

Elusive Officials Leave Afghans Queuing for Days

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Uruzgan residents complain about massive wait for basic services.

All Rahmatollah wants is the paperwork allowing him to cross from Afghanistan into Pakistan so he can take a sick relative for treatment.

For the last fortnight, though, he has been standing outside the census office in the central Afghan province of Uruzgan, waiting to be served.

“The officials aren’t here. Even if they are, they only work two hours a day,” Rahmatollah, a resident of Charchino district, told IWPR. “They come at ten in the morning and work until 11:30, when they tell us to leave because it’s their lunchtime. Many of them don’t return after lunch – they go home. We don’t know what to do.”

Accessing government services can be an exasperating experience in this impoverished province. Residents say they often have to queue for days to see officials who appear to spend little time at work, and residents of remote villages say they spend weeks staying in hotels provincial capital of Tarin Kowt just waiting to be seen.

Daud, a 50 year-old from Tarin Kowt district, said he had been waiting a week for his turn at the provincial finance department. Wrapped in a blanket, he told IWPR he spent every day outside the office waiting to be called, before returning to his hotel. The official he needs to see does not come in every day, and when he does, he only stays for two hours.

“To tell you the truth, there is no government in Uruzgan,” Daud said. “The people who work here regard the premises as their own private offices. They do whatever they want.”

While residents accuse public servants of being lazy, unprofessional and corrupt, local government officials blame transport and weather that make it difficult for staff to turn up on time.

Uruzgan is one of Afghanistan’s least developed provinces, with few decent roads.

Alhaj Gholam, head of the provincial finance department, conceded that staff at all government offices tended to arrive at work “very late,” but explained that “these employees live in remote places and don’t have transport”.

Uruzgan’s deputy governor Khodai Rahim maintained that lengthy delays occurred only in winter, while in summer, all provincial government offices opened at eight in the morning.

According to Mohammad Qais, head of the provincial department for labour and social affairs, government employees were expected to work seven hours a day, although exceptions were made for staff living far from their workplace.

Asked about the members of the public who spent weeks queuing to see an official, he said: “We promise to monitor the performance of every agency from now on, and to take legal action to solve the problem.”

As well as inconveniencing the public, bureaucratic delays may have other, more serious implications.

One tribal elder warned that people might turn to the Taliban, who can sometimes resolve their problems more efficiently than local government.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the elder said he had spent the last decade trying to get the authorities to issue members of his tribe with identity cards, and had found government services extremely inefficient.

“Nobody listens to me,” he said. “If that’s the case, how can I tell my people to support the government?”

Ahmad Shah Jawad is an IWPR trainee reporter in Uruzgan.

Topic: [Political reform](#)

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