

IDP Task Force - Update on Kunduz – 21 May 2015

Conflict and displacement in Kunduz province has been constant throughout 2015. With no lull in fighting during the winter season, displacement within and from various provincial districts (Imam Sahib, Qalazai, Chahar Dara, Dashte Archi) to the urban area continued almost unabated through the first quarter of the year. By the end of April, the humanitarian agencies members of the IDP Task Force in Kunduz¹ (hereinafter IDP TF) had already assessed and assisted 480 IDP families/ 2,994 individuals in Kunduz city, and some 297 IDP families/ 1,984 individuals in Imam Sahib, amidst challenges in accessing the affected population.

The intensification of simultaneous offensives by non-state armed opposition groups at the end of April in Qalaizal, Imam Sahib, Dashte Archi, Chahar Dara Districts and in the Gultepa area of Kunduz district, and the resulting military operation to counter the insurgency, caused an unprecedented number of internally displaced families arriving to the urban centre during the first weeks of May.

The present summary note provides an update on the activities carried out by the humanitarian community and coordinated by the IDP TF to respond to the immediate life-saving needs of the population displaced from the recent military operation and conflict in Kunduz Province.

¹ This update has been compiled by UNHCR on behalf of the IDP Task Force in Kunduz and the regional IDP Task Force in Mazar. IDP Task Forces are currently present in almost all regions (South/Kandahar, South-East/Gardez, North/Mazar, East/Jalalabad, West/Herat, Central region/Kabul forum). They are co-chaired by UNHCR and DORR to coordinate the humanitarian emergency response to conflict-affected IDPs. Apart from governmental representation, membership includes UN humanitarian agencies, international and national non-governmental organisations, the Afghan Red Crescent Society, ICRC (observer), and UNAMA. The link with other governmental institutions in charge of emergency response is exercised through MORR/DORR.

General situation and patterns of displacement

On 30 April, the Government announced the start of a counter-offensive to halt the advance of non-state armed opposition groups (AGEs). The announcement of the use of artillery and airstrikes was done in conjunction with a call for the population to leave the areas in anticipation of the imminent fighting². During the first three days of the counter-offensive, more than 2,000 families had already signalled their presence to the authorities in Kunduz. In few days, the number of petitions filed with governmental authorities, notably the Department of refugees and Returnees (DORR), grew exponentially³.

On 21 May, about 18,350 families had filed a petition with the authorities to be considered as conflict-induced internally displaced persons (IDPs) and in need for emergency assistance.

Most of the petitioning families originated from Gultepa, Alchin, Talewka, Bozi Qandari, Hazrat Sultan areas (61%); Chahar Dara district (25%); Imam Sahib district (6%), Ali Abad district (5%); fewer families from other neighbouring districts (Khanabad, Dashte Archi).

It is estimated that the majority of families from conflict-affected areas and districts immediately

² This is admissible as a precautionary measure according to treaty-based as well as customary International Humanitarian Law applicable to non-international armed conflicts, and as reflected in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. See Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Convention Art 13 (1); Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Principle 6; Rule 22, Rule 24, Rule 129 “Customary International Humanitarian Law”, ICRC, 2009. However, IHL also demands that the authorities take “all possible measuresin order that the civilian population may be received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition”. See AP II Art 17 (1); Rule 129 *ibid*. Customary IHL also demands care for persons with specific needs. These measures were largely unfulfilled by the governmental authorities.

³ By 3rd May, 4,500 families (2,000 in Kunduz town) filed a petition; the number rose to 4,500 (2,700 in Kunduz town) on 3rd May; 7,500 (5,600 in Kunduz town) on 4th May; 13,800 on 13 May.

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around the urban and semi-urban perimeter of Kunduz (Gultepa, Alchin, Talewka, Bozi Qandari, Hazrat Sultan, Ali Abad, Dashte Archi) have been able to reach the city. However, displacement is also believed to be significant within or between surrounding districts that are currently not accessible to the members of the IDP TF (e.g. Chahar Dara, Imam Sahib). It is estimated that 17-20% of the overall petitions received by the authorities in Kunduz originate from these areas.

Of particular concern is the situation in Imam Sahib district, where a recent offensive by AGEs resulted in sizeable territorial gains and intense confrontation with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Reportedly, these developments provoked the displacement of several thousand families within the district. The area, which was already of difficult access to the humanitarian community, is currently largely cut-off to the members of the IDP TF.

To date, the conflict dynamics remain very fluid. Territorial gains are easily overturned and front lines are shifting daily, creating difficult access dynamics for many humanitarian actors. Although the intensity of the conflict seems to have reduced, sporadic clashes are still reported in semi-urban areas and neighbouring districts.

There are initial reports that population displaced in the centre of town has started to return to their areas of origin – at least temporary and to locations where the situation is relatively more stable and the intensity of the conflict has reduced. Some families move together, while in other cases male members only return. Consulted IDP families reported to have left behind some of their relatives, particularly the elderly, to guard on the fields and the livestock. IDP families are increasingly concerned, as the harvesting season approaches and many of them rely on the harvest to support their living throughout the year.

As emerged from the consultations and observations during the assessments⁴, the profile of the IDP

population reflects the general demographic trends of the region and of Afghanistan in general. There is no evidence of a prevalence of specific age/sex groups, although children continue to represent the visible majority of the population⁵.

The consulted population reported to have arrived in different ways and with different means: crossing the river by boat, with own or family vehicles, on foot. During the assessment, the teams met several cases of persons, including children, with war injuries mainly caused by fragment of artillery or by small-arms fire⁶. In few cases, IDP families reported to have been injured while attempting to cross the river by boat. Some of them had already received treatment in public hospital or in structures run by humanitarian actors.

Families were found scattered all around the urban and semi-urban area of Kunduz, mainly hosted by relatives and acquaintances. An average of 3 to 5 families was found per each compound visited by the assessment teams. Few families managed to rent accommodation and no family was found occupying public buildings.

At the end of last week, some 376 families were initially found living in open air and in precarious conditions at the Sari Dawra area in Kunduz city, allegedly due to lack of family support. Given their situation, these families were immediately assessed and provided with relief assistance.

The assessment so far has not revealed any pattern of displacement linked to ethnic targeting or discrimination. The population arrived in Kunduz urban area is of mixed ethnicity, reflecting the ethnic

was to evaluate the effective displacement of the petitioner families and identify the most urgent needs for immediate delivery of life-saving assistance. In addition, not all members of the teams have a protection expertise. Based on simple tools prepared by UNHCR and the Protection Cluster, the teams were encouraged to address very basic protection-related question.

⁵ Normally around 57-60%

⁶ Given the rapid nature of the assessment, this information remains anecdotic. Authoritative records on conflict-related casualties should be the figures reported by UNAMA Human Rights following their investigations and verifications.

⁴ It must be noted that the assessment teams were not tasked to perform a specific protection assessment, as their main goal

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profile in the district of origin. Seemingly, no situation of ethnically motivated inter-communal tension has so far emerged amongst the displaced and hosting communities in Kunduz.

Freedom of movement seems to be improving over time, both from and to the areas of origin of the displaced families. However, the situation remains extremely fluid and obstacles to movement are severe in areas close to the confrontation lines and where the presence of pro-Government militia is reported. Violations against properties allegedly committed by paramilitary forces have emerged during the dialogue with displaced families.

The lack of an adequate number of female staff in the assessment teams may have restricted the possibility to better detect the specific concerns of women and children. Female family members displaced within the city were found to have general access to the available health services, including pre and post-natal care, also in the health structures supported by the humanitarian community. Yet, the increased population that moved from rural to urban areas is putting a severe strain on these services and humanitarian actors are struggling to provide support.

Most of the displaced children lost access to school, particularly in the areas of origin, also due to the damage sustained by several schools. Some of the educational programmes run in the conflict areas had to be suspended. According to the Department of Education (DoE), 48 schools may have suffered damages or partial destruction in the Kunduz provincial area affected by fighting. In addition, on 17th May, the DoE has reported the occupation of five schools by the Afghan National Army (ANA) in Kunduz. UNICEF is liaising with the DoE to allow access of children to schools in areas of displacement.

The presence of old persons and persons with disabilities is regularly detected during the assessment. Some of the old family members are reportedly still in the areas of origin to look after the crops and the livestock. However, when present in areas of displacement, old persons and persons with

disabilities appear to be well supported by the respective families or by the hosting families. So far, the assessment teams have not recorded any instance of neglect and abandonment of persons with specific needs.

The current response of the IDP Task Force

From the beginning of 2015, the IDP TF in Kunduz, supported by the regional IDP TF in Mazar, mobilised teams to rapidly assess the situation and the needs of the affected populations. As in previous displacement situations, a system was put in place to jointly screen the petitions submitted by the families to DORR, and to prioritise IDPs from the areas most seriously affected by the conflict. Petitions have been screened in light of the accessibility of the IDP TF to areas of displacement and of the integrity of the claim. Petitions coming from areas inaccessible to the members of the IDP TF are communicated to ARCS/ICRC for their consideration, evaluation of their access and possible assessment.

The preliminary screening has been followed by house-to-house visits in all areas where families requesting assistance were reported.

In few days, the pace of the petitions grew so significantly that the IDP TF had to mobilise extra human resources to be able to speed up the assessment process and the subsequent assistance distribution.

There are currently nine teams devoted to the joint assessment, representing a wide array of humanitarian agencies. Teams are composed by staff from UNHCR, WFP partners, NRC, SCI, ACTED, NPO, CHA, and Mediothek. A representative of DORR is present in every team. As frequently in the reality of Afghanistan, achieving gender balance in field work has been a challenge. Only two female staff could be included as part of the assessment teams.

Based on a division of labour per areas and petitions, as of 20 May the teams have been able to cover

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6,723 families and have identified 3,207 families (i.e. 48% of the assessed population) as genuine conflict-induced IDPs in need for emergency humanitarian assistance.

While petitions continue to be filed, albeit at a slower pace, it is estimated that the number of families that will eventually be considered for assessment would be around 13,400.



Verification of the families/ photo UNHCR

The following table represents the progress to date.

Tracking (Families)	Families	%	
Total Petitions = 18,350 families (21st May)			
Inaccessible areas	3,128	16.9%	% of total petitions
Estimated petitions accepted for assessment	13,441	72.7%	% of total petitions
Assessed to 21 th May	6,723	50.0%	% estimated petitions accepted for assessment
Rejected during house to house visit	3,516	52.3%	% of total assessed
Accepted for assistance during house to house visit	3,207	47.7%	% of total assessed
Assistance received (end of 21st May)	2,000	40.0%	% estimated petitions accepted for assessment

The assistance so far provided consists of food, basic relief items and hygiene kits⁷.

- **WFP**, through its local partner, is distributing a full food ration for two months;
- **UNHCR** provides a NFI kit including blankets, household utensils, and emergency shelter items for up to 3,000 families;
- Beyond the 3,000 threshold, **NRC** will complement with cash assistance in substitution of the basic relief items;
- **UNICEF** is providing Hygiene Kits and bed nets and is working with the DoE to ensure access to school for children;
- **WHO** provides its on-going support to the health structures;
- **UNICEF and ACTED** are also planning activities related to child protection assessment, emergency education assessment, WASH assessment and nutrition. This will include possible resources to support families affected by the conflict with hygiene items and clothing.
- **SCI** is supplying 64 clinics in Kunduz with medicines, medical equipment and with nutritional material provided by WFP.
- **MACCA/UNMAS** is planning MRA/MRE interventions through volunteers from education partners, both in areas of displacement and in areas of return. Support from the Department of Education is also being sought.
- Humanitarian actors that are not members of the IDP TF continue their health programs in the area, facing an increasing demand for emergency services.

In order to allow a swift distribution, considering that the stocks are largely coming from Mazar and from Kabul, a staggered distribution process has been organised. Families are assisted in lots of 500. The distribution takes place in a dedicated space in the compound of Mediothek, UNHCR shelter partner in Kunduz. Some 15 staff is involved in the logistics and in preparation, to guarantee an efficient process. The specific needs of women are duly taken

⁷ Information from the IDP TF and directly provided by the mentioned humanitarian actors.

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into account, and they are generally prioritised in the distribution.

As of 20 May, three distributions have already been completed (9-11 May, 12-14 May, 17-19 May) serving approximately 1,500 families. A fourth one will be concluded before 23 May. **It is estimated that by end-May, all the projected 5,000 families would receive the needed assistance.**

The possibility to reinforce the WASH response is also being pursued, since wells have been damaged and the increased population is putting strain on the current resources of the city.



Distribution point in Mediothek/photo UNHCR

Challenges in the response

Humanitarian access and overall security for humanitarian workers

Humanitarian access represents a significant challenge for the members of the IDP TF. In the volatile security situation, only the urban and semi-urban areas of Kunduz remain accessible. A possible extension of the assessment to selected areas in Ali Abad District is now being considered for the upcoming week. While the members of the IDP TF maintain their adherence to principles of humanity, and operational independence, their operational presence only in area under the effective control of government authorities may be perceived as a challenge in their neutrality and impartiality.

A dialogue continues with the ICRC/ARCS on the non accessible areas to the IDP TF members, for their possible access and assessment.

Ensuring the integrity of the assessment process

As the assessment proceeds, there is an increasing tendency to find duplications in the lists of the petitioners and to detect the presence of local residents who managed to include their names on the lists submitted by the authorities to the IDP TF. It is believed that these attempts contribute to the continuous rising of number of petitions. These trends have also been corroborated by evidence gathered both during the pre-screening process during the assessment process⁸.

Sometimes this problem is also amplified by the attempt by political representatives (e.g. Provincial Council members, MPs) to influence the assessment process, by putting pressure on the teams to prioritise certain areas, or by including additional families on the list.

It has been communicated to the authorities at both local and national level that such attitudes are to be avoided as they simply delay the assessment process and hence the much needed delivery of emergency

⁸ Some anecdotic reports have emerged of displaced populations including their names in six different petitions.

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aid to the affected population. The humanitarian and emergency nature of this joint intervention by the IDP TF, directed to meet the most urgent humanitarian needs of the recently displaced population, has also been repeatedly underlined. Chronic poverty needs to be addressed through different governmental programs and by different actors.

Voluntary and sustainable return

From consultations with the displaced population and in line with past trends, it is noted that the intention of the IDP families is to return to their areas of origin as soon as possible. This is a critical time of the year as it is the harvesting season. Many families are depending on the harvest to support their living for the year to come.

Authorities have indicated their intention to promote the return process. In its dialogue with the authorities, UNHCR has underlined that the return must be voluntary and in condition of safety. The safety of the beneficiary population is paramount in guiding the interventions of the IDP TF.

A possibility is being currently explored to monitor the return process through the presence of community representatives and Community Development Councils, as well as through direct contacts with the IDP families.

The sustainable nature of the return will depend on the level of stability in areas of origin and on the level of damage and loss caused by the conflict. While displaced families have currently managed to find coping mechanism through the humanitarian assistance delivered and the generous support of the hosting population, the possibility to harvest and to preserve livestock, on which most of the families' income is based, will be critical to guarantee self-reliance after the return without dependency from prolonged external assistance.

Presence of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), Unexploded Ordnances (UXOs) and land mines in areas of displacement

Areas where IDPs started to return, either temporarily or permanently, are believed to be

heavily contaminated by explosive remnants of war, unexploded ordinances, possibly also by land-mines.

It is critical that Mine Risk Awareness/ Education be reinforced in areas of displacement in Kunduz to alert the population, and that demarcation of hazardous areas and clearance be undertaken as soon as possible where humanitarian access is available.

This will be essential to allow farming activities to resume. Kunduz and neighbouring districts should be prioritised by MACCA/UNMAS and the various actors under their coordination.

In addition, donor support to humanitarian mine action should continue and possibly increase to permit these essential life-saving activities. Consideration should be given by donors to resume the support to MACCA/UNMAS emergency teams, to be quickly mobilised where MRA/MRE activities are needed. Unfortunately, those modalities of intervention were halted countrywide at the beginning of April due to lack of funding.

Cross border dimension

The situation in Kunduz may generate a cross-border out flux of population from Afghanistan into Tajikistan, particularly if the instability in Imam Sahib district continues or if the conflict in the Kunduz area further escalates. UNHCR office in Afghanistan is in contact with UNHCR office Tajikistan to provide updates and information and to inform the contingency planning developed with the Tajik authorities to face possible influxes of conflict-affected populations from Afghanistan.

Resources

Presently, thanks to the joint contributions of the IDP TF members, there is a capacity to support the estimated 5,000 families that the IDP TF members believe will result as displaced and in need for humanitarian assistance after the termination of the ongoing assessment.

However, the situation in Kunduz needs to be looked in relation to the several other scenarios throughout Afghanistan that are currently generating internal displacement, in the Northern Region (Badakshan, Baghlan, Faryab), in the South (Helmand and

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possibly Uruzgan), in the West (Baghdis and possibly Farah), and in the Central region (Wardak and Kapisa). The Kunduz situation has already exceeded the initial planning assumptions on conflict-induced displacement made by the IDP TF for the North East area. It is rapidly reaching the projected level of displacement initially foreseen for in the whole North in 2015, based on earlier trends. While humanitarian agencies – UN and INGOs - are coordinating their complementary efforts and supporting the region with central stockpiling, the situation needs to be monitored and comprehensively assessed at country level, to identify possible gaps for which new resources may be needed.

In addition, should the solution of the conflict not be rapidly in sight, and should the current level of instability continue, the possibility for periodical waves of displacement to Kunduz cannot be excluded. This may prolong the engagement and create a continuous strain on the resources of the humanitarian community.



Distribution point in Mediothek/photo UNHCR

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