



### Methodology

In March 2022, OCHA Afghanistan conducted its first bi-annual Access Severity Exercise. The methodology combined quantitative and qualitative aspects - convening focus group discussions with UN agencies, and National and International Non-Governmental Organisations operating in each of the six regions to collect and distill an agreed understanding by the humanitarian community of the access environment in Afghanistan. The findings by the three organisation types for all the regions at the district level are applied to a three-point severity scale of low, moderate, and high access constraints, followed by an average final scoring for each district based on the impact on programs. Data was collected through an approximate 40 focus group discussions covering 401 districts during the month of March 2022.

Prior to the Access Severity Overview, consolidated access reporting across Afghanistan was informed by the classification used in the Hard-to-Reach Districts Product (up until June 2021) and a set of constraints monitored in the Monthly Humanitarian Access Snapshot. In view of the change in context, the overview aims to complement incident-based reporting through a perception-based understanding of access dynamics.

### Key Findings (as of March 2022)

Consolidating access severity scores across all humanitarian partner groups – UN Agencies, International NGOs and National NGOs – reveals that from the 401 districts across Afghanistan, the level of access constraints were found to be:

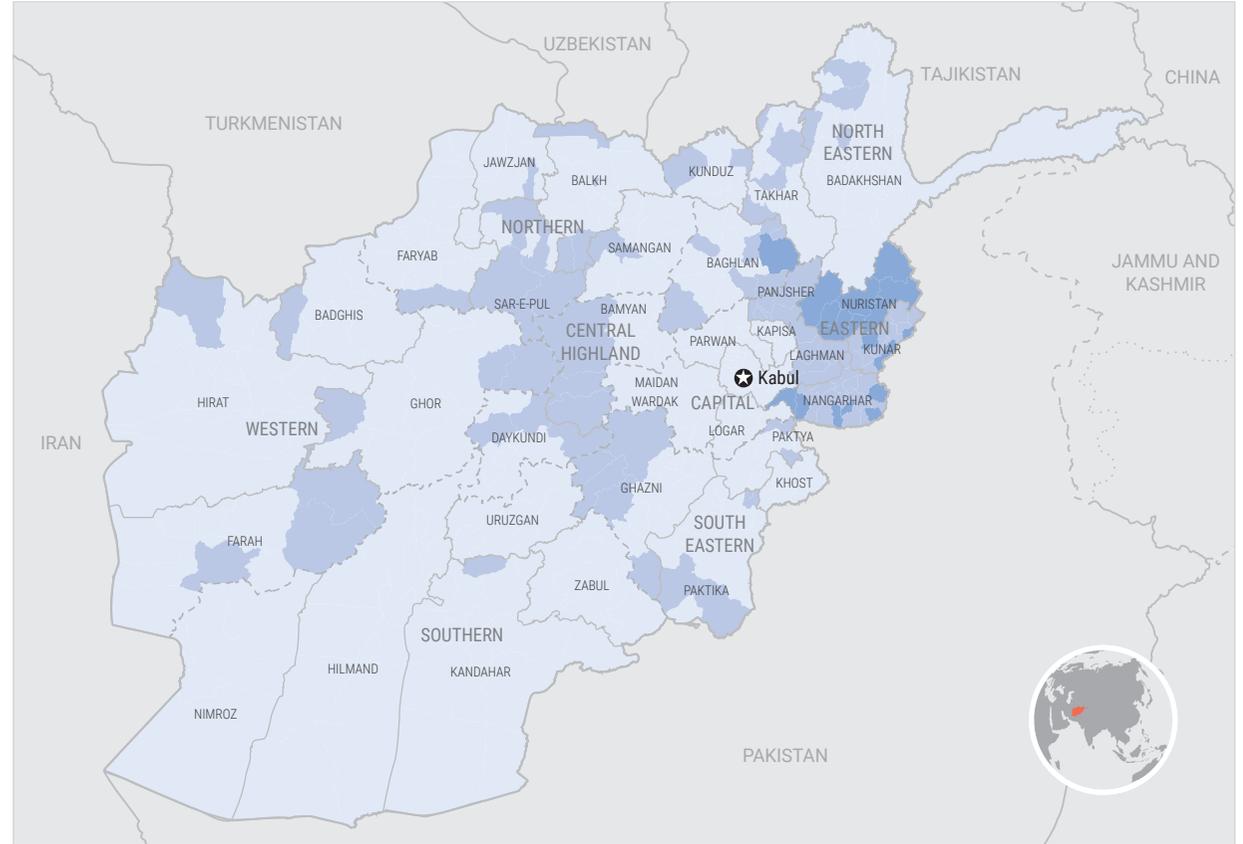
- High in 19 districts (representing 5 per cent of all districts).
- Moderate in 93 districts (23 per cent).
- Lower in 289 districts (72 per cent).

Interferences by the de facto Taliban authorities are the most common impediments faced by all humanitarian partners, including for those ranked with lower access constraints. 82 per cent of the districts across Afghanistan face high (32) and medium (297) priority of needs, 26 per cent of which are also perceived to have high (14) and moderate (70) access constraints. Findings in this document thus reveal that while physical access has markedly improved since August 2021 - mainly due to the significant reduction in armed conflict - various access constraints nevertheless persist, with varying impact on humanitarian actors ability to implement programmes and deliver assistance and services. Note that 1) the mere existence of an access impediment according to the criteria - such as the establishment of a checkpoint - does not necessarily slow down or hinder the response; and 2) the perception of quality of access is informed by severity and the magnitude of the potential impact on affected people and humanitarian staff, and not just by frequency (which speaks to the low perception of access constraints compared to the high number of impediments reported).

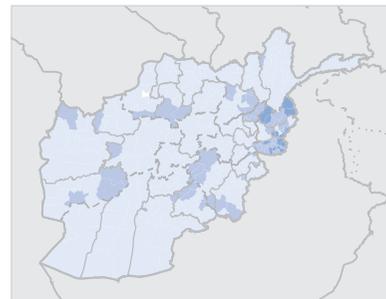
### Legend:

- Low access constraints (Level 1):** Relatively few access constraints. Armed actors, checkpoints, or other impediments such as administrative obstacles may be present and may impede humanitarian activities. However, with adequate resources and clearances, humanitarian organisations can still operate and reach all or nearly all targeted people in need.
- Moderate access constraints (Level 2):** Armed actors, checkpoints, lack of security, administrative impediments, or other impediments including physical and bureaucratic constraints may be present, and often result in restrictions on humanitarian movements and operations. Operations continue in these areas with regular restrictions.
- High access constraints (Level 3):** Armed actors, checkpoints, high levels of insecurity, administrative obstacles, as well as other impediments including physical and bureaucratic constraints are present and very often result in restrictions on humanitarian movements and operations. Operations in these areas face high difficulties and sometimes are impossible.
- No data**

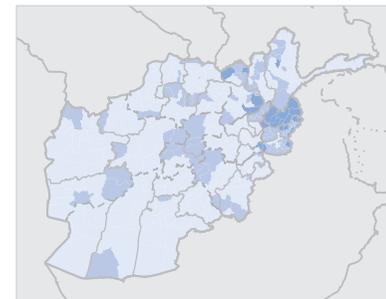
### Consolidated Access Severity Scoring



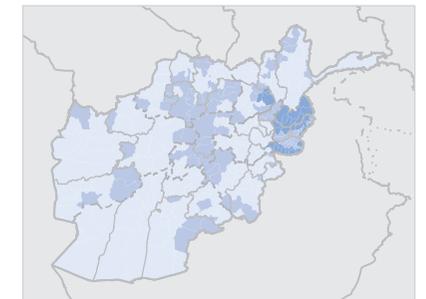
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## Analysis

- As of March 2022, significant changes in access dynamics in Afghanistan have been observed following the withdrawal of international forces, the collapse of the government and the effective takeover of the country by the Taliban in August 2021. With the drastic reduction in military operations and kinetic activity, humanitarian partners have been able to expand their travel to previously classified hard-to-reach areas, including between provincial capitals and districts more easily. Humanitarian access - in terms of partners' ability to assess, deliver and monitor the provision of assistance and services in an effective and efficient manner - is now largely determined by the Taliban de facto authorities (DfAs) trust and understanding of and in humanitarian action, requiring considerable time and investment in familiarisation of ways of working due to high turnover among authorities and lack of alignment on important humanitarian issues. In recent months, the most frequently recorded access impediments relate to interferences by the authorities at the provincial level regarding the involvement of line ministries and/or departments in the assessment, beneficiary selection or distribution process, as well as demands that humanitarian actors sign certain agreements or submit particular project details before implementation can go ahead.
- Notably, a sharp increase in work restrictions on female humanitarian workers have been recorded across the country, primarily because of the systematic imposition of mahram as a requirement for the movement of Afghan women particularly between districts. A shift in attitude towards working women has been observed by humanitarian partners who widely report on incidents of intimidation, harassment, and request for proof of relation from respective mahram at checkpoints. Female humanitarian workers are also currently less likely to participate in work outside of the office, such as in needs assessments and monitoring. The obligation of mahram also creates obstacles for female beneficiaries – particularly female-headed households – many of whom are unable to access distribution sites or other basic services in the absence of a male household member. Certain clusters have also been affected by severe restrictions, such as protection and health as programming related to gender-based violence (GBV) and polio vaccination campaigns have been prohibited across the country. However, it is worth noting that levels of challenges related to women participation differ from province to province, with a more enabling environment observed in the West and in the North of the country.
- Contamination of unexploded ordnance and landmines alongside roads and rural areas following 40 years of conflict poses serious security risks to the humanitarian community and civilians. Only partial information is available on improvised mine contamination as most of the affected areas were previously located in active conflict zones which were inaccessible prior to August 2021. A comprehensive assessment of the country-wide landmine situation is thus required.<sup>1</sup>
- Access to certain areas is restricted by a difficult physical environment. Afghanistan is prone to earthquakes, landslides, and avalanches. Severe winters, climate change and environmental degradation coupled with poor road networks entail regular disruptions to both air and road transportation routes. As such, remote areas previously considered as inaccessible due to armed conflict continue to be challenging in access terms due to these issues.
- While high-intensity conflict is no longer pervasive, numerous security challenges remain across regions due to presence of opposition forces, namely the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRFA) and the Daesh/Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK). The NRFA do not control territory but remain active in the North-East and Central regions, claiming responsibility for small-scale attacks against the DfA, particularly in the Panjsher Valley northeast of Kabul. While the NRFA does not target members of the humanitarian community, imminent security risks are present in proximity to their resistance pockets which also extend into the Northern region. Similarly, the ISK does not currently have distinct geographical lines yet regularly claim attacks throughout the country, particularly in Kunar and Nangargar provinces in the Eastern region, as well as Kabul, Mazar and Kunduz. The group have been known to attack civilians, religious minorities, journalists, and aid workers as they consider International NGOs a legitimate target, although of lesser priority to their Taliban targets. While these attacks are likely to impact humanitarian assistance, partners currently agree that the overall security situation has improved since summer 2021, mitigating negative consequences on the response.
- The systematic use of armed escorts has been imposed for UN humanitarian agencies by the DfA since 28 December 2021 for movements outside of main cities. Armed escorts are used since January 2022 in the Northern region, contrary to previous practices. In February, the Humanitarian Country Team adopted a guidance on armed escorts reiterating the principle of 'last resort'. While the humanitarian leadership continues its engagement with the DfA, there has been no resolution to date.

*The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.*

*Note: (1) The current explosive ordnance data shows that more than 1,532 square kilometers of land in Afghanistan remain contaminated with explosive hazards, impacting more than 1,500 communities. Approximately 63 per cent of the known contamination have been newly added since 2001.*

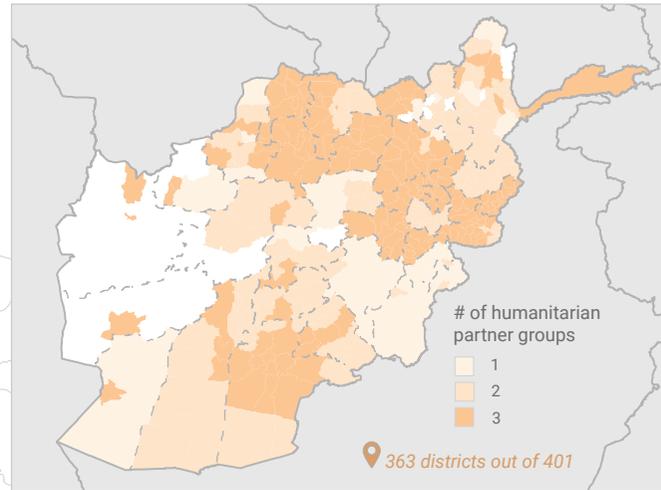
## Top five humanitarian access constraints

The following maps indicate access constraints as reported by the three humanitarian partner groups (UN, INGOs, and NNGOs), including the commonality of the constraint as perceived by the humanitarian community overall. The districts highlighted in orange indicate the number of humanitarian partner groups who reported the corresponding access constraint, but does not reflect the frequency or level of impact of the constraint. Thus, while the following access constraints are widely reported by humanitarian partners, it does not necessarily entail that partners are unable to move and operate in their respective regions.

Of the list of seven access constraints from which humanitarian partners could report on, the most common access constraints as perceived by at least one humanitarian partner group include: interferences in the implementation of humanitarian activities (reported in 92 per cent of districts); impediments to movements (reported in 81 per cent of districts); physical environment (reported in 66 per cent of districts); violence and/or threats against humanitarian personnel, assets, and/or facilities (reported in 57 per cent of districts); and presence of landmines/UXO (reported in 53 per cent of districts). The other two access constraints not included here which were reported by at least one humanitarian partner group as affecting access include ongoing fighting/military operations and kinetic activity (reported in 27 per cent of districts) and levy requests (reported in 26 per cent of districts).

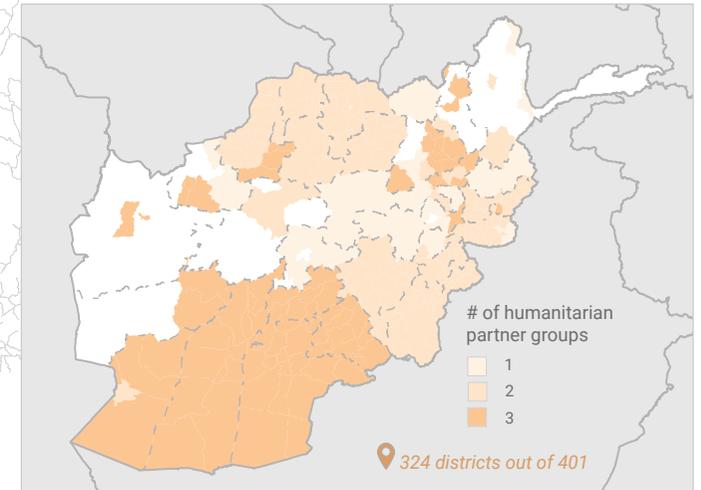
### Interference in the Implementation of Humanitarian Activities (by district)

*I.e., interferences or attempted interferences into beneficiary selection, staff recruitment, aid diversion, etc.*



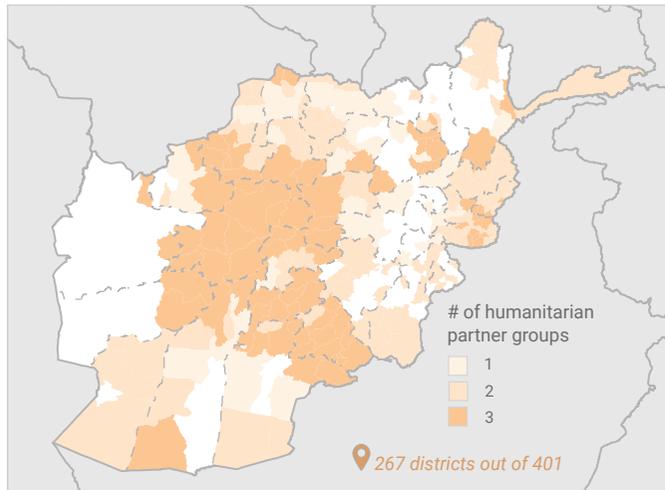
### Impediments to Movements (by district)

*I.e., incidents at checkpoints, imposition of armed escorts, road closures (not linked to weather hazards), etc.*



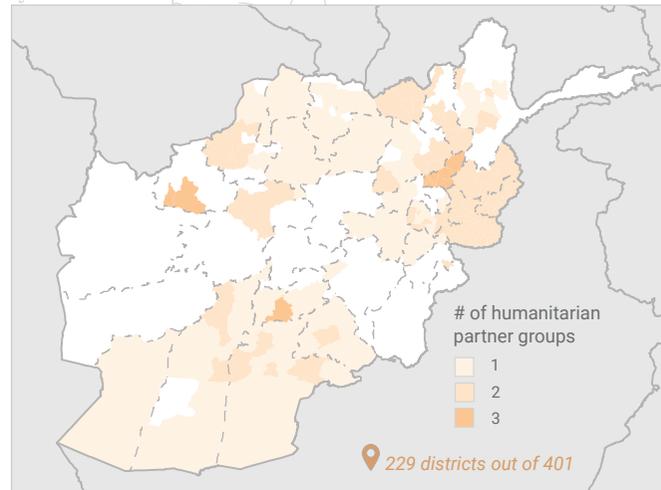
### Physical Environment and Lack of Infrastructure (by district)

*State of physical infrastructure, lack of phone coverage, and climactic or other event temporarily affecting infrastructure.*



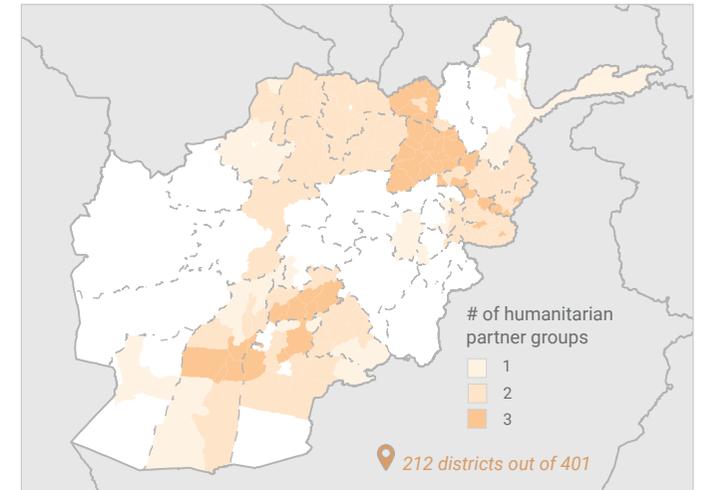
### Violence/Threats Against Humanitarian Personnel/Assets/Facilities (by district)

*I.e., attacks against humanitarian assets and/or facilities, occupation of facilities or assets, attacks against humanitarian workers, etc.*



### Presence of Landmines/UXO (by district)

*Status of mines/ERWs per geographic area.*



# HUMANITARIAN ACCESS SEVERITY - CENTRAL REGION

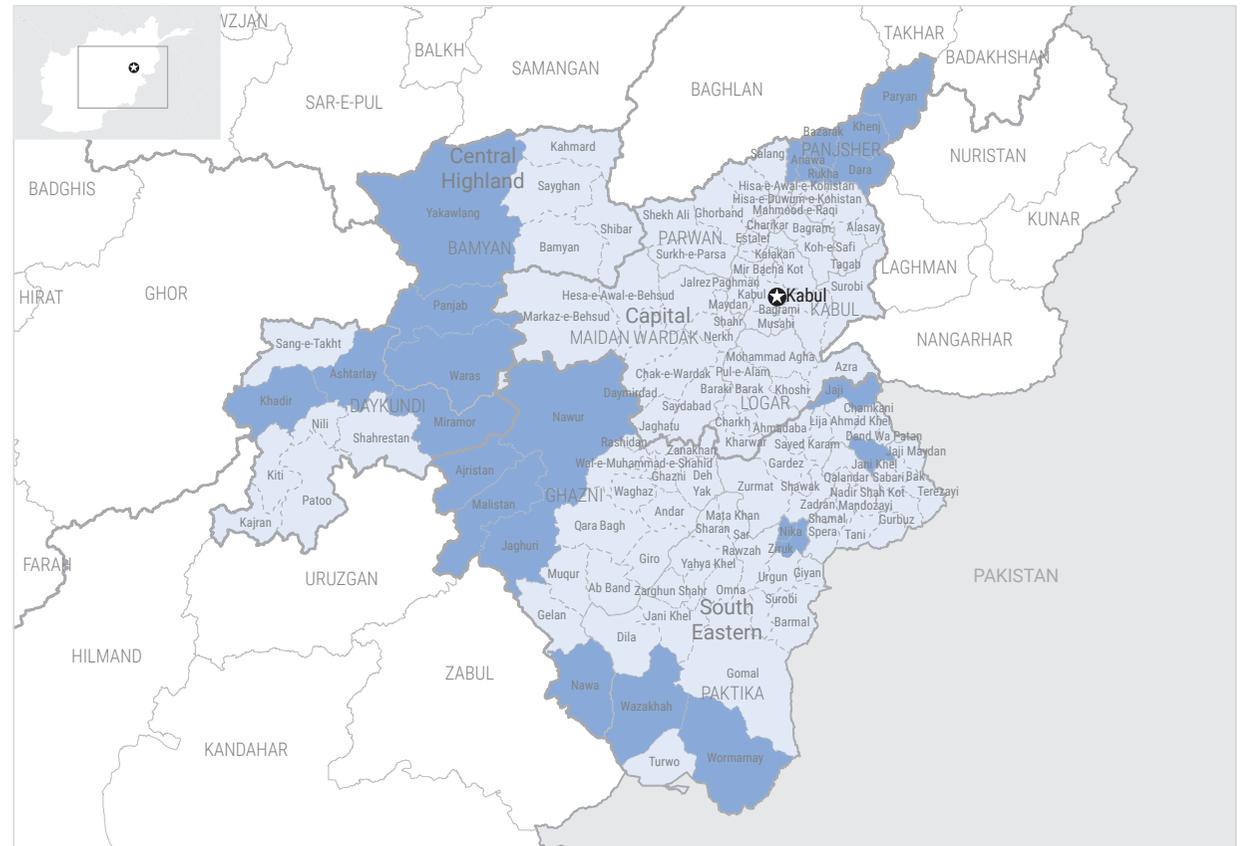
## Central Region

at district level

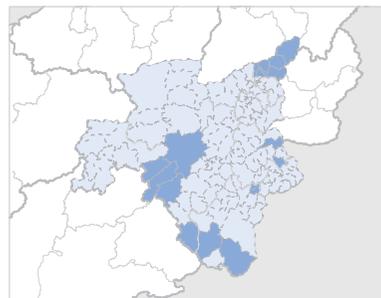
- The first round of engagements with humanitarian partners based in the Central region revealed an increasingly accessible environment post August 2021, as they note their ability to reach areas previously inaccessible due to safety and security concerns. Of the 133 districts – across three regions of Central, Central Highland, and South-Eastern – 24 were perceived to have moderate access constraints while 109 reported lower access constraints. Despite improvements, humanitarian partners identified several impediments, primarily in the form of interferences by the DfA.
- Humanitarian access is heavily contingent upon well-established relations with the DfA, such as gaining their trust and understanding of and in humanitarian action, which demands of partners to continuously invest in stronger relationships to mitigate obstacles. Nonetheless, interferences are commonplace, impacting the humanitarian community as it attempts to maneuver through various demands which often put humanitarian principles at risk. Requests for beneficiary lists, including amendments to such lists, pressure to influence staff recruitments, and suspension of protection programming related to GBV were uniformly reported by humanitarian partners. In addition, the imposition of mahram for female staff have obstructed activities further, as travel to districts and provincial centers are prohibited in the absence of one mahram.
- The security environment remains volatile in several provinces following a long history of conflict – resulting in widespread contamination of unexploded ordnance and landmines – particularly in Panjsher province. While military operation and kinetic activities have drastically reduced, sporadic security incidents are reported due to presence of the NRFA resistance forces, such as in areas bordering the North-East region. Humanitarian partners also reported violence against personnel operating in Kabul and Gardez districts in the Central and South-Eastern regions respectively, by the DfA.
- Humanitarian partners, particularly those operating in the Central Highlands, report a difficult physical environment due to poor road networks. Blockages caused by snow prevented partners from accessing vulnerable populations earlier this year. Locations bordering Central Highland are also prone to landslides, such as Maidan Wardak province.

### Legend:

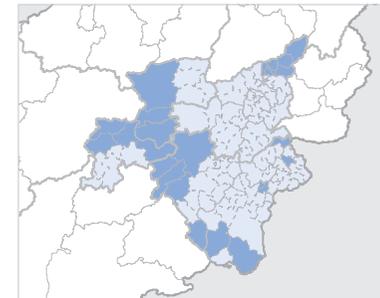
- Low access constraints (Level 1)
- Moderate access constraints (Level 2)
- High access constraints (Level 3)



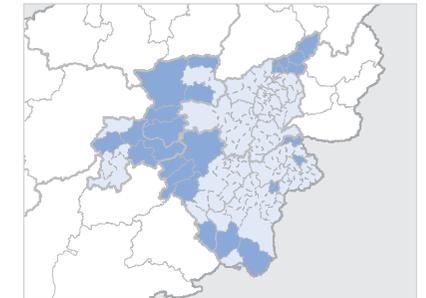
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# HUMANITARIAN ACCESS SEVERITY - EASTERN REGION

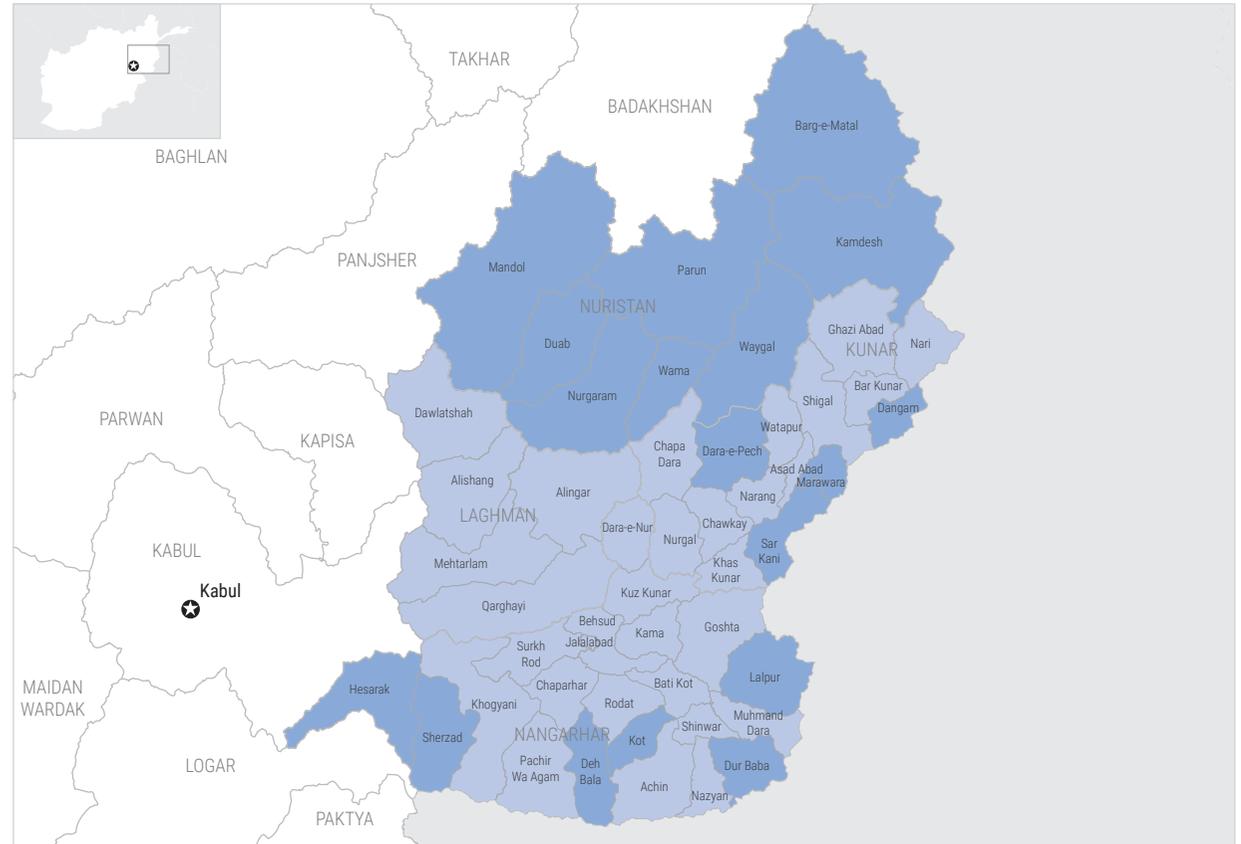
## Eastern Region

### at district level

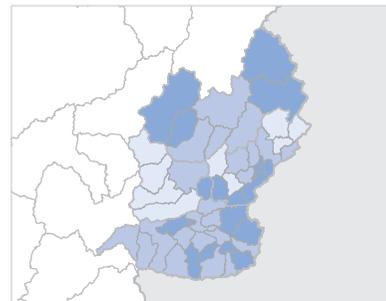
- The humanitarian access environment in the Eastern region is severely impacted by several access constraints which impede the work of the humanitarian community - albeit with slight improvements since the change of control in August 2021. High (18) to moderate (32) access constraints were reported across all 50 districts within the Eastern region by the humanitarian community, mainly due to the pervasiveness of interferences by local authorities, the threat of violence against humanitarian staff and/or assets, physical environment and contamination of unexploded ordnance.
- Interferences by local authorities were reported by partners in all 50 districts in the region. Such access impediments are known to have caused delays to time-sensitive programming i.e. distribution of food production kits, impediments to movements and infringement on humanitarian principles. The DfA have been noted to interfere with distribution sites and to deny humanitarian assistance to people in need based on their affiliation to and/or support of the former government.
- The access environment in the Eastern region has a gendered dimension as well, whereby female aid workers are restricted to movements only in the company of mahram, while female beneficiaries are often denied access to humanitarian assistance for the same reason. The safety and security of aid workers, including affected populations, has been compromised by the hostile environment armed authority personnel create at distribution sites.
- The security situation remains volatile in the Eastern region, particularly in the Kunar and Nangarhar provinces where frequent skirmishes are reported between the DfA and the ISK. The widespread presence of unexploded ordnance across the entire region was also reported by the humanitarian community, curtailing access to districts such as Marawara and Nurgal in Kunar province, Dawlatshah in Laghman province, and Achin and Bati Kot in Nangarhar province. Cross-border shelling into Kunar province due to clashes at the border with neighboring Pakistan are also regularly reported, particularly as it has contributed to further contamination.

### Legend:

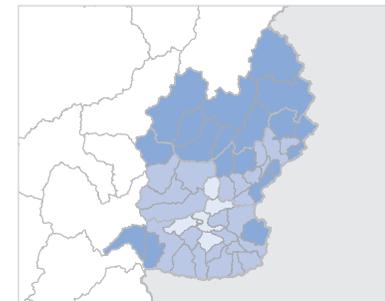
- Low access constraints (Level 1)
- Moderate access constraints (Level 2)
- High access constraints (Level 3)



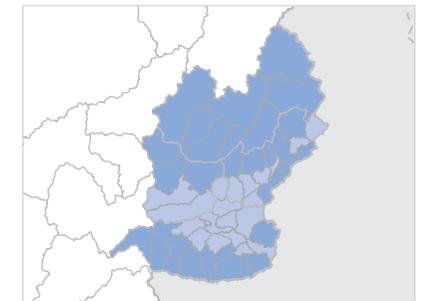
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# HUMANITARIAN ACCESS SEVERITY - NORTH EASTERN REGION

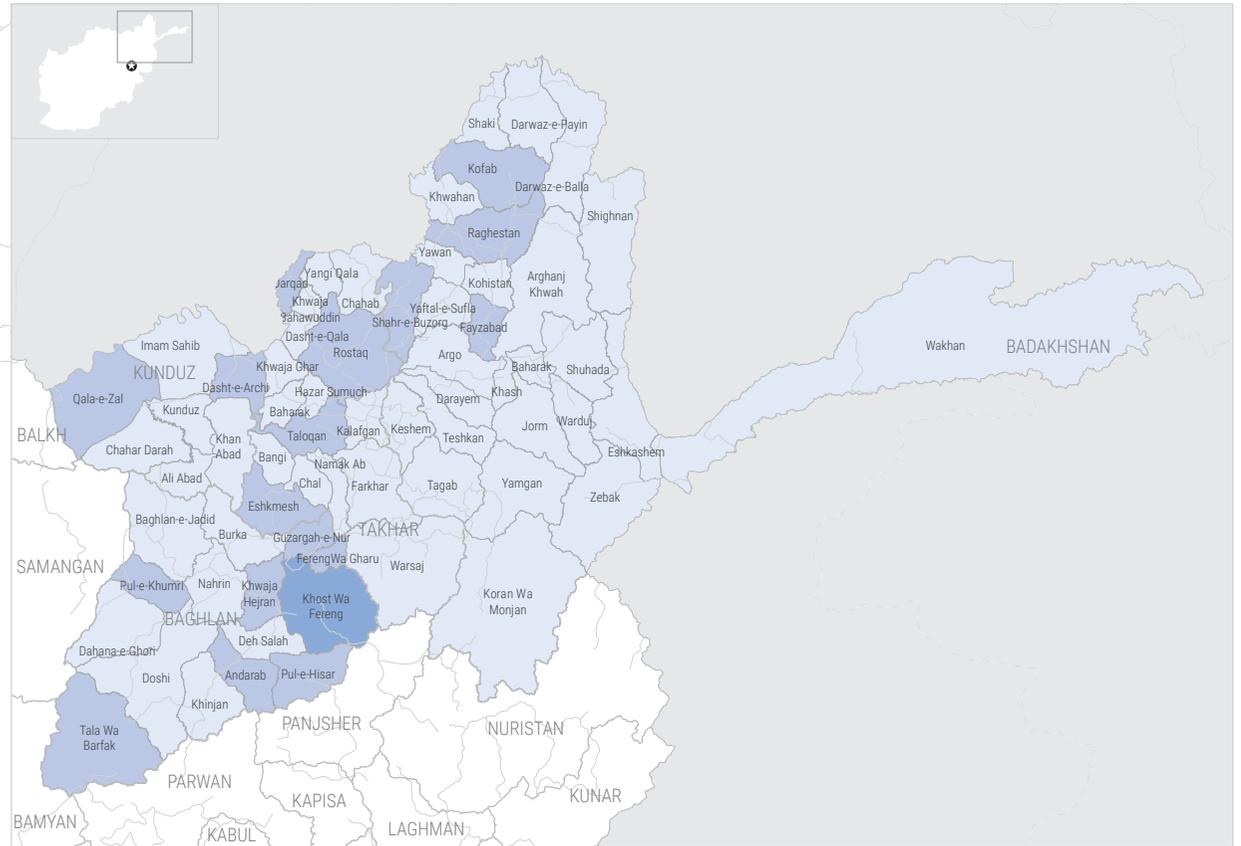
## North-East Region

at district level

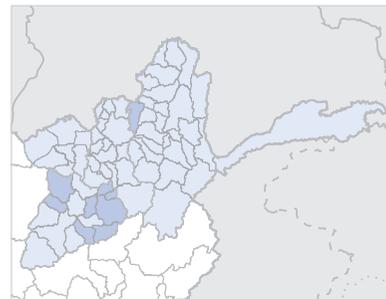
- The first round of engagement with North-East-based partners on access severity revealed that most districts present low levels of access constraints (49 out of 67). The level of military operation and kinetic activities have drastically reduced since the Taliban took over in August 2021, creating a more enabling security environment. Partners can travel between provincial capitals to districts and to previously perceived hard-to-reach areas. As such, of the 67 districts in the North-East region, 17 districts are perceived to have moderate access constraints and one district (Khost Wa Fereng) is perceived to have high access constraints by humanitarian partners, largely due to interferences by the DfA, security incidents and a challenging physical environment.
- Interferences by the DfA have impacted the humanitarian community, as it often includes targeting of affected populations and pressure on partners to recruit particular individuals. Most notably, the requirement that female staff members are accompanied by a mahram, particularly for overnight missions, has impeded humanitarian work.
- The safety and security of humanitarian partners is volatile in certain areas and largely dependent on the type of humanitarian activity being implemented. Most recently, during a life-saving polio vaccination campaign, eight health workers in Kunduz and Iman Sahib districts of Kunduz province, and Taloqan district of Takhar province were killed.
- Kunduz province had often been at the center of conflict, having experienced several shifts in control prior to the Taliban take-over. As a result, considerable contamination of unexploded ordnances is likely – notably in the vicinity of Kunduz city. The humanitarian community also reported widespread contamination of unexploded ordnance across all districts of Baghlan province, such as Andarab, Pul e-Hisar and Khost Wa Fereng districts.
- The security situation to the south of the North-East region remains dynamic due to its proximity to armed opposition forces in neighboring Panjsher province in the Central region, such as the NRFA. Armed forces remain active in their opposition to the Taliban DfA, leading to increased reports of skirmishes in Andarab and Khost Wa Fereng districts of Baghlan province. An uptick in hostilities during the spring season are noted as climactic improvements make the mountainous terrain more manageable for armed activities. Risk of sporadic airstrikes was also reported, particularly in the Andarab district in Baghlan province.
- The North-East border areas, particularly the provinces of Badakhshan, eastern Takhar and Baghlan, have challenging physical environments characterized by their mountainous terrain and lack of infrastructure, such as road networks. A large segment of the population does not have road access by means of four-wheel vehicles, necessitating travel by motorcycles or mules. These areas are also prone to natural disasters, such as earthquakes, avalanches, and landslides, which heavily impact access. Some areas of Badakhshan are only accessible by road from neighboring Tajikistan, while some communities are only accessible by helicopter during the winter season, such as Kofab district.

### Legend:

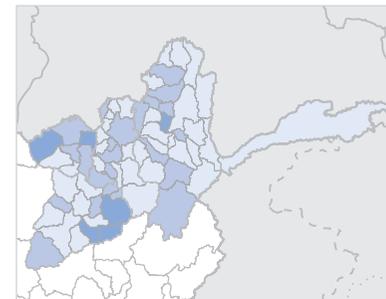
- Low access constraints (Level 1)
- Moderate access constraints (Level 2)
- High access constraints (Level 3)



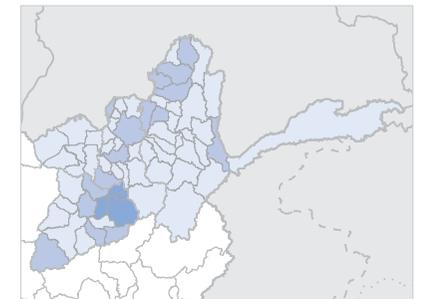
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International NGOs



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# HUMANITARIAN ACCESS SEVERITY - NORTHERN REGION

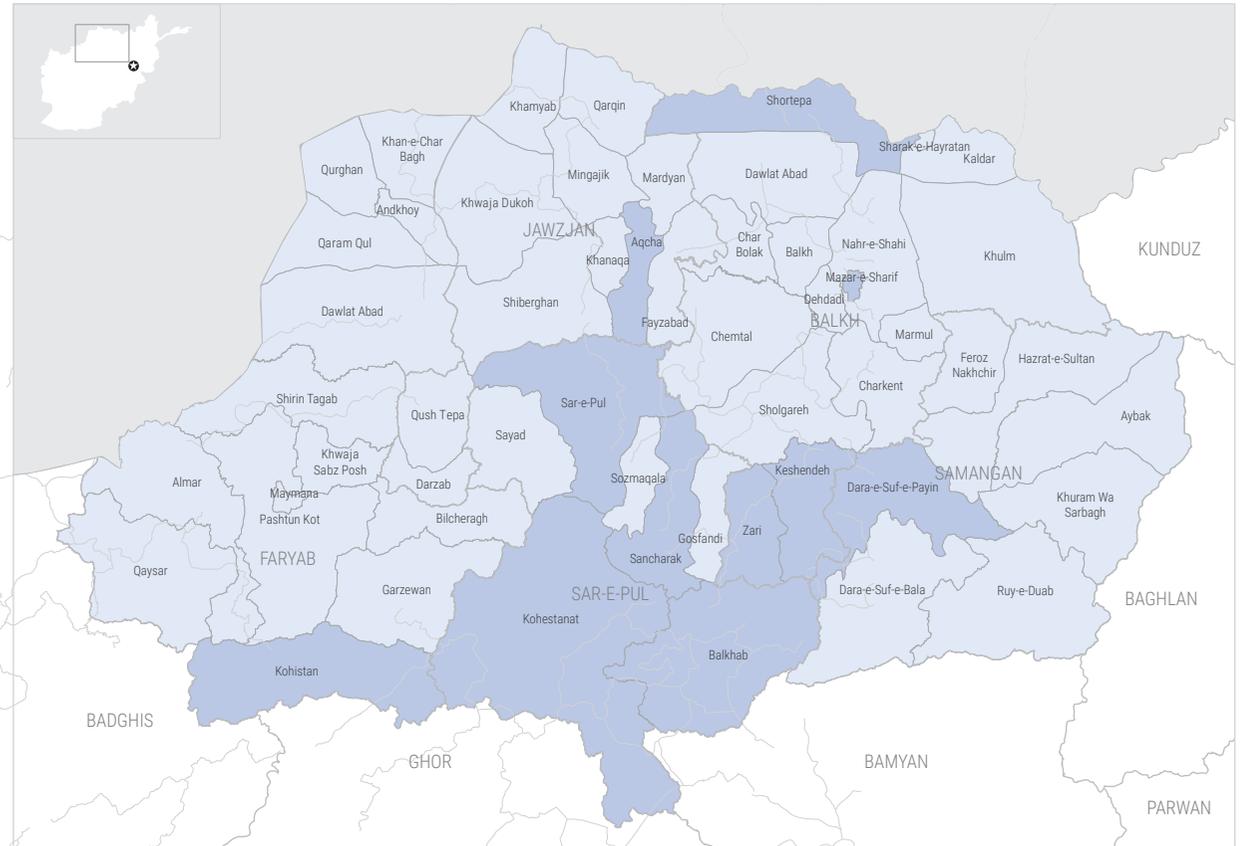
## Northern Region

### at district level

- The Northern region has remained largely accessible following the takeover of the previous government by the DfA in August 2021. No district was reported with high levels of access constraints. Humanitarian partners face low levels of access constraints in a majority of districts (44 out of 55) and moderate access constraints in 11 of the 55 districts. Nevertheless, despite a generally permissive access environment across the region, interferences by the DfA are commonplace and increasing. Of the 55 districts in the Northern region, interferences by authorities were reported in 49 districts, while impediments to movements were reported in 54 districts.
- As of January 2022, the DfA imposed the use of armed escort on UN agencies for all road missions outside of provincial capitals despite improvements in the security environment since August 2021, resulting in financial implications and frequent delays, particularly for onset emergency responses. Armed Escorts were not used for UN movements in the Northern region prior to 2022 and are not currently required by UN security assessments.
- Interferences in the form of coercion to amend beneficiary lists, restricting vehicle hires to those owned by the authorities, and interference in the recruitment of aid workers were widely reported by humanitarian partners, in addition to prohibition of certain activities, such as GBV monitoring. The regular presence of armed personnel at distribution sites was reported. Such conditions can prevent aid workers from accessing vulnerable groups who fear arbitrary arrest and detention, disproportionately affecting female-headed households.
- The imposition of mahram for female staff has shifted the attitude toward working women where reports of intimidation, harassment, and requests for proof of relation from escorting mahrams by armed personnel at checkpoints have been reported as a severe impediment by all humanitarian groups (UN, INGOs and NNGOs). Families of female staff members are repeatedly harassed and intimidated at checkpoints, discouraging the males from accompanying their female family member to work in the future.
- National NGO partners are particularly vulnerable to interferences by local authorities. Instances of violence against aid workers by authorities, including when authorities entice community members to disagree with humanitarian activities being implemented, have been reported as a means for authorities to yield their demands. This includes sporadic armed search operations of NGO premises without prior notification. Violence or threats against humanitarian personnel and/or assets were reported by at least one humanitarian partner group in 81 per cent (45) of the districts. In addition, frequent turn-over of authority personnel remains an impediment for partners as it requires staff to manage individuals with often limited knowledge of procedures or with personal agendas, thus preventing cooperation in the absence of UN facilitated activities.
- Widespread contamination of unexploded ordnance and landmines alongside roads, following forty years of conflict, was noted by humanitarian partners in the Northern region in 96 per cent (53) of districts.

### Legend:

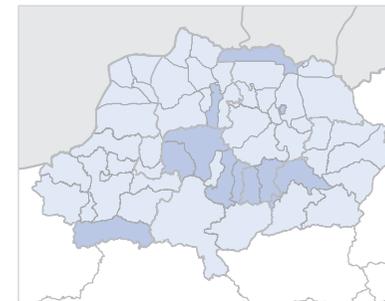
- Low access constraints (Level 1)
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- High access constraints (Level 3)
- No data



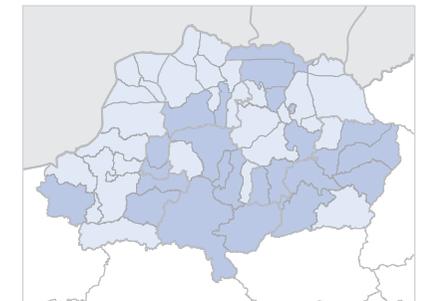
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# HUMANITARIAN ACCESS SEVERITY - SOUTHERN REGION

April 2022

## Southern Region

at district level

- The access environment in the Southern region is perceived to be largely permissive by the humanitarian community, as low access constraints were reported for almost all districts (52 out of 53) with the exception of Kandahar where moderate access constraints were noted. While regular access can be sustained across the Southern region, impediments by the DfA are reported uniformly by partners – including through movement and interferences in humanitarian activities.
- Despite a generally permissive access environment, the humanitarian community reported a number of obstacles following the shift in control of August 2021, from banning house-to-house polio vaccination campaigns and GBV activities across the region to attempting to influence staff recruitments and beneficiary lists. As in other regions, female humanitarian staff are prevented from engaging in humanitarian work or benefitting from aid unless escorted by a mahram. Humanitarian partners have also reported challenges to coordinate and communicate with local authorities due to a lack of consistency in their adherence to agreed procedures, often resulting in unpredictable movement impediments.
- The presence of unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices are noted by humanitarian partners in several districts in the Southern region following 40 years of hostilities, particularly in those belonging to Hilmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces. In addition, certain districts have a difficult physical environment including poor telecommunication networks, such as in Uruzgan and Zabul provinces.
- In Kandahar district, humanitarian partners report higher levels of access constraints than the rest of the region as a consequence of active military operations against ISK pockets, presence of armed DfA personnel at humanitarian sites and routine interferences in humanitarian activities, impacting the humanitarian community altogether.



### Legend:

- Low access constraints (Level 1)
- Moderate access constraints (Level 2)
- High access constraints (Level 3)

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International NGOs



National NGOs



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Creation date: 26 April 2022 Feedback: mekki@un.org www.unocha.org www.reliefweb.int

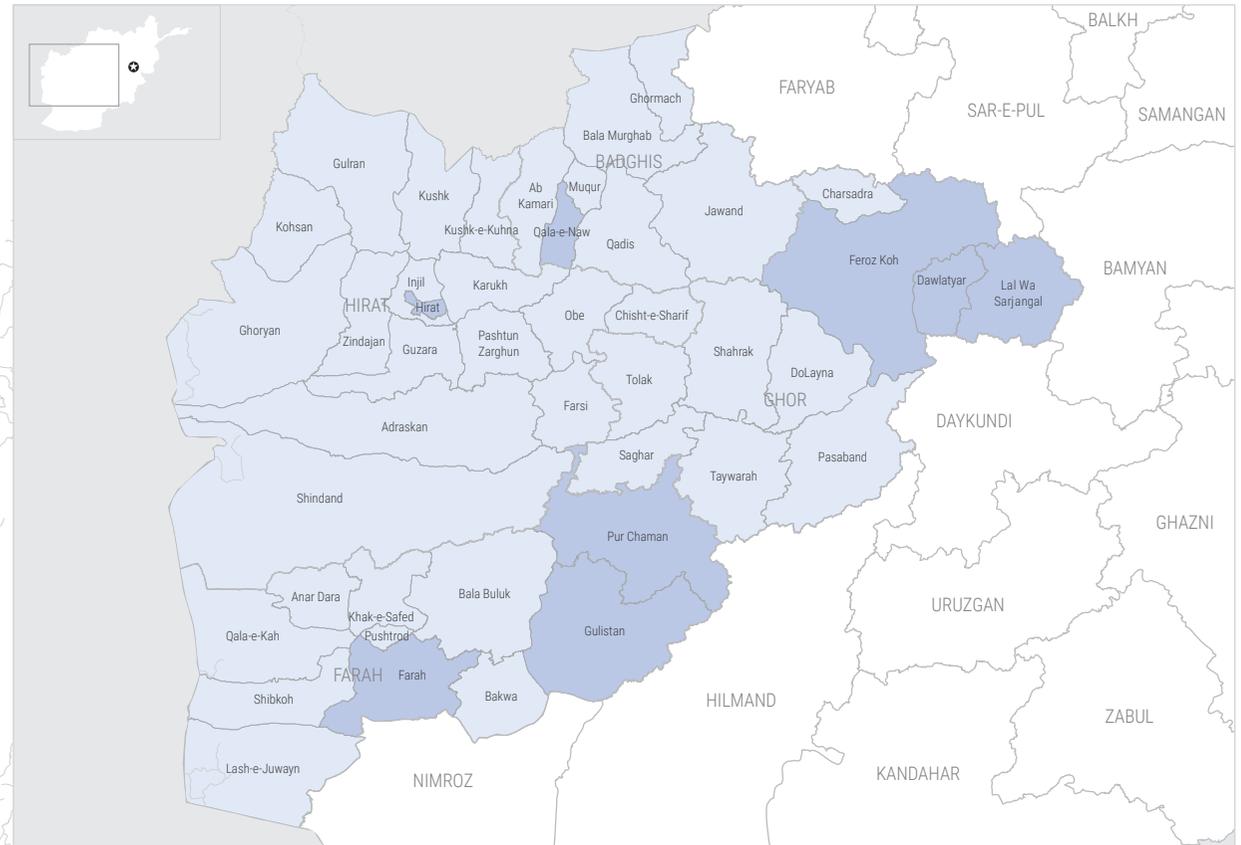
# HUMANITARIAN ACCESS SEVERITY - WESTERN REGION

April 2022

## Western Region

at district level

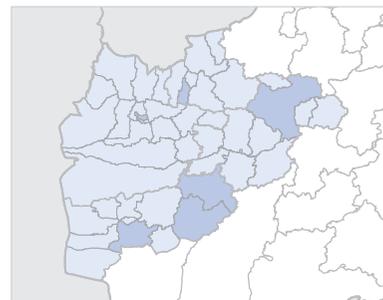
- The humanitarian partners operating in the Western region report of a generally permissive access environment. A large majority of districts, 80 per cent (36 out of 44), were reported as not presenting any major access issues while less than 20 per cent (8) of the 44 districts were perceived to have moderate access constraints. Partners noted the difficult physical environment, interferences by the DfA including shifting projects to DfA locations of interest, followed by impediments to movements as the most common access constraints.
- Interferences by the DfA were frequently reported in Ghor and Badghis districts since the beginning of 2022. Humanitarian partners have faced suspensions of activities, movement impediments and interferences in their internal functions. Most recently, on 21 March, humanitarian activities were unilaterally suspended in Ghor by the Provincial Governor for eight consecutive days and were only resumed following negotiations and agreements between the governor and the aid community.
- On 16 January, the DfA in Badghis province shared a number of specific restrictions predominantly limiting female participation in humanitarian operations. Humanitarians were informed that non-compliance with the new rules would result in female humanitarian staff being violently assaulted. A joint decision was made by humanitarian actors to suspend all activities except for life-saving operations in Badghis. Various engagements involving the provincial, regional and national levels, including the intervention of the humanitarian leadership (DHC), led to a resolution of the issue.
- A challenging physical environment in Farah province - such as in Gulistan and Pur Chaman districts - due to remote locations and poor road conditions, restricts access by humanitarian partners, particularly during seasons where risk of flooding or snow are recurrent.



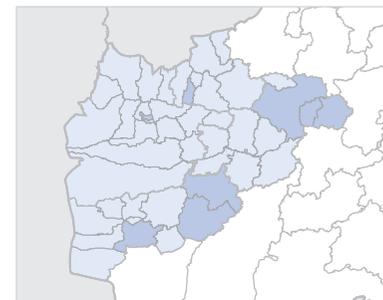
### Legend:

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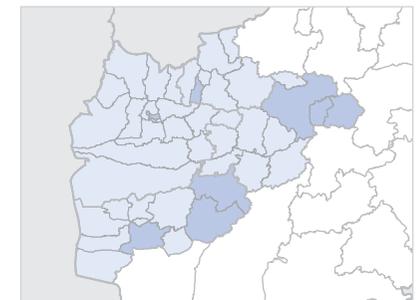
United Nations



International NGOs



National NGOs



## Comparing severity scores - access and priority

## Access Severity and Spring Prioritisation

- The following map displays the consolidated access severity overlaid with the priority of multi-cluster needs across the country down to the district level – as assessed during the Spring Prioritisation Exercise for 2022.
- 92 per cent of all districts nationwide are classified as having high (79) or medium (291) priority needs; 26 per cent of these same districts face moderate (78) or high (17) levels of access constraints. Variations in priority needs are found depending on cluster, where Protection (186), Mine Action (152), WASH (130) and Nutrition (105) rank over 100 of the districts as having high priority needs.
- Of the 79 districts classified as having high priority needs, 14 districts are perceived to have moderate access constraints – the majority of which are located in Balkh, Faryab, Samangan and Sar-e-Pul provinces in the Northern region and Farah, Ghor and Hirat provinces in the Western region. Of the 291 districts classified as having medium priority needs, 17 face high access constraints – all but one (Khost Wa Fereng district in North-East region) are in the provinces of Kunar, Nangarhar, and Nuristan in the Eastern region. Of the 274 remaining districts, 22 per cent (or 64 districts) are perceived to have moderate access constraints.
- The low perception of access severity in the 275 districts which are classified as having high and medium priority needs implies an ability of humanitarian partners to access and operate in these areas, although with discrepancies depending on cluster. For instance, while the Food Security and Agriculture cluster is among the largest in both operational presence and capacity, the same cannot be said for programming implemented by the Education and the GBV clusters which have suffered as of late, particularly following the ban on girl's education across the country (on March 23) and prohibition of GBV monitoring.

