

UNHCR COUNTRY OFFICE – Kabul, Afghanistan
Inter-Agency Refugee Chapter Meeting: Pakistani Refugees in Khost and Paktika

DATE: 18 FEBRUARY 2018

PARTICIPANTS

No.	Name	Designation
1	Aurvasi Patel (Chair)	UNHCR Deputy Representative
2	Campbell Macknight	UNHCR Protection Officer
3	Donna Corcoran	UNHCR External Relations Officer
4	Ahmad Jawid Qayumi	UNHCR Associate Program Officer
5	Nigina Moqim (Minutes)	UNHCR External Relations Assistant
6	M.Sadeq Reshtin	Health Net TPO- Grants Coordinator
7	Hamidullah Hamdard	WFP-Co- Program Associate
8	Ezzatullah Saeedi	WFP- Program Officer
9	Laurence Chabirand	UNICEF- Deputy team leader
10	Abdul Wali Walid	MFA- In charge of Refugee and Migration desk
11	Sayed Alam	IMC- Country Director
12	Dr. Jawid	IMC- Program Coordinator
13	John Morss	DACAAR- Director
14	Abdul Reshad Hamza	ORCD- Program Manager
15	Will Carter	NRC- Head of Program
16	Ghulam Tariq	NCA- Wash Cluster Co-lead
17	Rahmatullah Ramani	CoAR- Wash Program Manager
18	Ahmad Fahim Rahmi	MADERA- Operations Director
	Field Office Khost through video-conference (Nagwan Soliman and Nicholas Gichubiri, UNHCR)	

GENERAL UPDATE

The purpose of the meeting was for UNHCR, partners and government stakeholders to coordinate the ongoing response to the refugee situation in Khost and Paktika and to identify and address the needs of this population group.

UNHCR provided an update on the Khost and Paktika situation, including current population figures, return intentions among the remaining population, and barriers to voluntary return. WFP and UNHCR also presented the findings of the joint vulnerability assessments and challenges, before participants discussed their respective concerns and suggestions for 2018, particularly including the need for integration of refugee children in Afghanistan schools to address their education needs, and UNICEF's polio vaccination programme.

- UNHCR explained that the population is not formally recognized as refugees by the Government of Pakistan and therefore is not open to a Tripartite mechanism for voluntary repatriation of refugees. The GoP identifies this population as Internally displaced persons. The conditions of return remain a subject of bilateral negotiations between the Pakistani State authorities and refugee elders in Khost and Paktika; however, the Ghulam Khan border-crossing has been officially closed by the Pakistani authorities since late 2017, apart from a few hours on 7 February when approximately 20 refugee families returned to Pakistan. UNHCR noted that the refugee elders are not a homogenous group but consist of many



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different tribes/groups which may result in fragmented negotiations. Most are unwilling to return, particularly as they are required to register and stay at the Baka Khel IDP camp in Bannu rather than return to their homes.

- The majority of the refugees have also indicated that conditions in their places of origin are currently not conducive for return; including threats posed by unexploded ordnance and insecurity associated with ongoing military operations in some areas of NWA. Therefore UNHCR does not foresee a large number of returns in 2018.
- The estimated population is currently 100,000, with approximately 75,000 individuals registered with UNHCR as 'active'. Some 5,500 individual records in Khost have been inactivated after refugees did not collect food assistance for three consecutive months, although it is observed that for reasons of security and cost of transportation refugees are not necessarily able to collect assistance from distribution points. Another 7,158 individual records have been closed based on confirmation of their return to Pakistan. However, some refugee families who returned to Pakistan have come back to Afghanistan for a second time. As the border is porous and insecure, systematic monitoring is not feasible. In 2018, verification of the registered population data will be necessary, ideally by the Government (with technical support and assistance from UNHCR).
- UNHCR supports the Government of Pakistan with the IDP response; is engaged in advocacy; and has offered support although this is not taken up due to the perception of the population as temporarily dislocated persons) by the Government of Pakistan. UNHCR cannot directly monitor the conditions of return for refugees / IDPs to NWA due to the lack of the required "no objection certificate (NOC)" from the Government of Pakistan and its armed forces. No UN agency has a permanent operational presence in NWA although the Pakistan RC conducts missions periodically, and national NGOs are operating in NWA.
- UNHCR emphasized that refugees in Khost and Paktika need improved access to education. The priority in 2018 should be to introduce refugee students to the Afghan curriculum and integrate them in Afghan schools, given the limited prospects of significant returns to Pakistan for the foreseeable future. UNHCR noted the potential for inclusion of refugees in a joint programming proposal for funding from Education Cannot Wait (ECW) that would be additional to the government's existing budget for education. NRC observed that its current EiE program for primary education (with approximately 3,500 boys and girls enrolled at schools within and outside Gulan camp) would likely continue beyond April 2018, but NRC's EiE program (which draws on core funding) is not sustainable or appropriate for multi-year funding.
- In 2018, food distributions will continue to refugees through Tripartite agreements for Khost (WFP-UNHCR-APA) and Paktika (WFP-UNHCR-ORCD). Polio vaccinations (UNICEF) will also continue despite resistance to vaccination campaigns among some refugees and host communities. MFA explained that they will coordinate a meeting between UNHCR and other government counterparts (MoRR, MoI, MoE, MoPH, NSC) to discuss a transfer of responsibility for registration and future verification of population data as well as provision of basic services to the population
- **DACAAR** raised the point that for 2018 they have added Khost and Paktika in their area of concern. Many of the needs in Khost and Paktika remain the same and have also grown as refugee families have settled and spread out geographically. DACAAR also emphasized registering these refugees and conducting an intention study. Three major tribes have recognitions from Pakistani authorities/police in border talks and return policies.

Action Point: UNHCR will share a response concerning the request of the partners for funding requests for 2018 inter agency response plan.

- **WFP** agreed with the operational change from emergency to a focus on self-reliance and resilience activities for refugee communities in 2018. WFP plans to shift focus to livelihoods programmes, such as cash-for-work initiatives as this can stimulate the local market for the host community, as well as vocational skills training. WFP is concerned about malnutrition, food and security in Gulan Refugee Camp, there is a need for assessment of these refugees situation.

Action points:

- UNHCR will issue the inter-agency refugee updates on a regular (quarterly) basis.
- UNHCR and WFP will share the mission report following the UNHCR-WFP joint mission to Khost in November, for exploring/designing joint WFP-UNHCR programming in Khost and Paktika.
- **NRC** has been operating in Khost since 2014, primarily providing education in emergencies and accelerated learning programs as well as shelter and other activities. NRC is concerned about the legal status of these refugees and that under which legal category/definition these refugees can come. In terms of education support, a total number of 3,000 children are enrolled in NRC's accelerated primary education learning every year. The challenges in education section is the language differences and certification.
- **ORCD:** A challenge for ORCD is the insecurity which affects food distribution processes. Due to insecurity, food distribution has been interrupted several times in the past.
- **IMC** provided an update on IMC's health services which are funded by UNHCR and OCHA.
- It is important to continue advocacy and fund-raising in order to maintain basic services for refugees in Khost and Paktika until the end of 2018, particularly as many partners face challenges in funding.
- UNHCR will consolidate the needs of partners/NGOs by sectors for the refugee section of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) with UNHCR's funding needs/requests for 2018.
 - Participants agreed that the issue of ensuring continued education services for Pakistani refugees in Khost and Paktika should be included as part of the Education in Emergencies (EiE) Working Group, for further discussions and practical recommendations, while parallel efforts will be made through development actors to promote the inclusion of refugee children in MoE's strategies and programmes.
 - Meetings and follow up is needed with the Afghan government authorities who were not able to attend the meeting, including MoRR, MoE, MoPH and MoI.

Action Point: UNHCR will follow-up with MFA, MoRR, MoI, MoE, MoPH and the NSC to coordinate a gradual transfer of responsibility to the Government for registration and issuance of individual identity documentation, access to education, birth registration of refugee children, and other integration measures.

Conclusion

- It is important to continue advocacy and fund-raising in order to maintain basic services for refugees in Khost and Paktika until the end of 2018, particularly as many partners face challenges in funding.
- UNHCR will consolidate the needs of partners/NGOs by sectors for the refugee section of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) with UNHCR's funding needs/requests for 2018.



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UNHCR Afghanistan Data Portal - <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/afg>

