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iDMC internal displacement monitoring centre

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AFGHANISTAN

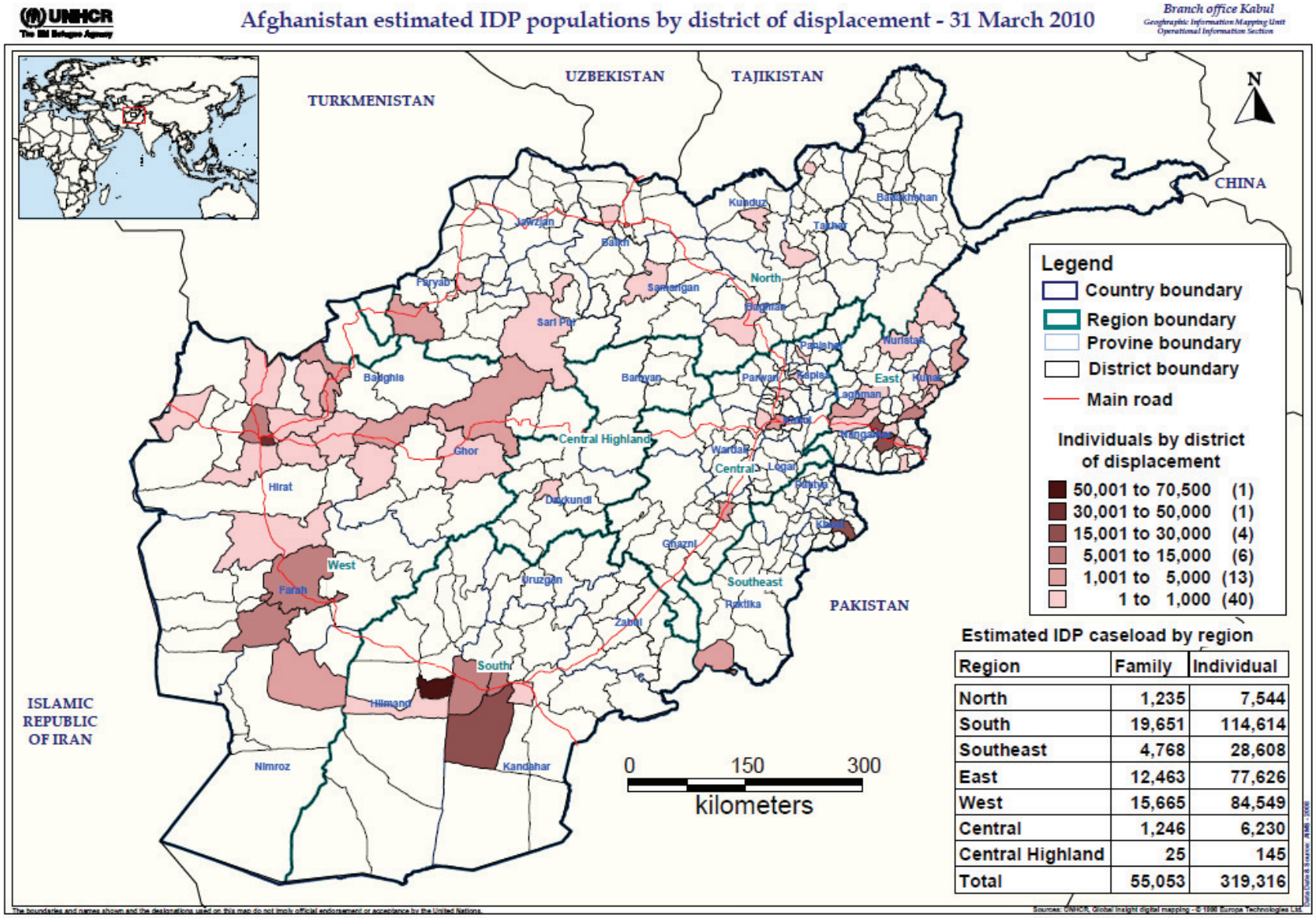
Armed conflict forces increasing numbers of Afghans to flee their homes

After large, and mostly spontaneous, return movements following the ousting of the Taliban regime in 2002, internal displacement is again on the rise, with new displacements as a result of the intensification of fighting in many regions. The latest estimates indicate that 240,000 persons are currently internally displaced due to armed conflict and insecurity. Data-tracking and the provision of humanitarian aid is inordinately difficult due to security and logistical constraints, particularly where displacement serves as a short-term coping mechanism.

IDPs in Afghanistan suffer from lack of access to basic services and legal protection mechanisms, including lack of access to land (repossession of land and landlessness), absence of livelihoods, additional risks due to the minority status of some and political and ethnic dynamics in places of displacement. Female heads of households are particularly vulnerable due to their exclusion from social and economic services and the lack of social protection measures in the country. Access to education has been affected by attacks on schools, especially girls' schools and female teachers.

In 2009, international assistance constituted around 90 per cent of public expenditure in Afghanistan. However, relief and development assistance are not always based on assessments or needs, and have also occasionally been seen as a means to achieve counter-insurgency objectives. Attacks on humanitarian personnel and premises by armed opposition groups also effectively deny IDPs their right to seek and receive impartial humanitarian assistance.

Many IDPs rely on their savings, informal day labour or the support of extended social networks for their survival. Some IDPs search for new livelihood opportunities in urban areas, a pattern shared by economic migrants. But while return is improbable for some, economic recession affecting many parts of the country has contributed to increased pressure on host communities and made it harder for IDPs to resettle elsewhere or integrate locally.



Source: UNHCR

More maps are available at www.internal-displacement.org

Background

In December 2001, the ousting of the Taliban regime by a US-led, international military intervention under *Operation Enduring Freedom*, translated into a period of reconstruction and development. A moderate Islamic constitution was introduced alongside with election of a president and national assembly. An ambitious five-year development framework (the Afghanistan Compact of 2006) and national and international endorsement of an Afghanistan National Development Strategy formed some of the main policies.

Democratisation, investment in reconstruction and development and deployment of international troops – the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to ensure stability and US troops to combat Al-Qaeda – generated expectations that Afghanistan would be rebuilt and the lives of its citizens improved.

But despite ISAF's mandate to bring law and order to the country (UNSC, 2003; UNSC, 2009), the underlying conditions that helped bring the Taliban to power have not been addressed (ICG, July 2008: 7). For most Afghans, neither physical security nor access to jobs, health care and education have improved sufficiently. Infrastructure and homes have been destroyed, and, with them, Afghan livelihoods (UNAMA, July 2009). Afghanistan now ranks 181 out of 182 countries in the UN's Human Development Report and is amongst the world's most gender-unequal states (UNDP, 2009). Forty per cent of the population is unemployed (AIHRC, December 2009; Oxfam, November 2009).

There has been a steady rise in violence across the country, particularly in Pashtun areas where the insurgency is at its strongest. According to UN figures – disputed by the insurgency (Voice of Jihad, 15 January 2010) – 2,412 civilians were killed in 2009 by the parties to the conflict, up 14 per cent from 2008. 67 per cent of the death toll was attributed to the armed opposition groups (AOG) and 25 per cent to the pro-government forces (PGF). Suicide and improvised explosive devices attacks caused more civilian casualties than any other tactic, killing 1,054 civilians or 44 per cent of the total civilian casualties in 2009. Although such attacks have primarily targeted government or international military forces, they are often carried out in areas frequented by civilians. There seems to be an increasing tendency of AOGs basing themselves in civilian areas in order to blur the distinction between combatants and civilians (UNAMA, 2010).

Whereas ISAF has tried to reduce civilian deaths and thus improve relations with the Afghanistan government and eliminate a recruiting tool for the Taliban, the use of air strikes and the proximity of military facilities in civilian areas nevertheless continues to increase the danger faced by civilians (BBC, 5 February 2007; Reuters, 16 April 2009; NATO, 30 August 2009). It is moreover feared that the Afghan and international troop surges in 2010 will lead to the intensification of the conflict, with dire humanitarian consequences (Council on Foreign Relations, March 2009; NYT, 1 December 2009; IRIN, 19 January 2010; RI, 26 January 2009).

Hamid Karzai was re-elected to a second presidential term in November 2009 amid allegations of corruption, inefficiency and bad governance (Glatzer, 2008; CNN, 2 November 2009). The ongoing conflict has moreover limited the government's capacity to deliver basic services, while further widening the gap between the government and its citizens (UN Secretary-General, 28 December 2009). In rural areas where the government has little or no presence, the resurgent Taliban provides informal "shadow" governance. The conflict has also spread into areas previously less affected, such as the North, North-East, West and Central areas and the insurgency is now capable of inflicting damage in the heart of the capital, Kabul (Reuters, 19 January 2010). As a result, the Afghan government, the UN and several foreign governments are currently exploring ways to en-

gage in dialogue with moderate Taliban elements (NYT, 17 January 2010; UNAMA, January 2010).

In addition to a substantial economic migration of Afghans to neighboring countries, there are currently 1.78 million registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan and 980,000 in Iran (UNHCR, 2009; Brookings Bern, 2009). But the worsening insecurity in Afghanistan is increasingly hindering refugees' repatriation; the number of Afghan refugees who returned home from Pakistan and Iran in 2009 dropped to the lowest level since 2002 (IRIN, 29 December 2009).

The critical humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is reflected in the appeal for funding of the Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP), which represented an increase of 30 per cent compared to the 2009 HAP. Yet, humanitarian needs go beyond those documented in the Humanitarian Action Plan.

Displacement figures

The National IDP Task Force - a multilateral response mechanism co-chaired by UNHCR and Afghanistan's Ministry of Refugees and Repartition (MoRR) – estimates that 240,000 persons currently are internally displaced due to armed conflict and insecurity. An additional 89,000 are displaced by natural disasters (UNHCR, 31 March 2010).

Out of those displaced by armed conflict and insecurity, 79,000 were displaced before January 2003; 161,000 have been displaced since then. 36 per cent of the IDPs are children, 12 per cent under the age of five, while only one per cent is older than 60 years of age.

Agencies involved in IDP protection and response in Afghanistan are confronted with the intrinsic difficulty of undertaking needs assessment, gaps analyses and updating data. Displacement has occurred at different times, in different parts of the country, and for different reasons, forcing three out of four Afghans to leave their homes at some point (Oxfam, November 2009; UNHCR, September 2008). Moreover, IDP profiling is complicated by security and logistical constraints in accessing conflict, rapid changes in the situation on the ground, the temporary nature of some displacements and by methodological difficulties in distinguishing between forced internal displacement and economic migration, particularly in urban settings. These challenges are thoroughly discussed in UNHCR's national IDP profiling reports (UNHCR, August 2008; UNHCR, March 2010).

Nevertheless, some researchers have indicated that the real IDP-figures are higher than the National IDP Task Force estimates. Using case-based evidence, the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement argued in June 2009 that the number of conflict-affected IDPs in southern Kandahar province alone may be as high as two hundred thousand; and that the situation is similar in Helmand and Uruzgan provinces. The report argues that the reason for this disparity is that some conflict-affected IDPs in the south, southeast and east, who are assumed to have returned home, in fact still are displaced. Moreover, some ethnic Pashtuns displaced from the northern provinces out of fear of ethnic cleansing by victorious anti-Taliban militias, later – after leaving IDP camps in Kandahar, Helmand and Herat provinces - found that the hostility, which led to their displacement in the first place, still existed, prevented them from reintegrating into their home communities (IRIN, 21 June 2009; BI, June 2009).

Patterns of displacement

Conflict-induced displacement in Afghanistan represents a "fluid picture of a dynamic situation of active and increasing conflict" (Brookings, 22 June 2009: 2). Apart from civilians forced to flee the ongoing conflict or local disputes over resources or access to land, refugee returnees and

deportees from Pakistan or Iran come back to a bleak situation. Lack of access to land, jobs and basic social services force some into secondary displacement, often to urban areas. Many IDPs who live on their own or with host families in rural areas depend for their survival on handouts from host communities, savings, labor and humanitarian aid (UNAMA, 2008; Civic, 2009).

The National IDP Task Force statistics show that the geographical distribution of conflict-induced IDPs is as follows: 115,000 people displaced in the south, 29,000 in the south-east, 78,000 in the east, and 85,000 in the west (UNHCR, November 2009).

While the vast majority of the estimated 1.2 million IDPs who lived in camps in 2002 have returned home, an estimated 185,000 IDPs lived until recently in camp-like settlements in the south, west and south-east of Afghanistan. Those who were displaced during the conflict with the USSR and the following inter-Mujahedeen clashes generally have resolved their situation, but some IDPs who fled local warlords in the north after the fall of the Taliban remain. Zhare e Dasht camp, for example, which housed nearly 40,000 persons in 2003, now holds 6,000 persons (information from UNHCR, January 2010). Some of those who have attempted to return to the North, struggle to reintegrate and, despite follow up by UNHCR and DoRR, remain displaced close to their homes (BI, June 2009; information from UNHCR, April 2010).

More recently, the conflict between AOG and PGF has generated the majority of new, mainly temporary, displacements. Some 318,000 conflict induced IDPs received assistance from UN agencies between January 2007 and July 2008, indicating the scale of the trend, mainly occurring in the south, but also the south-east and the west (UNHCR, August 2008). In February this year, amid ambiguous messages by PGF and hindered by AOGs, 27,000 persons fled Marjah town in the Hilmand province, most of them seeking protection in Lashkargah city, where they were assisted by humanitarian organisations and social networks. Around 8,000 have returned after the fighting ceased, but continued military activity and the presence of UXOs and mines prevents the rest from returning (UNHCR, April 2010; IRIN, 29 March 2010). Planned military operations against AOG strongholds in Kandahar are expected to lead to more displacements this year (IRIN, 30 March 2010).

Ethnic and tribal conflicts over access to pasture and arable land also cause displacement. For example, a long-standing conflict between Hazara farmers in the central highlands and a Pashtun group of Kuchi pastoralists recurred in June 2008, displaced 7,000 families to Kabul and the central highlands. Under a peace agreement, the Kuchi withdrew, allowing the Hazara IDPs to return to their villages despite risk of renewed conflict.

While over 5.2 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran since 2002, some of those who do not return voluntarily are particularly vulnerable to secondary displacement in Afghanistan (IRIN, 19 June 2009; information from UNHCR, January 2010). The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) found that 67 per cent were unable to return to their places of origin due to a lack of land, or left after finding that their land had been occupied by others (AIHRC, 2007). Many of the refugee returnees have settled in spontaneous camps in the east.

Others have settled in Kabul, one of the world's fastest growing cities since 2002, accounting for an estimated 30 per cent of a population increase from 1.5 to 4.5 million people (information from UNHCR, January 2010). Kabul's expansion can also be attributed to mixed (in-) migration of groups of economic migrants and IDPs from rural areas often residing in informal settlements in many cases without access to public electricity, water and sanitation services (UNHCR, 2008; AIHRC, December 2009).

Natural disasters add to the complexity of the displacement situation in Afghanistan. Drought and harsh winter conditions regularly pose a threat to vulnerable groups, as do earthquakes and floods. In 2009, earthquakes in Nangarhar killed 22 people and destroyed nearly 300 houses. Spring floods in the north, east and west affected 22,000 households. In August, another 4,000 people were affected by flooding in Jalalabad (HAP, 2010).

Obstacles to durable solutions

Insecurity, landlessness, a lack of shelter, and an absence of sufficient job opportunities or services in rural areas prevent IDPs from returning home or sustainably resettling elsewhere.

In an attempt to further weaken public support for the government, insurgents have targeted schools, medical services, humanitarian aid and commercial supply lines. These attacks have a severe impact far beyond their immediate victims and help explain reasons for the drop of return rates 2008. In 2009, UNHCR counted a modest 7,000 IDPs returning to the north of the country.

Land mines and UXOs also pose a significant problem - yet 15 per cent of the Afghan population is believed to live in mine-affected areas (Oxfam, November 2009). Landmines restrict areas available for cultivation and prevent people from returning home. Indeed, the UN Mine Action Centre reports most victims of mines are refugee-returnees or IDPs having limited mine risk awareness. In 2008 mines and other explosives claimed the lives of 752 people, most of them children (IRIN, 5 April 2009; HAP, 2010).

Evidence provided by UNHCR and supported by the Brookings Institute suggests that some of those who opt to return become displaced again; local integration could be a better alternative for refugee returnees and for IDPs who have sought protection in urban areas (UNHCR, 2008). MoRR has, nevertheless, encouraged people to return to their original areas (IRIN, 23 April 2009).

Widespread destruction of property and the illegal occupation of homes during years of conflict have created a severe shortage of adequate housing in Afghanistan. Lack of adequate housing disproportionately affects returnees and IDPs, in particular female headed households and those who have returned most recently. Renewed armed conflict has also created new shelter needs. Few IDPs apart from Afghanistan's protracted caseload live in camp-like settings. In urban areas, increased urban migration has placed intense pressure on shelter options for IDPs and returnees. In rural areas, returnees and IDPs live with relatives in overcrowded and poor quality shelters with few livelihood opportunities and limited access to clean water, electricity and sanitation.

Sub-standard living conditions result in health-related complications, including respiratory diseases. This is particularly true for displaced children during the harsh winters. For example, the majority of children living in the Charahee Qambar squatter slum on the outskirts of Kabul, where IDPs are known to reside, were recently found to have pneumonia (HP, November 2009). One in five children dies before the age of five (UNDP, 2007). Attacks on health care workers and facilities have moreover forced many clinics to close.

Food insecurity is endemic across Afghanistan: A combination of natural disasters, many years of drought, high food prices, and conflict has exacerbated an already fragile situation (RI, 26 January 2009). At present, 7.3 million Afghans are at risk of hunger. IDPs are particularly vulnerable. Nearly half the population is chronically malnourished, almost 6 per cent acutely and 1.6 per cent severely (WFP, 2009; ReliefWeb, 10 December 2009).

Since 2002, enrolment of children in primary school has increased to more than six million, but some two million children, two-thirds of whom

are girls, do not attend primary school (Oxfam, November 2009). The prevailing conflict has forced closure of up to 80 per cent of schools in southern areas where internal displacement is highest.

Access to land and landlessness continue to remain a main obstacle to durable solutions. Half of the Afghan population does not enjoy access to land. Meanwhile, insufficient documentation, competing land claims, and judicial corruption hinder the resolution of property disputes. In many parts of the country, land has been distributed to political and/or military allies without regard to prior titles, thus creating several layers of valid claims to ownership (AIHRC, 2009). Those whose property has been expropriated or damaged are often unable to secure redress.

Traditional justice mechanisms have generally proved more effective at reconciling parties to land and property disputes; however, as in the formal justice system, rarely uphold women's property and inheritance rights. The government administered Land Allocation Scheme has failed to provide the majority of landless returnees and IDPs with a viable option for reintegration. Concerns exist due to corruption in the beneficiary selection process, the isolated location of land available, and absence of basic services and employment (Smith and Lamey, December 2009; NPR, December 2008).

Efforts to strengthen the rule of law in Afghanistan have so far been unsuccessful in ensuring access to justice for the vast majority of Afghans. The formal justice system is widely distrusted and weak institutions, inadequate infrastructure and resources are major barriers for individuals who try to obtain their legal rights through the courts. The effectiveness of the judiciary is further undermined by widespread corruption, poor oversight and interference by local power-brokers, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. For vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as returnees, IDPs and women, these difficulties are greatly compounded by a lack of affordable legal assistance (USIP, March 2009; Wardak, 2004).

National and international response

International assistance constitutes around 90 per cent of all public expenditure in the country. Given the links between development and security, aid also has a major impact on peace and stability in the country (ACBAR, 2008).

While much has been achieved since 2001, the UN and the Afghan government have repeatedly called for more efficient funding (NYT, 2 October 2009). The donors are spending 70 per cent outside the government's budget, which makes it much harder to ensure that their programs are supporting national priorities, (Alertnet, 6 July 2009). Much foreign funding is channeled through Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in places where foreign nations have political or military interests despite reports claiming that this increase local conflict and fuel corruption (Boston Globe, 16 September 2009),

UNAMA (UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan), the Government of Afghanistan and ISAF have pursued a comprehensive approach to stabilising Afghanistan, linking security with development projects, but as long as humanitarian UN agencies and NGOs are perceived as forming part of that strategy, their ability to realise their humanitarian work is undermined (ANSO, 2010; IRIN 20 January 2010).

Humanitarian access

In December 2009, OCHA launched the Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) for 2010, synthesising humanitarian needs and planned response for the following year. The 2010 HAP highlighted insecurity as the main threat to humanitarian response in Afghanistan. Much of the South, South

East and parts of the East are largely inaccessible for aid agencies, and insecurity is spreading to the previously stable areas of the North, North East, Central and Western provinces. UN agencies are presently only able to access approximately half of the country.

From January to June 2009, UN-registered security incidents increased by 43 per cent compared to the first half of 2008. A deadly attack on an international guesthouse in Kabul in October 2009 and ongoing threats against the humanitarian community have forced UN agencies to review security arrangements and to reassess priorities (HAP 2010). But while conflict-affected areas in the south and south-east have become humanitarian black-holes – no-go zones for which information is sketchy (RI, 20 July 2009) – NGOs may be able to work in some areas under the control of non-state armed actors.

Humanitarian response

The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) includes a Refugee Returnees and IDP Sector Strategy (RRI). Under this strategy, the government is responsible for IDPs, but international actors complement the government's efforts. The response is led by the National IDP Task Force – jointly chaired by UNHCR and the MoRR – which coordinates registration and verification exercises, needs assessments and corresponding responses with the aim of providing durable solutions to IDPs (IDP Task Force, August 2009).

UNHCR provides emergency assistance to IDPs most in need, distribution of non-food items such as kitchen tools, blankets and clothing and provision of emergency shelter for winter preparedness being among assistance provided. In December 2009, UNHCR launched a winterisation program to provide basic necessities to 200,000 vulnerable Afghans, including IDPs and returned refugees. The delivery of this assistance is primarily implemented by international and national NGOs (HAP, 2010).

In the course of 2009, the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) delivered food to 4.4 million people affected by conflict and disaster. Of those, 80,000 were registered IDPs and returnees. In order to prevent forced migration, FAO provided seeds and fertiliser for the autumn 2009 season to 38,740 vulnerable households affected by the crisis of high food prices and drought in Uruzgan, Daikundi, Faryab, Jawzjan, Laghman and Nangarhar provinces.

Moreover, UN agencies and international NGOs working together in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Cluster provided safe water to more than 100,000 people in the north and north-east and are planning to provide water for another 400,000 people in 12 drought- and flood-affected provinces. Around 300,000 people benefited from the construction of water points and latrines, and hygiene education (HAP, 2010).

The Mine Action Program of Afghanistan (MAPA) deployed emergency mine-clearance teams to areas where returnees were resettling and where mines were discovered. The program also provides education on mine risks to 23,250 returnees in partnership with UNHCR.

Many schools which have been targeted by non-state armed actors are closed, thus reducing access to education. In March 2009, 81 schools were reopened by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with community leaders. Another 210 schools were reopened in June, leaving an estimated 460 schools closed because of security concerns.

Note: This is a summary of IDMC's internal displacement profile on Afghanistan. The full profile is available online here.

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About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capaci-ties to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing com-prehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to en-hance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people.

In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org .

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