HIGHLIGHTS

The scale, severity and complexity of needs for emergency and transitional shelter remains high, particularly among new and protracted IDPs who require core, supplementary and seasonal assistance, as well as longer-term support to rebuild their resilience. In 2020, 3.68 million people will either have shelter, NFI needs or require support to cope with the harsh winter season across 34 provinces in Afghanistan. Across the country, 72 per cent of displaced households reported shelter needs as their second top priority need after food for survival with the highest shelter needs being reported from the North East and Western region by 80 per cent of the displaced population, followed by the Northern region at 72 per cent and the Central region at 71 per cent.

Around two-thirds of displaced households (65 per cent) reside either in collective centres, open space, makeshift shelter, tents, and poor transitional shelter that do not protect them from the elements. Often having fled with nothing more than personal possessions, hundreds of thousands of conflict IDPs require basic shelter to maintain their well-being/survival. Many of those who have been displaced also remain in a state of displacement for prolonged periods, with no plans to return to places of origin (nearly 90 per cent of IDPs). IOM’s DTM data shows that 4.1 million IDPs who have been displaced since 2012 remain in urban and rural settlements residing in sub-standard shelters characterized by a lack of adequate privacy and dignity; poor protection from harsh weather (particularly during winter); inadequate access to safe water and sanitation facilities; lack of connection to basic infrastructure and services; poor/non-existent security of tenure and a lack of adequate settlement planning.

With 70 per cent of Afghanistan being mountainous, many people living in high altitude areas remain susceptible to harsher weather conditions. Insufficient access to blankets and heating materials for the winter season is also a significant driver of need, with 64 per cent of households reportedly owning less than one blanket per household member - due to reduced ability to cope derived by interrupted livelihoods. These concerns disproportionately affect persons with specific needs, women girls, children and the elderly.

In 2020, The Emergency Shelter and Non- Food Items (ES-NFI) cluster aims to support 1.05 million vulnerable people affected by conflict and natural disaster with shelter, NFI and winterization assistance. The cluster prioritizes the provision of timely, targeted and appropriate emergency lifesaving assistance through the distribution and installation of emergency shelter kits and/or materials to displaced people, the rehabilitation, repair or upgrade of existing shelters that are in poor conditions. Standard NFI Kit will continue to be distributed where needed. Seasonal items (such as warm clothing, heating materials and thermal blankets in winter), will also be distributed to sustain lives and reduce the impact of winter. The Cluster will continue to assist the most vulnerable families with one-off winterization assistance to minimize the cost of heating and deter people from engaging in harmful coping mechanisms. Priority target populations include: IDPs, returnees and vulnerable host communities. In 2020, the cluster requests US$ 85.5 million and aims to reach 1,050,000 vulnerable people with shelter, NFI and winterization support.
During the first quarter of 2020, the cluster continued the delivery of winter support to beneficiaries residing in the coldest parts of the country under a joint plan with the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. As the winter progressed, hundreds of thousands of people remained in poor shelters, in need of fuel for heating, winter clothing and extremely vulnerable to rain, snow and freezing temperatures. 95,000 households were estimated to need support over winter 2019/20 to alleviate their exposure to the elements. With the ongoing support of the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, donors, partners, 80 percent (76,589 households) across the country received winter support. Nevertheless, 18,761 families, 20 per cent of the people in need remain unassisted.

At the same time, displacement due to ongoing conflict and natural disasters continued to drive humanitarian needs in Afghanistan. 55,728 individuals fled their homes due to conflict with total of 25 out of 34 provinces recording some level of forced displacement. In addition to this, close to 65,500 people returned from neighbouring countries to Afghanistan including 64,000 from Iran, and 1,500 from Pakistan. Some 5,800 people were also deported from Turkey in 2020, while a small number also returned from Europe.

In addition, due to the scale and spread of transmission, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, which began in December 2019, 714 people across 27 provinces in Afghanistan are now confirmed to have COVID-19. Some 43 people have recovered, and 23 people have died. Afghanistan is likely to be significantly affected due to its weak health system and proximity to the Islamic Republic of Iran, with tens of thousands of people crossing the border from Iran each day. Furthermore, more than four million people displaced since 2012 are estimated to remain displaced in 2020. Internally displaced people (IDPs) are also especially reliant on either humanitarian assistance or casual labour and any breaks to humanitarian supply pipelines or employment opportunities will hit these vulnerable groups hard. Partners hold fears for 87,000 people still living in displacements sites in Herat and Badghis after the drought and recent conflict. Assessments have shown these IDPs are in poor health, making them more vulnerable in the context of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 outbreak comes against the backdrop of the spring flood season which typically runs from March to June each year. In first quarter of 2020, some 34,432 people were affected by natural disasters throughout Afghanistan. Over 14,000 individuals have been affected by floods across the country as heavy snow melts and rivers swell, inundating communities. Humanitarian partners plan annually for this flood response but there is a risk that life-saving relief supplies may be stretched if a widescale COVID-19 response is required simultaneously and pipelines are interrupted.

**RESPONSE**

1. USD 17.6 Million had been secured for the joint winterization strategy with Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan; and over 23 partners delivering winter support to more than 536,000 vulnerable people across the country.
2. As of 01 January, to 30 March 2020, the cluster reached 356,556 individuals including 22% men, 23% women, 28% boys and 27% girls with shelter assistance, NFIs and winterization assistance.
3. Partners reached 83,713 individuals with emergency shelter, transitional shelter and shelter repair/ upgrade support.
4. 49,971 individuals have been reached with core NFI packages and 56,183 individuals have been reached with supplemental shelter and NFI assistance.
5. 297,478 vulnerable individuals received winterization support.
6. The Shelter / NFI cluster continues to maintain emergency preparedness with contingency stocks and monitoring of gaps.

GAPS / CHALLENGES

1. The scale, severity and complexity of needs for emergency and transitional shelter remains high, particularly among new and protracted IDPs with 72 per cent of displaced households reporting shelter needs as their second top priority need after food for survival (77%).

2. The cluster remains heavily underfunded having received 2% of its annual requirements. Emergency responses to covid-19 may result in normal programming in existing response locations being compromised by new covid-19 needs.

3. The flood season and covid-19 response may place a simultaneous strain on human and physical resources in different parts of the country. Pipelines of key shelter and NFI stocks may be affected.

4. Based on post distribution monitoring, beneficiaries have reported concerns over the quality of shelter items, delayed distribution of seasonal items and varying standards. There is a desire throughout the population groups for long-term shelter solutions so shelter maintenance is no longer a burden.

5. Security-related constraints may limit partner’s capacity to access affected people.

6. The spread of COVID-19 may affect the ability of humanitarians to go to the field and respond – including undertaking assessments, registration and monitoring.

7. Delays in delivery of core relief items to affected regions may be experienced due to movement restrictions, border closures, as well as other factors including conflict and natural disasters.