coordinated attack with the Taliban against Hazara civilians in Sayyad district of Sar-i-Pul (northern region). ISK has also claimed responsibility for recent attacks on Shia mosques in Kabul and Herat.

Internal displacement: All 34 provinces are hosting IDPs, undermining their capacity to absorb returnees from Pakistan and Iran and provide adequate shelter, livelihoods, and basic services.

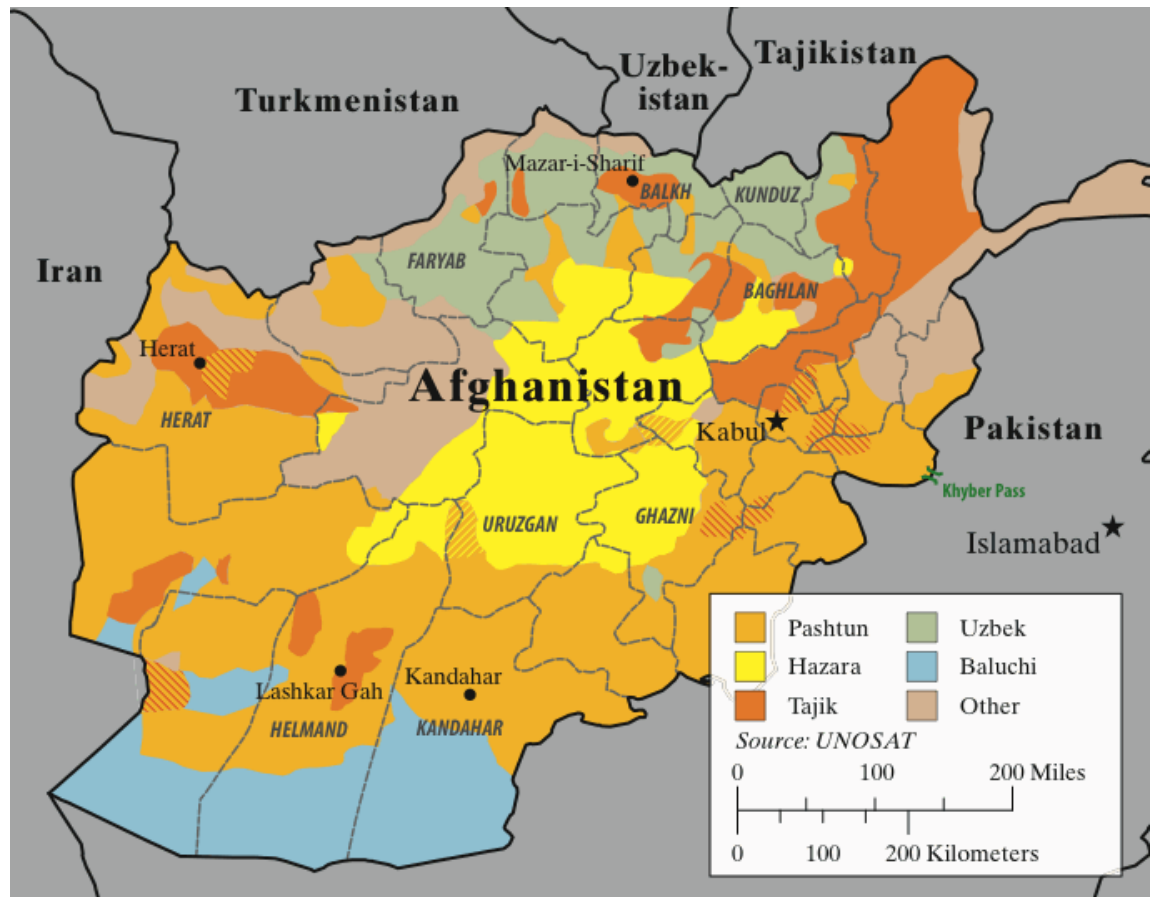
Some 20% of IDPs are located in areas considered “hard to reach”.

31 out of 34 provinces were affected by conflict-induced displacement in 2017, indicating the geographical scope of conflict in every region.

Specific causes of displacement cited by IDPs in protection monitoring include aerial strikes, ground clashes, threats of forced recruitment, indiscriminate attacks on civilians including IEDs, extortion, intimidation, harassment, illegal taxation by AGEs, aggravated by limited access to services and livelihood opportunities, ethnic tensions and disputes between political factions.

Economic situation: Insecurity is taking a heavy toll on private investment, labour demand, and consumer demand. Economic growth is projected at 2.6% in 2017, and has remained less than 3% since 2013, having crashed as a result of international military forces withdrawing from the country. Inflation rose to 5.1% in July 2017, driven by higher food prices - particularly for fruit and vegetables. The annual trade deficit of 33% of GDP is financed by foreign aid. The poverty rate increased to 39.1% in 2013-14 (latest available survey data). The most recent household survey (2016-17) showed an increase in unemployment (now almost 24%), with women more than twice as likely than men to be out of work. Female beggars (often widowed) are commonplace in Kabul and other cities, often accompanied by children. (Stats from WB, October 2017: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview>)

Ethnic diversity



- Afghanistan is a **diverse but divided country**, and no single ethnic community claims a complete majority.
- Most villages in the rural areas are inhabited by one ethnic / religious community.
- Even in cities with a mixed population, such as Kabul and Herat, **communities are largely segregated in different neighborhoods with minimal interaction**. Although political alliances have formed between leaders of different communities, such alliances are primarily a result of political expedience rather than shared ideology and remain fragile.
- Afghan politics at both national and local levels is increasingly driven by the exploitation of ethnic/religious identity and community allegiances. **Decisions, policies and action plans of the NUG in Kabul are not necessarily accepted or implemented by provincial government authorities**, who exercise substantial autonomy in practice.
- National and provincial authorities have minimal capacity to reintegrate former refugees, as well as other returnees from Pakistan, Iran, and elsewhere, together with a growing number of new and protracted IDPs. Social protection by the State is almost non-existent. **Individuals and families without an existing support network in the place of return or displacement do not have effective State protection**. Limited access to shelter has left IDP and returnee families living in over-crowded houses and makeshift structures, with poor sanitation and hygiene, and destitute living conditions.

Risk Profiles

(NB: illustrative of certain risks, not exhaustive)

Individuals perceived to support Government or international community, and their family members

Humanitarian aid and development workers, human rights activists, and their family members

Tribal elders and religious leaders

Women and children in certain circumstances

Journalists and media professionals

Men of fighting age, children at risk of forced recruitment

Religious/ethnic minorities, diverse sexual orientation/gender ID

Men and women suspected of violating Shari'a or contravening social mores

NB: These profiles are illustrative, not exhaustive.

- Throughout 2017, UNAMA continued to record the abduction of civilians by Anti-Government Elements, documenting **255 incidents involving the abduction of 1,005 civilians** (resulting in the death of 76 and injury to 17).
- At least 15 **humanitarian aid workers** were killed in 2017. Dozens of incidents against humanitarian and healthcare workers are reported each month, including threats and intimidation, robbery, abductions, and shootings. (Additionally, on 22 January 2 national UN staff were abducted (UNFPA) while in transit towards their place of work. In the course of the incident, one local civilian (non UN) who was supposedly trying to offer assistance to the UN staff was killed. The deteriorating economic situation in the country has led to an increase in criminality and anyone now perceived to be privileged - including UN staff, doctors, shop keepers, restaurant owners are at risk of kidnapping for ransom.
- UNAMA recorded **23 incidents of parallel justice structure punishments imposed on civilians by Anti-Government Elements in 2017**, resulting in 33 civilian casualties. Such cases are likely under-reported given limited access to areas controlled by Anti-Government Elements.
- **Men of fighting age, children at risk of forced recruitment:** In areas controlled or contested by AGEs, families may be obliged to provide a man or boy to fight with the armed group, and/or illegal taxation. Adolescent boys and young men face a heightened risk of forced recruitment.
- **Individuals perceived to support the Government or international community** may include civilians in areas under government control, as well as civilians working for the government, national NGOs or international community, and their family members.
- **Religious minorities (eg. Shia, Hindu, Sikh communities)** have been increasingly targeted in the past 2 years, and face a heightened risk of being deliberately killed, abducted or seriously harmed, while **Afghans who convert to Christianity cannot openly practice their faith in Afghanistan**, and would be at risk of violence from family members, the community and armed groups. The minority Hindu and Sikh communities have fled Afghanistan en masse, and as such, those who remain or who return to Afghanistan do not have effective social protection.

- **Women** without customary male protection, such as widows/divorced women, may be seen as a burden or immoral, and are vulnerable to gender-based constraints and violence. For a woman to live alone in Afghanistan, even with children, is not culturally accepted or secure. Afghanistan has one of the highest proportions of widows in the world, as a result of four decades of armed conflict, and marriage to older men. The average age of Afghan widows is 35 years, most are illiterate and raise more than four children. It is customary for widowed women to enter into a second marriage with someone from the husband's family, usually his brother, in order to obtain support, yet this is not always possible, and not necessarily voluntary. In large cities, widows who do not re-marry work as cleaners, weavers or tailors, and as beggars or prostitutes.
- Girls and women who try to escape from forced marriage are often rejected by their families and have nowhere to go due to the stigma of running away. They may be even killed for shaming the honour of the family. Those without any family support are often forced to become beggars or prostitutes to support themselves and their families.
- **Women Protection Centers (WPC)** and **Family Guidance Centers (FGC)** support women who need safe accommodation. UN Women funds 11 of the 25 WPCs and 6 of the FGCs, the rest are funded by USAID. From 2014-2016, the total number of women housed by the WPCs was 5,788. Of these women, 65% were "successfully reintegrated" into their birth or married homes. The remainder have stayed on in the WPCs, transferred to other facilities, or discontinued contact with the WPCs. Between 2014 and 2016, the FGCs supported 2,110 women clients facing abuse. Of these women, 48% have had their cases successfully resolved. The remainder continue to receive services from the FGCs, have discontinued their engagement with the FGCs, or have suffered an escalation of violence requiring referral to other shelter services for support.
- According to UN Women, the extraordinary level of violence against women and girls is embedded in a traditional system of male domination in which girls and women have limited or no status as independent persons. Numerous cases confirm the continuing prevalence of violence against women and girls in both the public and private spheres, including violence perpetrated by husbands and other relatives; violence linked to early and forced marriages - including *baad* (the exchange of girls for dispute resolution) and *baadal* (exchange marriages); incest; so-called honour crimes; and self-immolation and self-harm due to domestic violence and forced marriage practices.
- **Children:** The Afghan National Police (ANP), Afghan Local Police (ALP), Haqqani network, Hezb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HiG) and Taliban forces have been identified by the UN Secretary-General as persistent perpetrators of the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. The recruitment and use of children is significantly more prevalent in the ALP than the ANP. The unlawful and arbitrary detention of children continues to be reported, likewise torture and ill treatment while in custody.

- Sexual abuse and exploitation of children, including Bacha Bazi, is under-reported and a significant threat for boys and girls.
- AIHRC: “In some parts of our country, a number of local individuals keep with them one or more boys typically aging between 10 to 18 years for the purpose of Bacha Bazi generally associated with sexual exploitation and other forms of sexual harassments. These children are usually coming from poor families who are kept by some rich individuals as bodyguard, apprentice, servant at home, shop, bakery, workshop, hotels, restaurants and other paid jobs or through coercion, threat, trickery, intimidation and enticement. They often fall victims to sexual abuses. In some parts of the country, these children while wearing female clothes are used as dancers in parties and wedding ceremonies. At the end of ceremonies, they are usually taken to private houses or hotels and raped; sometimes they are even gang raped. As sex slaves, these children continually suffer from sexual exploitation or other forms of sexual harassments.
<http://www.aihrc.org.af/home/research-reports/3324>
- Save the Children survey: 91% of children have experienced some form of violence in the home, including kicking, hitting with objects, beating, choking, and branding or burning. 38% exposed to the murder of someone in their household. 31% have seen somebody shot, bombs exploding, or people fighting.

Internal Protection Alternatives



Must be “**relevant**” and “**reasonable**”



Is the area of relocation practically, safely, and legally accessible to the individual?



Can the claimant lead a relatively normal life without facing undue hardship?



Must be more than a “safe haven” away from the area of origin



If an individual would be without family links or effective social protection from an established community network, relocation is unlikely to be reasonable

- UNHCR Guidelines on International Protection No. 4, "Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative": <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3f2791a44.html> (extracts below)
- International law does not require threatened individuals to exhaust all options within their own country first before seeking asylum; that is, it does not consider asylum to be the last resort. The 1951 Convention does not require or even suggest that the fear of being persecuted need always extend to the whole territory of the refugee's country of origin.

Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative

“The claimant must be able to find **safety** and **security** and be free from **danger** and **risk of injury**. This must be **durable**, not illusory or unpredictable. In most cases, countries in the grip of **armed conflict** would not be safe for relocation, especially in light of shifting armed fronts which could suddenly bring insecurity to an area hitherto considered safe.”



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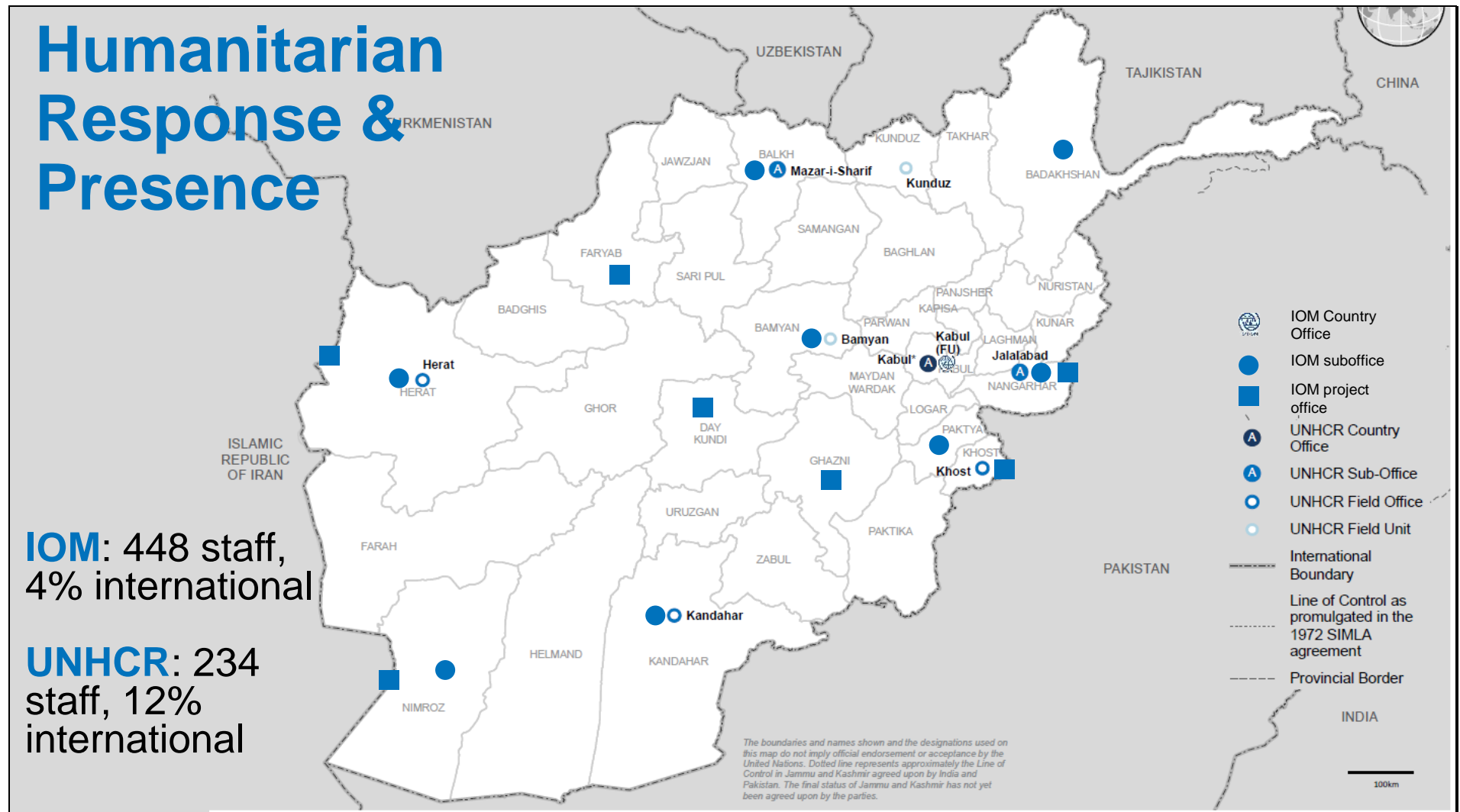
**GUIDELINES ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION:
“Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative” within the Context of
Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol
relating to the Status of Refugees**

UNHCR issues these Guidelines pursuant to its mandate, as contained in the *Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, and Article 35 of the *1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and/or its 1967 Protocol*. These Guidelines supplement the *UNHCR Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees* (1979, re-edited, Geneva, January 1992). They further supersede UNHCR's Position Paper, *Relocating Internally as a Reasonable Alternative to Seeking Asylum – (The So-Called “Internal Flight Alternative” or “Relocation Principle”)* (Geneva, February 1999). They result, *inter alia*, from the Second Track of the Global Consultations on International Protection which examined this subject at its expert meeting in San Remo, Italy, in September 2001 and seek to consolidate appropriate standards and practice on this issue in light of recent developments in State practice.

These Guidelines are intended to provide interpretative legal guidance for governments, legal practitioners, decision-makers and the judiciary, as well as UNHCR staff carrying out refugee status determination in the field.



- If internal relocation is to be considered, a particular area must be identified by the decision-maker, and the **claimant must be provided with an adequate opportunity to respond in the interests of procedural fairness.**
- The relocation alternative must be more than a “safe haven” away from the area of origin.
- The personal circumstances of an individual should always be given due weight in assessing whether it would be unduly harsh and therefore unreasonable for the person to relocate in the proposed area. Of relevance in making this assessment are factors such as age, sex, health, disability, family situation and relationships, social or other vulnerabilities, ethnic, cultural or religious considerations, political and social links and compatibility, language abilities, educational, professional and work background and opportunities, and any past persecution and its psychological effects. In particular, **lack of ethnic or other cultural ties may result in isolation of the individual and even discrimination in communities where close ties of this kind are a dominant feature of daily life.**
- In Afghan society, **living alone is assumed to be negatively associated with inappropriate behavior; eg. the consumption of alcohol or illicit relations. This perception applies to both women and men.** Consequently, Afghans without family or an established community network could not reasonably relocate to Kabul or other cities.



8 UNHCR field offices (Kabul, Kandahar, Khost, Jalalabad, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kunduz, Herat, Bamiyan) covering every region

4 UNHCR Encashment Centers for registered refugee returnees

IOM presence at zero point of 4 main border-crossings, with transit centers to assist unregistered returnees

3.3 million in need of life-saving humanitarian assistance (HNO)

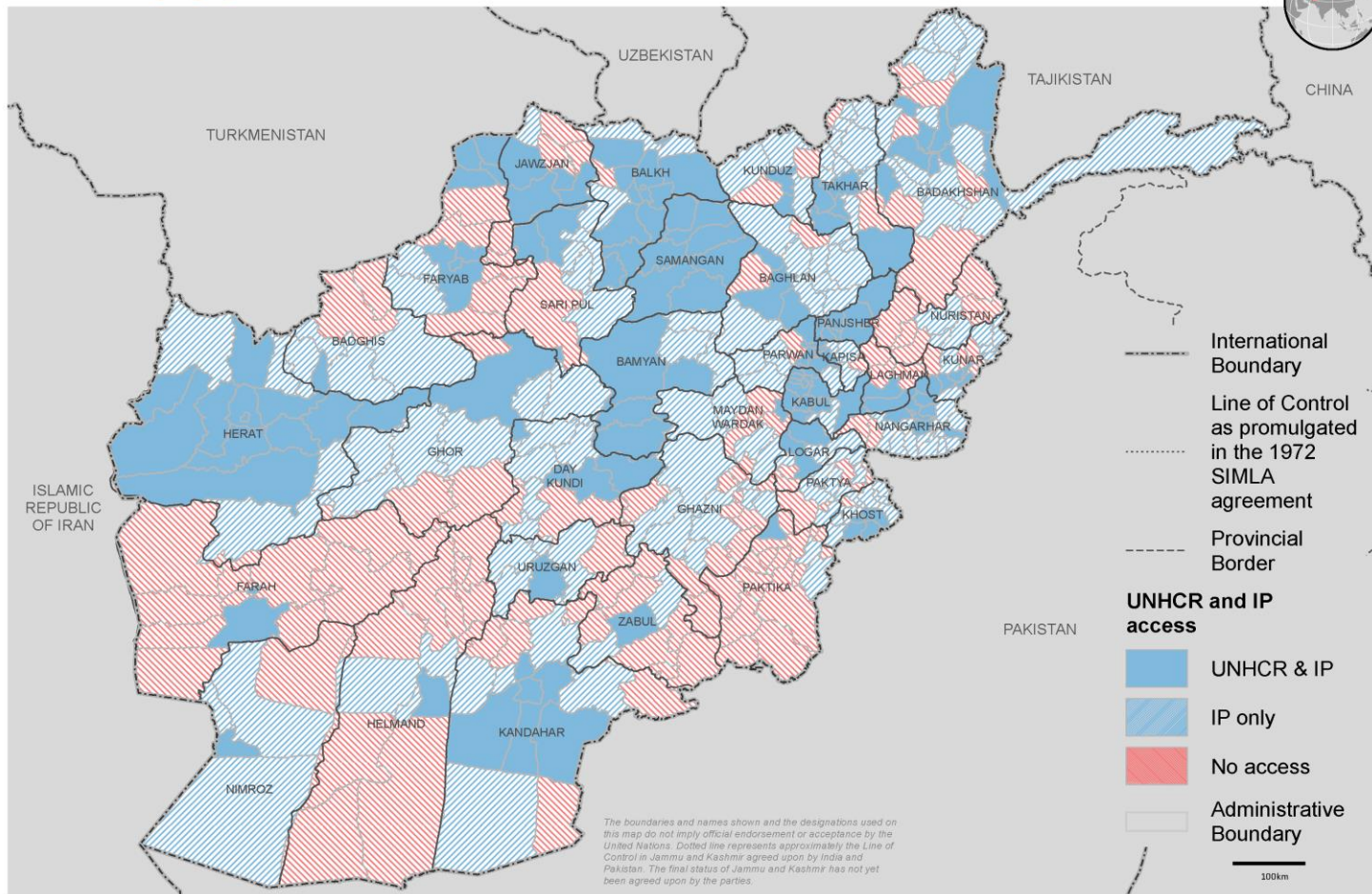
8.7 million have chronic needs which require longer-term systemic action

- IOM staffing:
 - 448 staff in total
 - 13% female
 - 4% international
- UNHCR staffing:
 - 234 staff in total
 - 15% female
 - 12% international
- The **deteriorating security situation** and **lack of absorption capacity** pose significant reintegration challenges for returnees and IDPs. Key protection risks include lack of access to adequate shelter, healthcare, education, and documentation; lack of viable livelihood opportunities resulting in negative coping mechanisms (e.g. exploitative working conditions, child labour, early or forced marriage, debt); threats of violence and forced recruitment by AGEs; and death or injury from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and explosive remnants of war (especially among children).
- Further, the **conflict has limited humanitarian access** and the delivery of assistance, thus returnees and IDPs in hard to reach areas, including areas controlled or contested by AGEs, face even greater vulnerabilities. UNHCR has found modalities, such as **national partners** and **liaison officers** who facilitate communication with beneficiaries, protection monitoring, and access in hard to reach areas to the extent possible. **Telephone surveys** also support the collection of information on the affected population's protection concerns, through representative sampling (eg. ODR).
- **UNHCR has 8 field units** located in Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kunduz, Herat, Bamiyan, and Khost – covering every region. Activities are implemented either directly or through national NGO partners. Former refugees returning from Pakistan, Iran and other countries under the **voluntary repatriation** programme receive assistance at **4 encashment centers**.

- **NB: explain that UNHCR provides repatriation assistance to only those refugees that repatriate voluntary, which means that deported individuals and failed asylum seekers do not benefit from this assistance!** Assistance includes overnight accommodation, an unconditional cash grant of approximately USD 200 /individual to meet their immediate needs for transport, food and shelter, vaccinations and basic health screening, and mine risk education and awareness. Afghans returning from Europe (voluntarily or otherwise), who were not found to be in need of international protection and therefore refused asylum or subsidiary protection, are not monitored by UNHCR upon their return to Afghanistan as the sending country has deemed they are not refugees.
- **IOM and UNHCR work in in close partnership**, along with government ministries, other UN agencies, NGOs and local communities to provide humanitarian protection through return and reintegration support for registered refugees who voluntarily repatriate (UNHCR) and other Afghans returning either voluntarily or involuntarily (IOM). Community-based protection measures include several small-scale livelihood initiatives and vocational training, designed as a catalyst to link beneficiaries with longer-term development projects.
- **IOM has established reception centres at the 4 major border crossings** (Torkham, Spin Boldak, Islam Qala, Milak) and a network of transit centres near borders or in major neighbouring cities. IOM assists 95% of returns from Pakistan, but only 4% of returnees from Iran due to funding constraints, targeting the most vulnerable PSNs and their families, eg. urgent medical cases, victims of trafficking, and unaccompanied children. For Afghans returning from Europe, IOM and MoRR provide temporary accommodation for up to 2 weeks in Kabul.
- UNHCR leads the Protection Cluster and Emergency Shelter/NFI Cluster, in coordination with humanitarian partners, as part of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP).
- UNHCR also leads the response to address the needs of an estimated 100,000 Pakistani refugees from North Waziristan Agency (NWA), providing targeted assistance to persons with specific needs (PSNs) and building capacity, self-reliance and resilience through livelihood initiatives, while coordinating with government authorities and partners to ensure continuity of essential services including basic health care, WASH, and education. In addition, UNHCR provides protection and assistance to almost 500 refugees and asylum-seekers of various nationalities residing in Kabul, Kandahar and Herat, registered under the UNHCR mandate in the absence of a national refugee law.
- 58,592 registered Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan in 2017 from Pakistan (98%), Iran (2%) and other countries.
- The rate of return, compared to 2016, for registered refugees and undocumented Afghans substantially decreased, largely as a result of an improved protection environment for registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan as well as the undocumented population.

- IOM reported more than 400,000 returns from Iran and Pakistan of other Afghans who were not registered as refugees, although many returns from Iran represented a cycle of repeated cross-border movements.
- The majority of arrivals from Iran had left Afghanistan less than 6 months before their deportation or spontaneous return, and many had not had effective access to asylum procedures.
- Afghans displaced within the last 10 years are not able to obtain a PoR card in Pakistan, while Amayesh cards in Iran are only renewed for Afghans who were first registered pre-2002.
- UNHCR advocates on behalf of the undocumented population in both Pakistan and Iran to maintain protection space and ensure access to asylum or registration procedures (eg. 2017 headcount exercise in Iran, ACC registration in Pakistan).

Afghanistan: Humanitarian access (preliminary)



37% districts
inaccessible;

11% districts
where only
district
administrative
centre is
accessible

- Humanitarian access has been a constant challenge for the last several years: continuous insecurity, ongoing fighting have limited access to the numerous areas.
- Most of the inaccessible areas are non-government controlled areas (**informally, the Government controls less than 50% territory**), which means that provision of the government services is limited or none. At the same time, education, health care, access to justice are the main challenges in the non-government controlled areas.
- Some of the provinces (like Uruzgan) are accessible for the Government by flying in and out of the provincial capital, having not much of the control over the other territory.
- Humanitarian access in Afghanistan is very often over-reported: agencies claim they have access to the district, while they can go to the district administrative centre only (capital city). In practice, most of the rural areas are not accessible.

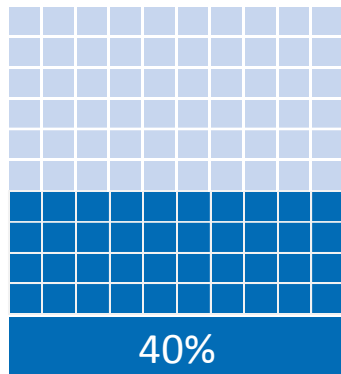
UNHCR community protection measures programme

video

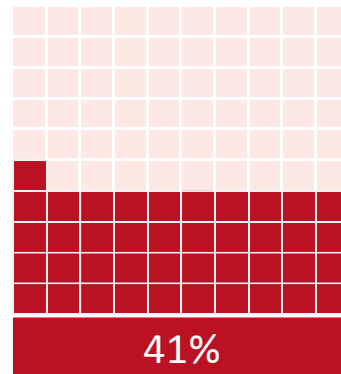
Open in advance:

<https://vimeo.com/247622038>

Food Security



people are **food insecure**



children < 5 **stunted**



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Gull Andam, age 35, with her children Hamiedulla, age 8, and Khadija, age 4, cooking food outside her house. Gull Andam and her family were displaced to Mazar city seven months ago. Here, she works in the houses of her neighbors and washes their clothes.

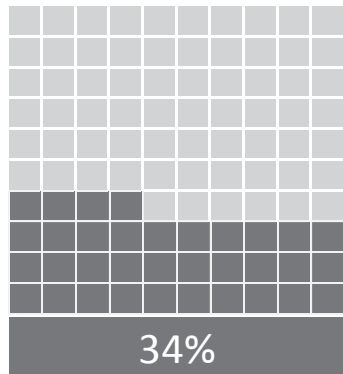
Gull Andam, age 35, with her children Hamiedulla, age 8, and Khadija, age 4, cooking food outside her house. Gull Andam and her family were displaced from Shirin Tagab district of Faryab province to Mazar city seven months ago. Here, she works in the houses of her neighbors and washes their clothes. She has also received winterization assistance from UNHCR.

Mazar, Afghanistan

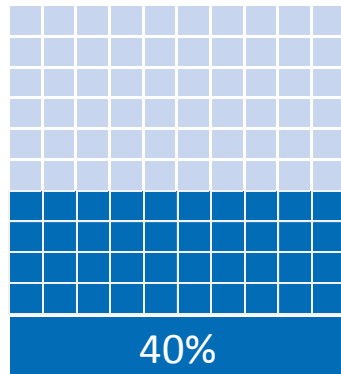
- **Each year, 400,000 Afghans enter the labor market and less than half find work.** Many work for only a few days a week or month. **Establishing a business is not realistic for individuals with no training, entrepreneurial skills, or experience**, even if given financial capital. The majority of Afghans rely on daily wage labor – those who lived in urban environments in Iran or Pakistan will not easily adapt to agricultural labor, while construction and laboring job opportunities in urban cities are not sufficient to meet demand.
- **40% of population suffers food insecurity** (OCHA)
- 41% of children < 5 years old are stunted, 25% are underweight
- **Over 34% of the working-age population are either unemployed or underemployed**
- Almost 40% of the Afghan population live in poverty
- Despite the establishment of the 2008-2013 National Social Protection Strategy, government social protection in Afghanistan remains very limited, with children and women-sensitive social protection almost non-existent. **Afghans rely entirely on their family and networks as a safety net.**
- For IDPs and returnees, the presence of a social network is fundamental in the choice of their destination, as relatives are the primary sources of support and economic assistance, and security. Returning refugees, IDPs and deportees often lack social networks in the area of displacement or return, however.
- **There is a misperception that poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion are predominantly rural concerns in Afghanistan. In reality, however, since social safety nets, access to land, and subsistence living of rural areas are not available in cities, urban dwellers frequently find themselves without coping mechanisms, at heightened vulnerability.**
- In 2016, **for the first time, urban areas are more food insecure than rural areas.** As a result, urban households are more likely to resort to emergency or negative coping strategies such as begging, selling their house or land, or migrating. This is due to rising unemployment and under-employment levels in urban areas, as well as the continuing rural to urban migration flows, partly fueled by the rise in IDPs. Nepotism and bribery affect access to employment, especially for women. Without intermediaries it is difficult to get a job with the government or NGOs.

- **Kabul Informal Settlements (KIS).** There are about 50 such camps around Kabul hosting mostly IDPs, returnees, and ethnic minorities – Kuchi or Jogis. Most KIS inhabitants live in slum-like conditions. Their shelters do not provide sufficient protection against the cold and wet winter months, are over-crowded and do not provide sufficient privacy. In many locations a large number of families share only a few hand pumps to access clean water. The population lives under constant threat of eviction. Access to basic services and public infrastructure is very limited. **Kabul was initially built for 500,000 people, now 75% of the city consists of informal settlements.**
- Significant ethnic segregation in major cities, despite diversity of population.
- Sources: WB, CSO, EASO

Livelihoods



working-age
population are
unemployed /
underemployed



Afghan population
live in **poverty**

© UNHCR / S.Rich



His name is Ali Muhammad. He is 57, has 8 children. His two sons-in-law were beheaded by the Taliban. In his place of origin, he was busy with agriculture and livestock. Now, not having my livestock with him, he earns 150 Afs a day. They are three families in one house and pay 2,500 Afs per month for rent.

His name is Ali Muhammad. He is 57, has 8 children. They escaped the conflict in Darzab district, Jawzjan province. Taliban has always threatened him and his family accusing in being close to the police and Government. His two sons-in-law were beheaded by the Taliban. In his place of origin, he was busy with agriculture and livestock. Now, not having my livestock with him, he earns 150 Afs a day. They are three families in one house and pay 2,500 Afs per month for rent.

"My name is Ali Muhammad and am 57 years old. I have eight children. My wife's name is Mehrab. Due to the war in Darzab district, Jawzjan province, where we are from, we became displaced to Sheberghan city three months ago. The Taliban have always threatened to kill us, because they said we were working with the government and the local police. Two of my son-in-laws were killed by them. Their head was cut off by the Taliban. They had wives and children. When we were escaping, we could not bring them with us. They stayed there and we still do not have any news from them. Are they alive or not?"

The Taliban are very savage and do not have mercy on anyone. In Darzab district, there were Taliban and also ISK (Islamic State Khorasan). Some villages around us were under the Taliban's control and some were under ISK control. First, the Taliban attacked our village. Then after one week, the ISK also attacked to our village. They started fighting with each other.

The second war suddenly happened overnight. And we were guarding the houses until the morning. So early morning, we took the children and pretended we were leaving the village to visit our relatives. If the Taliban knew we were going to escape, they would have killed us. Immediately we took the children and the ladies and ran away.

When we arrived here (Sheberghan city), we asked other relatives to send us items from our home. They have secretly sent a number of items to us and we were informed that the Taliban and ISK took the rest and burnt down the houses. They killed our cows and sheep. In our place of origin, I was busy with agriculture and livestock. My oldest son also took the sheep to graze in the plains. My wife also helped me with agriculture activities. Here, the security is good but we have to work hard to get money. I earn 150 Afs per day. But I've been injured 30 years ago and I cannot do hard labor.

We are three families in one house and we pay 2,500 Afs per month for rent. The behavior of the locals here is good towards us. But if the security becomes better in my place of origin, I want to go back. We are requesting you to think more about us. We are all internally displaced people. Our living condition is very bad. Most of our relatives who have been displaced do not even have bread for eat."

- **Each year, 400,000 Afghans enter the labor market and less than half find work.** Many work for only a few days a week or month. **Establishing a business is not realistic for individuals with no training, entrepreneurial skills, or experience,** even if given financial capital. The majority of Afghans rely on daily wage labor – those who lived in urban environments in Iran or Pakistan will not easily adapt to agricultural labor, while construction and laboring job opportunities in urban cities are not sufficient to meet demand.
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- Sources: WB, CSO, EASO

Health

- Poor quality services, inequity in services provision, shortage of qualified health care providers particularly women
- High rates of preventable maternal, infant, and child mortality and morbidity;
- **46% of Afghan women were married <18**
- Afghanistan is one of three remaining **polio endemic countries** in the world
- **Vaccinations** impeded by lack of security/humanitarian access

Wealthier people travel abroad for medical treatment, mainly to Pakistan or India. Limited medicines available in Afghanistan. Despite an overall increase in the number of female health professionals, there is still a shortage. This is one of the primary access challenges for women. Dominance of an unregulated private health sector. Costs can be punitively high and quality is unpredictable due to insufficient regulation.

Source: Health Cluster, MoPH

Education

- 2/3 girls do not go to school
- almost 50% girls marry before turning 18 years of age
- 41% of schools in Afghanistan do not have buildings



© UNHCR / S.Rich

Ziarahman, age 8, (left) and Rehimullah, age 10 (right) use the solar lamps provided by UNHCR and partner to read and write and study their lessons. Jalalabad, Afghanistan.

- Primary school enrolment increased from 1 million in 2002 to over 9 million as of 2016, yet an estimated 3.5 million children remain out-of-school. Estimated 2/3 girls do not go to school.
- Only 16% of all schools are girls' schools. Girls continue to get married early (17% before the age of 15, almost 50% before turning 18 years of age).
- 22% of children enrolled in primary schools are permanently absent. Insecurity remains a major concern for parents, who worry about the safety of sending their children to school.
- 41% of schools in Afghanistan do not have buildings.
- Sources: HRW, EASO
- State military forces and non-state armed groups used schools and universities as barracks, as sites to recruit and train children, and for other military purposes. By the end of 2016, the Ministry of Education reported that approximately 1,000 schools were closed due to insecurity, inter-communal violence, and threats from anti-government armed groups.
- Approximately 180 attacks on schools across Afghanistan were documented between 2013 and 2017. Direct attacks included arson, suicide bombings, and IEDs. Attacks on schools peaked during 2014, largely in relation to presidential elections, when non-state armed groups targeted schools used as polling stations. Parliamentary and presidential elections are scheduled to be held in 2018 and 2019, which may see renewed attacks on schools used as polling centres.
- The first eight months of 2017 saw at least 31 attacks on schools, according to media and local sources, with almost half of these attacks affecting girls' education. The Taliban, Islamic State, and Afghan security forces were each responsible for attacks on schools, which involved mortars, airstrikes, and arson.
- In January 2017, unidentified attackers set fire to the Ahmad Shah Baba girls' school in Kabul city, killing the security guard. The same month, Islamic State affiliates abducted 12 teachers and two administrative staff from a government-run madrasa in Nangarhar province.
- In February 2017, two students were killed when a mortar struck a classroom at Shaheed Mawlawi Habib Rahman High School, a government school, in Laghman province. At least five other students suffered injuries in the attack. Also in February, anti-government groups closed six girls' schools in Farah province.

- 10 attacks on higher education were reported in 2016, including several high-profile attacks involving explosions, kidnappings, a beheading, and organized armed raids. A complex attack, involving suicide bombers and gunmen, took place on the American University of Afghanistan in August 2016, when armed assailants stormed the campus. Seven students, one lecturer, and two campus guards were killed in the attack.
- There were 42 verified cases of parties to the conflict occupying schools for military use in 2016, including 34 by government forces. The Ministry of Education reported in January 2017 that some 30 schools were still being used for military purposes by both Afghan government forces and anti-government groups. For example, Afghan soldiers stationed at a high school and a middle school in central Baghlan province.
- **See: UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/72/361-S/2017/821, 24 August 2017: <http://undocs.org/A/72/361>**

Conclusion

Widespread and escalating conflict causing record # civilian casualties especially in Kabul, forced displacement in every region, increase in violence and targeted killings with impunity

Internal protection alternatives (eg. in Kabul, Herat) are not “relevant and reasonable” in the absence of family support or an effective community network

Weak governance and rule of law, limited capacity of National Unity Government and provincial authorities to deliver basic services and implement policies in practical terms

AGEs control or contest almost half the country, young men and boys targeted by parties to the conflict based on perceived support/opposition, high risk of forced recruitment

Many development gains since 2001 have been lost as a result of armed conflict, and serious human rights violations by State and non-State actors, which are the leading causes of internal displacement and forced migration

- On internal protection alternatives (IFA), the **actors of persecution and serious human rights violations act with general impunity**, and have the ability to commit **violence even in major cities** such as Kabul, Herat, and Mazar, which should not be considered safe.
- There is **no anonymity in Afghanistan**, as new arrivals in a neighbourhood will inevitably attract interest, suspicion, and attention. The Taliban and other NSAG have extensive networks of informants (attested also in EASO report on targeting of civilians).
- It is **rare for single men (and especially for single women) to live alone**, which would be perceived by the local community as indicative of immoral behaviour. **Individuals without existing family support or a community network would have no reliable social protection.**
- International protection standards require **an internal protection alternative to be both relevant and reasonable**. Considering the scarce livelihood opportunities, widespread food insecurity and poverty, limited access to education, poor quality healthcare, and lack of adequate shelter and housing in Kabul, Herat, and Mazar, these cities generally would not offer a reasonable alternative to seeking international protection outside Afghanistan for asylum-seekers originating from other parts of the country.