

IOM in Herat, Western Afghanistan

Facts & Figures

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Returns – the IOM office in Herat recently organized the first return of internally displaced persons from the giant Maslakh IDP camp. The IOM road convoy carrying 269 returnees left Maslakh for Badghis province on 27 February. The 77 returning families arrived in Qal-e-Naw, those who were not from this town spent the night in IOM's newly constructed transit centre before travelling on to their villages the following morning.

The families each received a reintegration package comprising an IOM tent and family kit, 50 kilos of wheat donated by the UN World Food Programme, 50 kilos of seeds and 50 kilos of fertilizer donated by the Danish NGO DAACAR.

When they arrived home, farmers received an IOM-donated set of agricultural tools through the NGO Norwegian Project Office (NPO). NPO will continue to monitor conditions in the villages and channel international aid to vulnerable groups.

By early February, some 12,000 people in Maslakh had already registered with IOM to return home, providing they were given agricultural tools and seeds to cultivate their land. IOM has scheduled a return of some 3,000 persons to Badghis province later this month. Working with NGOs, IOM will continue to provide returning families with food, seeds and tools to re-start their lives.

Registration – by mid-February, IOM supported by UNHCR, other UN agencies and NGOs, completed a major re-registration of internally displaced Afghans living in Maslakh camp.

The re-registration began on 12 February when some 400 staff deployed at 36 registration centres throughout the camp fixed non-removable plastic wristbands on over 118,000 people in the course of the day.

Before the re-registration, aid agencies had only guessed at the number of IDPs in Maslakh. Abuse of the camp registration system under the Taliban – multiple registrations and registration of local people – put the official camp population at 324,000. An IOM count of tents and shelters showed some 23,500 dwellings. Assuming that about five people live in each dwelling, this would mean a population of some 117,500.

A battalion of 700 troops deployed by the Governor of Herat provided security and crowd control and also sealed the camp to discourage local people from registering to get access to international aid distributions. General Salahaddin Joyan, who supervised the operation, reported that as many as 600 families were turned back from military checkpoints.

As the re-registration was taking place, IDP families arriving at IOM checkpoints outside Herat were directed to Shaidayee, one of the two other Herat camps managed by IOM that had been previously closed to new arrivals. At the camp, the newly arrived are given food, tents, blankets and other non-food items.

IOM Western Afghanistan Chief Rafael Robillard described the long awaited registration exercise as a success. "The registration was needed because we had to separate the IDPs



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from the urban poor because, while both face similar problems, the solutions for each group are different. For the IDPs, who fall within IOM's mandate, the solution is to help them return home and restart their lives. That means redirecting some of the aid away from Maslakh and into the villages. For the urban poor, the solution is to revive Herat's economy and create jobs and disposable income."

Early the following morning, camp residents began to file through the registration centres to exchange their wristbands for the family ration/distribution book.

Inside the centres, registrars asked heads of families about the number of people in the family; their ethnic origin; province, district and village of origin; how they became displaced and when; the main source of income in their village; if they want to return home; when; under what conditions; and if not, why not.

Registrars noted a disproportionate number of female-headed households, suggesting that some men, encouraged by a relatively wet winter, have already returned to their villages to prepare their land for cultivation.



The data processed by the IOM office in Mashhad, Iran is meant to provide relief agencies with valuable insight into western Afghanistan's displaced population and the requirements for assisting them to return to their villages.

Maslakh was originally set up by the ICRC in the winter of 2000. IOM has coordinated the work of relief agencies in the camp since July 2001. After international staff were evacuated after the September 11 terrorist attacks, local staff continued providing assistance to the IDPs.

Relief agencies including IOM, WFP and UNICEF have delivered food, tents, blankets, clothing, stoves and other items to Maslakh's desperately poor population.

IOM shelter programmes in the camp have included provision of five million mud bricks, construction of 1,000 mud brick shelters and the re-roofing and renovation of another 7,600 shelters. Other agencies contributing to shelter for the IDPs include the NGOs Shelter for Life, Ockenden International and HAFO.

Since mid-October, IOM road convoys from Mashhad in Iran carrying non-food items for the Herat camps have delivered some 7,000 tents, 138,000 blankets, 41,000 jerrycans, 6,500 plastic tarpaulins, nearly 13,000 kerosene lamps and tens of thousands of items of winter clothing.

Other agencies have also donated large quantities of non-food items and services. UNICEF donations to Maslakh have included tents, blankets, sweaters, rubber boots, jerrycans, mattresses and stoves. UNHCR and ICRC have donated tents. Among NGOs, World Vision has provided tents and items of winter clothing and personal hygiene kits. German Agro Action has donated tents, plastic tarpaulins and kitchen sets.

WFP delivers food to the camp every day. WFP also provides porridge served to all children and pregnant and lactating women from 17 kitchens run by the NGO HRS.

Health services in the camp comprise six clinics run by the NGOs Médecins du Monde (3), HRS (1), CHA (1), IbniSina (1). The NGO Médecins Sans Frontières operates two supplementary and two therapeutic feeding centres. Deaths in the camp, based on IOM daily monitoring of the cemetery, are currently running at between 25-30 people a week. According to the UN, this mortality rate could be described as "average" in any developing country.

Water and sanitation in Maslakh is coordinated by UNICEF, supported by IOM, WHO, and UNCHS (Habitat); international NGOs IRC, DAACAR, Shelter For Life and Ockenden International; and local NGOs HAFO, HRS and RRD. There are 237 water points, 2,410 latrines, 167 solid waste bins and 750 bathhouses in the camp.



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