



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR

Our work in Afghanistan

Cover photo:

Children in Janat Bagh village
in Kunduz province, north-eastern Afghanistan,
which was on the frontline of active conflict for
seven years.

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Our work in Afghanistan

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Who we are

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global inter-governmental organisation dedicated to saving lives, protecting human rights, distributing relief assistance and building a better future for people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution.

We lead international action to protect refugees and asylum seekers, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.

We deliver life-saving assistance, help safeguard fundamental human rights, and develop solutions that ensure people have a safe place called home where they can build a better future. We also work to ensure that stateless people are granted a nationality.

UNHCR's work is based on the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence.

UNHCR has been present in Afghanistan for over 35 years. UNHCR's work in Afghanistan focuses on protecting the most vulnerable

and assisting displaced Afghans with life-saving shelter, water and core relief items. Together with our partners, we are committed to staying on the ground and delivering our emergency response as long as we can access those in need.

Afghanistan has suffered more than 40 years of conflict, natural disasters, chronic poverty and food insecurity. Facing ongoing humanitarian and human rights crises, the coping mechanisms of refugees, internally displaced people and host communities are severely strained.

Afghans make up one of the largest refugee populations worldwide. There are 6.4 million Afghan refugees in the world, the largest refugee population globally. 90 per cent of all Afghan refugees are hosted in Iran (3.8 million) and Pakistan (2 million). Approximately 3.2 million people are internally displaced, having fled their homes searching for refuge within the country.

Who do we support



ESTIMATED INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS) BY CONFLICT IN AFGHANISTAN
3.22 million



REFUGEES IN AFGHANISTAN
34,827



IDPS ESTIMATED TO HAVE RETURNED TO THEIR PLACES OF ORIGIN IN 2021–2024
1.46 million



ASSISTED RETURNS FROM ABROAD IN 2024
18,860



PEOPLE ASSISTED IN 80 PARRS, SEEKING TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES, SINCE 2017
4.1 million

Assistance provided



TOTAL PERSONS SUPPORTED
895,819 (2024) | 1.52 million (2023)



PERSONS BENEFITTED FROM IN-KIND AND OTHER INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE
659,004 (2024) | 622,100 (2023)



PROVINCES REACHED
34/34



PERSONS ASSISTED WITH CASH ASSISTANCE
236,815 (2024) | 366,700 (2023)

What we do

Providing protection and seeking solutions

Supporting refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced people (IDPs), refugee and IDP returnees, UNHCR activities include protection monitoring, protecting children from violence, exploitation and abuse, and prevention and response to gender-based violence, supporting persons with specific needs, including persons with disabilities, mental health and psychosocial support, legal assistance, and community engagement for social cohesion and empowerment.

The inclusion and empowerment of women and girls is embedded in all our protection and solutions interventions in Afghanistan, and a core principle of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals to ensure the action plan reaches everyone ("leave no one behind").

Community-based protection

UNHCR prioritises community-based protection (CBP) to empower and mobilize displaced and returnee communities to secure their safety and dignity, using an age, gender and diversity (AGD) approach to ensure equality in decision-making and the provision of services.

It includes working with trained community outreach volunteers (COVs), community representation structures, and community-based organisations/entities to promote access to information about services, identify and refer persons with specific needs and promote community empowerment/mobilisation as well as receiving feedback from the community to inform UNHCR's programming.





“I can give a voice to those in need through my work as a volunteer.”

The COVs help with awareness-raising and information dissemination, and the referral of persons with specific needs. Originating from the community themselves, they have a strong understanding of community composition, dynamics, and needs and can identify ongoing or emerging needs and gaps, which they can relay to UNHCR and partners for targeted programming.

In Zabul province, 20-year-old volunteer Gulalai helps people to better understand what services are available from UNHCR, its mandate, and how they can benefit from programmes.

“Helping people brings me joy. Through my volunteering, I aim to empower those in need,” she said.

Gulalai also plays an important role in community engagement activities and ensuring that people are aware that they can report complaints or raise specific concerns with UNHCR and partner staff.

More than one hundred community outreach volunteers have been trained across Afghanistan. Their role helps UNHCR and partner staff to strengthen two-way communications with the communities they work in.

“I feel very happy to help people. I think I can give a voice to those in need through my work as a volunteer,” said Gulalai.



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Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)

UNHCR's programming also seeks to address the significant mental health needs of men, women, boys and girls in Afghanistan, where decades of conflict and violence have led to widespread trauma, anxiety and depression and where entrenched poverty and limited opportunities – especially for women and youth – contribute to feelings of hopelessness and despair. Through community awareness activities, UNHCR's Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) programming helps to address cultural stigma surrounding mental health issues and to facilitate access to services for women, girls, boys and men, contributing to improved social cohesion and the empowerment of the community.

More than 5,000 people were assisted with psychosocial counselling following a series of devastating earthquakes which hit Herat, western Afghanistan, in October 2023.

Eid Mah and Noor Ahmad, from Zinda Jan district, one of the most impacted areas, lost their three-year-old son.

The family received counselling help through UNHCR partner, Women's Activities and Social Services Association (WASSA). Trained counsellors helped to support people to process what they had gone through.

"The counsellors came and talked with us and now we feel a little bit better. Their sessions helped us to forget our grief," said Eid Mah.

Another mother, Maryam, from Koshkak village, Zinda Jan district, lost her two-year-old daughter. "Thanks to the counsellors, we could talk and share our feelings and we felt better. Our hearts got calm after attending the sessions."

"Their sessions helped us to deal with our grief."





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Child protection

UNHCR, with its child protection partners, provides specialised services, such as psychosocial support, through case management to displaced and returnee children survivors of violence, abuse and neglect or at risk and their families, including through awareness-raising activities and supporting community-based child protection structures. This includes implementing Best Interest Procedures (BIP), an assessment through which the best outcome for a child is based on an evaluation of circumstances and considering the child's own input.

Gender-based violence prevention and response

UNHCR and partners help to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV) through awareness-raising activities and referral mechanisms, encouraging survivors to seek help and facilitate access to multi-sectoral services. UNHCR is also facilitating dialogue with community leaders and outreach activities to strengthen community awareness to respond to and mitigate the negative impacts of violence on individuals, families and communities in Afghanistan.

UNHCR is building the capacity of partners, to more effectively tackle gender-based violence through the provision of quality prevention, mitigation and response services for GBV survivors. UNHCR also prioritises the establishment of women community centres which serve as safe spaces for women and girls who face restrictions participating in community life and to enhance their wellbeing through small-scale livelihood and recreational activities as well as providing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

Support to persons with specific needs

“I now believe that I can live like other members of society.”

UNHCR has been supporting 90 visually impaired women in three provinces of eastern Afghanistan – Nangarhar, Laghman and Kunar – with programmes to help them gain more self-confidence through training in braille, literacy, life skills and mobility.

36 graduates from the programme were taught by UNHCR’s implementing partner, WADAN, how to operate telephone helplines, to help them find livelihood opportunities and become self-dependent.

“Life was difficult before being enrolled in this training program. I had lots of difficulties

including mental and psychosocial tensions,” said 37-year-old Khalida, one of the trainees.

“After I was enrolled, I learned a lot of things. Most importantly my mental health improved, and I now believe that I can live like other members of society. I can now write and read as well as help with chores at home like washing clothes and cooking,” she said.

“My life has significantly improved, and I have also gained the trust and respect of my family, as I am no longer a burden to them.”



Protection mainstreaming

Considering the shrinking protection space affecting all population groups in Afghanistan, UNHCR has ensured that protection is placed at the heart of all its interventions. This is achieved by operationalising all key elements of protection mainstreaming, ensuring the participation and empowerment of the community throughout all stages of programming, prioritising safety, dignity and ‘do no harm’ as well as meaningful access for all affected population groups, and enhancing accountability for its interventions through inclusive complaints and feedback mechanisms.

Complaints and feedback mechanisms are also in place to ensure that UNHCR is made aware of relevant concerns or challenges facing the communities it serves, to respond effectively, including information feedback desks in the community, complaints and feedback boxes, as well as face-to-face engagements and referrals by Community Outreach Volunteers (COVs) and other community-based mechanisms.

Protection monitoring

UNHCR conducts protection monitoring to inform evidence-based action for displaced, returnee and host communities in Afghanistan.

Participatory methodologies, including participatory assessments and protection monitoring tools, are key to ensure that needs are reflected in protection, assistance and solutions programming.

Protection monitoring tools, including community-based protection monitoring, rapid household assessments, border and returnee monitoring as well as community engagement, help to generate reliable qualitative and quantitative data on protection risks and trends across all population groups and provinces.

Diversifying communication channels with the community is crucial to mitigating the risk of selection biases or excluding certain members of the community. To this end, UNHCR has strengthened its outreach through community volunteers to get direct feedback on the protection risks and needs of women and girls who face restrictions in their freedom of movement as well as other marginalised and hard-to-reach communities in remote areas.

Legal assistance, identity and civil documentation

After fleeing his home province in Paktia, south-eastern Afghanistan, due to conflict, Mohibullah, 24, and his family faced great challenges while in displacement in Khost province. Four years ago, the extended family of 14 were finally able to return to their province, but still faced many challenges, largely due to the absence of proper civil documents, including a tazkira, the Afghan national identity card.

Then, last year, Mohibullah attended a legal awareness session organised by UNHCR with its partner, Watan's Social & Technical Services Association (WSTA). They learnt about the importance of holding valid civil documents, especially tazkira cards.

“Everything is dependent on having a tazkira in our village, only one person in our family had this document,” explained Mohibullah,

a father of two. “We faced problems in accessing some of the basic services, but this programme helped us to get tazkira. Now I can get assistance from aid agencies because I have an identity,” he said.

Lacking the necessary identification documents meant that his family had been unable to access basic health care in local clinics, nor could they get free schooling for the children. He also said his mother had been turned away from receiving humanitarian aid as she didn't have any legal documents.

Mohibullah, who struggles financially to support his family, approached WSTA's legal assistant for further help. They guided him through the whole process and supported the family to obtain the crucial legal documents they had lacked for many years.



© UNHCR/WSTA



“I am glad that now I have an identity in my country.”

“I am very happy about this programme,” he added. “My eyes opened to new chances, and I got to learn new things. I am glad that now I have an identity in my country.”

Mohibullah is one of 30,000 people helped under UNHCR’s pilot legal assistance projects in 2023. The agency is expanding the programme to help more vulnerable families in Afghanistan access justice and legal support.

As part of the legal assistance project, birth registration is also conducted to prevent children born in displacement from becoming stateless in the future. Returnees and IDPs have also access to individual legal counselling, free legal aid and legal representation.

Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration

An effective, sustainable protection and solutions response for communities

Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs) are at the heart of UNHCR's protection and solutions work in Afghanistan, an area-based "whole of community" approach, inclusive of all population groups, facilitating reintegration and access to durable solutions for forcibly displaced people, including returnees, and channeling multisectoral interventions by various local and international partners.

The PARRs were established to improve access to basic services in areas where high

numbers of internally displaced Afghans and returning Afghan refugees settle. This objective is more relevant than ever, given the large-scale arrivals from Pakistan and Iran. The PARRs are an effective mechanism to support communities in welcoming back fellow Afghans. They can be designed to adapt to an evolving landscape of displacement and return movements.

Since 2017, 80 PARRs have been established, and 4.1 million people assisted, as they sought to rebuild their lives.



PEOPLE ASSISTED IN 80 PARRS, SEEKING TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES, SINCE 2017

4.1 million

Protection is at the core of the PARRs, ensuring that every intervention is guided by the fundamental principle of safeguarding the rights and dignity of forcibly displaced populations and host communities. Importantly, support is delivered directly to the communities and individuals.

The activities in the PARRs are rolled out in partnership with UN agencies and NGO partners. They aim to enhance access to education, healthcare, shelter and community-based projects to facilitate access to public services and livelihood opportunities, provide cash assistance and in-kind support to vulnerable families. UNHCR's programmes also facilitate access to land, documentation, social services, self-reliance, and inclusion in decision-making structures. Through this holistic approach, interventions improve the lives of Afghans, building resilience and self-sufficiency.



MORE ABOUT UNHCR'S PARR PROGRAMMES

UNHCR developed PARR programmes under the regional [Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees \(SSAR\)](#)¹, the regional framework for protection and solutions for Afghan refugees to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration, and assistance to host countries. They are fully aligned with and embedded in the 2023-2025 [United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan](#)² and promote collaboration and synergy among humanitarian and basic human needs actors, bridging the gap and ensuring a more effective and sustainable solution to displacement challenges. Through their inclusive, “whole of community” focused design, the PARRs are an example of the [Global Compact on Refugees \(GCR\)](#)³ in action.

1 <https://www.unhcr.org/asia/solutions-strategy-afghan-refugees>

2 <https://afghanistan.un.org/en/238795-united-nations-strategic-framework-afghanistan>

3 <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/global-compact-refugees>

Our activities and impact

UNHCR activities aim to ensure that the forcibly displaced and returnees are not left behind.



An area-based approach providing effective and sustainable protection and solutions in crisis-hit Afghanistan

The PARRs are an effective mechanism to support communities in welcoming back fellow Afghans. They help to promote peaceful co-existence and social cohesion by engaging all segments of society in decision-making. This way, community representatives, including youth groups and women, become the agents of change.

Recent arrivals from Pakistan benefitting from PARRs and stronger communities

Lower Sheikh Misri High School, built by UNHCR in Surkhrod district, Nangarhar province, is providing a warm welcome to newly arrived Afghan children who, until recently, had been living in Pakistan.

Most of the students at the school are returnee or displaced Afghans. “I am very happy and proud that students are coming here, and we turn their sadness into happiness,” said school principal, Shah Agha.

“When they come here, we reassure them and tell them: This school is at your service. You can come here, come to the school with confidence and you will be given a pen and notebook,” he said.

Education is an important priority for the

newly arrived families, although, for the time being, girls can only study up to Grade Six in Afghanistan. “This school has been built very well and the teachers are also very good. We feel good and happy that our children can work and study here,” said parent Mohammad Yosuf.

Volunteer teacher, Shamshoda is a former refugee in Pakistan herself and knows the difficulties that they face. She says the recent arrivals need support. “We should help them so they can lead a good life.

“The help provided by UNHCR here, such as the clinics and schools they built, has made the people stand on their feet, giving them motivation in their lives,” she added.

“This school has been built very well and the teachers are also very good. We feel good and happy that our children can work and study here.”





Refugee returnee and community elder, 55-year-old Marwat, a father-of-nine, knows how hard it is to return to your country after spending decades away. His family fled to Pakistan during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Now, he is helping new arrivals from Pakistan to settle in Chamtala township, Surkhrod district, a Priority Area of Return and Reintegration (PARR) in eastern Nangarhar province, where there are high numbers of returnees and displaced Afghans and where UNHCR works with partners to provide protection and other key services.

At the Siasang health clinic, built by UNHCR, many new arrivals are getting medical care.

Marwat says services like the clinic play a key role in supporting the newcomers. “I represent about 250 families here,” he said. “There are many families who cannot afford to eat more than one meal a day or afford private health care. This clinic plays a critical role. With other interventions in

the community, they all help newly arrived families to stabilise and reintegrate.

“UNHCR built a school for us, and this clinic. [They] are very important because the people here are poor. They don’t have money, and some are disabled.”

“When refugees return, they have many priority needs – starting with shelter, then things like healthcare, food and education.”

While the community welcomes the arrivals, Marwat also worries about the strain that this will place on existing services. “We are going to feel the pressure in our communities, but we must welcome the new families. We are ready because they are our brothers. We will try to help as much as possible, even if we face difficulties ourselves,” he added. “I say: Welcome to them!”

“Interventions in the community...help newly-arrived families to stabilise and reintegrate.”

Shelter

Shelter support is a key protection activity. UNHCR builds and repairs houses impacted by conflict and natural disasters, including installing solar energy panels and heating systems.

“I hope for a good future in the village. We can live peacefully.”

Janat Bagh village (“Paradise Garden” in English), in the north-eastern province of Kunduz, was on the frontline of conflict for more than seven years. Around 95% of the houses were damaged or destroyed. After years of displacement, families have begun returning to rebuild their lives, with the support of UNHCR, partners and other agencies.

“It’s a good feeling to come back and live here again, to live in the place where my father and I grew up,” said Yunus, who struggled to find work and money for rent in displacement.

His family are among 63 households in the village that received UNHCR grants to help them rebuild their destroyed homes,

which are fitted with solar panels, providing electricity, and helping his children to be able to study at night. They also benefit from a solar powered well and water reservoir in the village, helping residents access clean drinking water. Other facilities, including a community centre and primary school, have also been built.

“UNHCR’s help has had a big impact on people’s lives,” said Yunus. “I hope for a good future in the village. We can live peacefully.”



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Cash-based interventions

UNHCR provides cash-based assistance to vulnerable groups, including people with specific needs, cash for work, cash to meet basic needs, such as food, and cash for shelter. The agency also provides livelihood grants, helping individuals start small businesses.

Cash assistance can mitigate negative coping strategies, giving individuals the freedom, choice, and dignity to prioritise their most urgent needs.

Cash-for-work

Cash for work activities provide short-term job opportunities for people and help to improve communities.

In Bamyan, in Afghanistan's Central Highlands, hundreds of people benefitted last year from a cash-for-work programme, carried out by UNHCR partner, WSTA, which included repairing roads, irrigation and flood canal cleaning.

Participants from local communities, including displaced and returnee Afghans, are paid 9,000 Afghanis (around USD \$120) for 22 days of work.

"This cash for work programme is very important," said father-of-eight Qurban, cleaning an irrigation canal in Jograkhel village. "At least I can earn something now

to feed my family. I haven't had any regular work for three or four months and we had to borrow lots of money."

Qurban, who is displaced, said he had debts of around 50,000 Afghanis (USD \$637) and that the programme had come at a vital time. "This is like a gift: at least I can have regular work for around a month.

"This is the first cash-for-work programme here. It provides short term jobs for people and helps protect my community from flooding."

He said some of the income would be used to pay off some of his debts, while the rest would be spent on food.



© UNHCR/Caroline Gluck

“At least I can earn something now to feed my family. I haven’t had any regular work for three or four months and we had to borrow lots of money.”



© UNHCR/Caroline Gluck



Livelihood and skills support

Teenager, Aqila, runs a shop selling mobile phones and accessories at the UNHCR-supported Women's Business Centre in Herat. There are 21 stores at the Centre, all operated by women from the local community. The second floor offers training programmes and psychosocial counselling.

Aqila also repairs mobile phones, having completed a training programme at the centre, and has a small photo studio in her store, working with one other woman. "Many women don't feel comfortable going to a shop to fix their phones if it is run by men as they have personal data on the phones," she explained.

"I have many customers and a good income. I can help support my family as my father is old and cannot work.

"I have been so happy since I started working here," she added. "I like working in this community. My self-confidence has increased. This has been an important journey for me, and I have learnt a lot," she added.

"I have many customers and a good income."



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“Who does not want to have a good and sweet future?”

One of UNHCR’s livelihood projects in Faizabad, north-eastern Afghanistan, involved training 50 displaced Afghans to learn beekeeping and honey production, helping them to generate income.

Father-of-six, Zabiullah, from Wakil Abad village, is one of the beneficiaries. He was provided training, equipment and three hives. After one year, he has expanded the number of hives.

“I was able to collect 25 to 30 kilos of honey from the bees and earned a small profit,” he said. “Beekeeping is very good for us, and the income helps with some of my household expenses, like buying flour and rice.”

“I have been selling the honey in Badakhshan province, but plan to export to Kabul and Mazar this year,” he added. “If I put in more effort, and the yield of honey increases, I can increase the income. My family and I will be happy. Who does not want to have a good and sweet future?”



A UNHCR livelihoods project to assist vulnerable families grow crops in greenhouses has been a lifeline for widow and mother-of-four, Kamila.

“Now I can work and can support my family with the income from here, thanks to UNHCR,” she said.

UNHCR, with local partner Afghan Community and Health Rehabilitation Organization (ACHRO), built five greenhouses in different districts of Parwan province. The village is

located in a UNHCR-designated Priority Area of Return and Reintegration (PARR).

Beneficiaries were provided with equipment, including solar panels, water pumps, wheelbarrows, shovels, and seeds, to start them in business.

Kamila and four other beneficiaries also received training on planting and irrigation. The greenhouses will allow families to grow vegetables and flowers all year round and sell crops at local markets.

“I can work and can support my family with the income from here.”



© UNHCR/Mushtaq Munawarzada



© UNHCR/Mushtaq Munawarzada



Support to help grow businesses

“It is very important for me to help other women gain skills. Some women are the only person in their family to be able to earn any money.”

UNHCR supports women to play an active role in the community. Through entrepreneurship grants, more than 2,000 people in the Western Region have been helped to set up their own businesses, 65% of whom are women.

One of them is 27-year-old Fatima, in Guzara district, Herat. She started off working at home with just one sewing machine, but now employs 16 other women making clothing items, including school and hospital uniforms, at her company Chic Poshan. One year after starting her business, she also received a top-up grant under the ABADEI programme run by UNDP.

“I feel lucky and happy to have had this assistance. The support was crucial in helping

me to start and expand my business,” she said. “Through my company, more women can work, develop new skills and be a source of income for their family.”

Fatima, a displaced Afghan, also sets aside time to train other women in her community to learn sewing skills and fashion design so they can they work at home. “I’m very happy to be able to give opportunities to others,” she said.

“It is very important for me to help other women gain skills. Some women are the only person in their family to be able to earn any money. They can sew at home and earn to support their families.”



Zahra, a mother-of-three, was displaced due to conflict and drought more than a decade ago. But today, she runs a successful carpet weaving company in Injil district, Herat, employing 25 women.

“I’m the breadwinner in my family. The women I work with are also displaced, like me and also, the sole breadwinners. I’m very happy to provide them a chance to work and to do so in safety and security and be able support their families.

“I’m very proud of this business and will not stop. My dream is to establish my own brand and sell my products in international markets,” she said.

The 35-year-old received a business grant from UNHCR to start up her company, buying equipment and wool. Today, most of her profits are sunk back into the business, which she plans to expand.

She firmly believes people who’ve had to start their lives afresh in displacement should be given opportunities to thrive and contribute to society. “People who are displaced need support to start new lives, to earn an income and to access basic services,” she said.

“Equally, we have a responsibility to support others where we can,” she said.

“I’m very proud of this business and dream of selling my products in international markets.”



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Microfinance projects – supporting SMEs

Microfinance projects, which provide small amounts of capital and support, have helped create job opportunities and strengthen economic resilience for refugee returnees and internally displaced Afghans, helping to build a culture of entrepreneurship.

In 2023, more than 220 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and women-owned businesses were assisted in the Central Region of Afghanistan through these microfinance programmes, supported by UNHCR and the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat-Afghanistan (AKAH-A). They follow the principles of Islamic financing, providing business owners with easy options for repayment, with longer grace periods.

Almost 40% of the businesses supported are run by women, like 27-year-old Muzhada. She has been able to start and expand a tailoring business in Kabul after receiving a loan of 150,000 Afghanis (USD \$2,000) to set up.

“The day I received the loan, I felt a great sense of happiness,” she said. “Before, our life was not good, we had many problems in our life, our house was swept away by a flood, and we were left with nothing.”

The loan money allowed her to buy the equipment and fabric she needed to set up in business. “Before, I knew how to do tailoring, but I didn’t have the tools. Since I received the loan, I have a very good income from the tailoring work I do. My business has prospered.”

Muzhada has big dreams for the future. “I want to become a businesswoman, become famous all over the world, as a designer, a tailor,” she said. With microfinance funding, she has begun a journey to make her dreams come true.

“I want to become a businesswoman, become famous all over the world, as a designer, a tailor.”







With microfinance funding, Hanifa, a mother-of-five, has been able to start up her own grocery store in Dasht-e-Barchi, in Kabul.

Hanifa, who is displaced, started her grocery store after receiving a loan of 200,000 Afghanis (USD \$2,800) and has been able to expand her store within less than a year.

“We were in a very dire situation; things were really bad. My husband is a casual labourer, and he could not find a job for days,” explained Hanifa, who opened her shop after getting the loan. She said she had to learn a lot of business skills on-the-job and has grown a lot in confidence.

“Now I know how to use a scale, how to do calculations, how to transfer a mobile balance.

“I am running a shop, although mostly men play this role, and people say: ‘Well done that you are doing this job!’ They encourage me a lot.”

“I am running a shop, although mostly men play this role, and people say: ‘Well done that you are doing this job!’ They encourage me a lot.”

Support for health services

A UNHCR-built comprehensive health centre in Kandahar is playing a vital role in helping thousands of people, mostly displaced Afghans, get access to good quality medical care.

On average, 300 people each day come to Hakim Sahib Ada centre. As well as providing basic health services, operationally run by IOM, it also offers nutrition, delivery care, childcare and immunisation, health education and psychosocial counselling services, with 18 medical staff. Previously, people had to travel several kilometres to reach a basic clinic; and more than 20 kilometres to the regional hospital.

“There are very good quality health services here, and it is free of charge,” said the hospital’s COVID-19 vaccinator, Mohammad Nasim. He lives in the community, and his wife and children have been treated at the clinic.

In one part of the building, mother, Malala, has come to weigh her ten-month-old daughter, Sharifa, who was diagnosed as malnourished, weighing just six kilogrammes at nine months old. “I’m very pleased with the treatment here; my daughter is doing well and has gained two kilos in just one month. I was given good advice about how to feed and care for her,” she said.

“The problem of access to good healthcare services for people, especially the women of this community, has been solved.”



A community of around 15,000 people in Surkhbab village, Mohammad Agha district, Logar province, most of whom are returnees and internally displaced people, are benefitting from better health care services through a newly built Comprehensive Health Centre (CHC).

The UNHCR-supported facility, with 23 staff, includes a solar-powered water well, laboratory, maternity ward, pharmacy,

nutrition, and vaccination facilities.

“The people of this community are very poor and were far away from health services and other basic services,” said community elder, Faiz Mohammad. “The nearest health centre is about 45 minutes away from this village. With this facility, the problem of access to good health care services for people, especially the women of this community, has been solved.”



© UNHCR/Samand Ibrahim







“My goal is to save the lives of mothers and their children.”

“I am thrilled to have completed my education. Now, I can serve my community, especially women who have very limited access to health facilities,” said Shazia, who just completed a two-year midwifery training programme in Bamyan province.

She is among the first in a group of 80 women, from various districts in Bamyan and Daikundi provinces, to graduate from the course. The programme, run by UNHCR with partner, Watan’s Social and Technical Services Association (WSTA), aims to tackle Afghanistan’s high maternal and infant mortality rates and empower young women by training them to work as qualified health professionals in remote, rural villages in the country’s Central Highlands.

The trainees are from rural areas themselves, where limited access to healthcare can mean the difference between life and death.

“In winter, roads are blocked most of the time and people cannot go to the hospital,” said Tahira, one trainee. “My aunt had twins but lost them because of the closure of the route by snow.

“My goal is to save the lives of mothers and their children,” she said.

Training the women is helping to strengthen their communities. UNHCR is committed to continuing the programme in the Central Highlands and running similar projects in other areas of Afghanistan.



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Building schools and better futures

“Before, we didn’t have enough classrooms and many pupils studied in tents outdoors.”

Children have access to better learning facilities at Dasht-e-Essa Khan middle school, Bamyan, after UNHCR built an additional six-classroom building, used by girls. It is fitted with solar panels, providing electricity and powering a water tank, a playground and a boundary wall to prevent flooding.

The village, with high numbers of returnees and displaced Afghans, has grown rapidly in recent years.

“The work had a very positive impact,” said headmaster, Maqbol Shah. “Before, we didn’t have enough classrooms and many pupils studied in tents outdoors. But they couldn’t learn well when it was very hot or cold weather. Now, they have a very good environment. They are more motivated, and absenteeism has decreased,” he said.



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Gulam Hussain, head of the Parents Association, with a son at the school, also welcomes the changes. “The children are very happy here. They no longer need to study in tents and the classrooms are properly equipped with chairs and desks. My son’s interest in studying has increased. This school can play a vital role in their future; they learn here, get educated and aren’t left illiterate.”

“Students were learning in tents, and it was very difficult for us to conduct classes.”



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“We now have very good facilities. It’s a 100% improvement compared to before.”

Hundreds of students, mostly from displaced Afghan families, now have access to better learning facilities thanks to a UNHCR-built girls school in Kandahar.

Around 750 pupils currently study at Mirza Ahmad Khan Kalacha school, in Loya Wala and the school director, Latifa, says that the improved facilities mean more families are keen to enrol their children.

“The old building used to leak which meant some classrooms couldn’t be used. Students were learning in tents, and it was very difficult for us to conduct classes,” she said.

The new solar-powered building has 12 classrooms, with a playground, wash facilities and a borewell supplying water to the school. “We now have very good facilities. It’s a 100% improvement compared to before. We don’t worry about the weather and because of the solar system, we can run fans when it gets so hot in the summer,” she added.

“Everything has been provided to ensure there is a good environment for pupils to learn. It is also a clean and green environment. More parents want to send their children here to study. It has had a very positive impact on the local community.”

Strengthening communities

Some 20,000 families in Awar-e-Mazar village in Shahristan district, Daikundi province, in the Central Highlands, have better transport access to reach health and education services as well as work opportunities thanks to UNHCR support.

People used to travel a long distance to cross a river, using a wooden bridge, which was only accessible to pedestrians, not vehicles. After the construction of a 28-metre concrete

bridge, villagers now enjoy shorter travel times, lower transport costs and improved safety.

“People of this village were facing many problems, especially in winter,” said 52-year-old Ali Jan, a teacher in the village. “Now that UNHCR has built this bridge, students and teachers do not worry about crossing the river in any season.”



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“Thanks to the protection wall our agricultural lands won’t be destroyed by floods.”

A UNHCR-built 60-meter-long protection wall in Karwan Sarai village, Aybak city, Samangan province helps farmers to safeguard their lands from damage during flash floods.

Villagers are mostly farmers and rely on agricultural products for a living.

“The floods damaged our lands and agricultural products and sometimes our livestock was also killed while grazing,” said Firozuddin, a farmer and community leader.

“Now, thanks to the protection wall our agricultural lands won’t be destroyed by floods.”

Emergency Response

Flood response, May 2024

Flash floods and heavy rains devastated villages in many areas of north-eastern, northern and western Afghanistan, killing more than 300 people, destroying thousands of homes and thousands of hectares of agricultural land.

As part of an inter-agency humanitarian response, UNHCR with its partners, has been

responding to emergency needs, providing basic relief items, including emergency tents, non-food items and clothing kits, and providing a range of protection services, including psychosocial counselling, and identifying people with specific vulnerabilities in need of extra support.



© ARAA/Ali Sher Bek





Herat earthquakes

UNHCR and its partners were on the ground and responded immediately to emergency needs as the first of a series of earthquakes hit Herat province, western Afghanistan, on 7 October 2023.

Lifesaving aid was provided to nearly 60,000 people in 77 affected villages across eight districts, including relief items and multipurpose cash assistance for nearly 60,000 people, and distributed thousands of family tents, solar lamps and heaters.

Child-friendly spaces were set up; and psychosocial support and awareness sessions provided.

Rabea, a displaced mother-of-six, was forced

to shelter outdoors with 10 family members in a makeshift tent after the quakes. Large cracks in her house made it uninhabitable. She was very grateful to receive a family tent, blankets, tarpaulin sheets and kitchen and hygiene items in a distribution organised by UNHCR with its partner, Ansari Rehabilitation for Afghanistan (ARAA).

“This is the first help we have received. We will use the items you provided, and they are the items we need,” she said.

“We were living in the open field, spreading out blankets and sleeping on them. We don’t live at our home because of the earthquake, all parts of the house are cracked, and it’s cold outside.”



Returns from Pakistan

UNHCR and partners, as part of an inter-agency response, scaled up their work and presence at Afghanistan's official border crossings as tens of thousands of Afghans began arriving from Pakistan in October 2023.

Following the announcement by Pakistani authorities to deport undocumented foreigners, more than half a million Afghans have since returned to Afghanistan.

UNHCR has been supporting arrivals, including refugees and those with specific protection needs under its mandate who may face great hardship and risks, including providing protection monitoring and assistance such as essential relief items and

cash-based support to help the newly arrived individuals.

Some refugees have returned under a long-established UNHCR voluntary repatriation programme, which provides support to refugees wanting to return home, including protection assistance and a voluntary repatriation cash grant.

“Within 24 hours, our lives changed. When you move from one place to another, you face challenges. You start from zero.”

Abdul, aged 23, a new father, received UNHCR support upon arrival from Pakistan and now needs to rebuild his life in Afghanistan, a country he had never set foot in before.

“Within 24 hours, our lives changed. When you move from one place to another, you face challenges. You start from zero.”







مرحباً بالضيوف الجدد
مرحباً بالضيوف الجدد
Welcome

including governments, foundations

CZECH REPUBLIC
DEPARTMENT OF

Arrival
Desk

New arrivals are grateful for the support but worry about the future. “This help is very important, if it wasn’t there, believe me, we wouldn’t have money for our transportation,” said returnee, Mohammad Aman, a father-of-seven, who spent two decades in Pakistan.

“With the help we receive, I have to create a job for myself or work as a labourer.

“Our problems are that we have no shelter or place to live. We need fuel, medicine, clothes and household items. Our biggest concern is shelter. We have no house and no land.”

“When I left, I was almost 14. Now I don’t know what to do,” he added.





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Inter-agency coordination

As the lead protection agency in Afghanistan, UNHCR heads three inter-agency co-ordination groups – the Protection Cluster, ES/NFI (Emergency Shelter/Non-food Items) Cluster and the CCCM (Camp Coordination and Camp Management) Working Group. It co-chairs the Disability Inclusion Working Group (DIWG) and is a core member of the Durable Solutions Working Group (DSWG) – helping to maximise the positive impact of the work of the UN and partners in providing protection services, the delivery of humanitarian responses and solutions to displacement.

UNHCR as Protection Cluster Lead Agency

UNHCR performs a dedicated coordination, strategy development and advocacy function, within the framework of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the Cluster Approach, under the auspices of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in Afghanistan.

The Protection Cluster provides analysis, organization, and reporting. It provides support to sub-clusters or working groups of the Protection Cluster, including Child Protection, Gender based Violence, Housing Land and Property, and Mine Action.

Key objectives of the Protection Cluster include ensuring protection assistance and services to vulnerable, conflict and disaster-affected communities, including IDPs, refugees and returnees; strengthening capacities of partners, service providers and civil society including through established guidelines, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and training; monitoring key protection issues in order to identify persons in need of assistance, inform the humanitarian response and advocate for the protection of civilians and mitigate protection risks through meaningful engagement with duty bearers as well as advocate for the ‘centrality of protection’.

UNHCR as Emergency Shelter/Non-Food Items Cluster Provider of Last Resort

The Emergency Shelter and Non-Food Items (ES-NFI) Cluster in Afghanistan, led by UNHCR with IOM as co-chair, plays a critical role in addressing the shelter and non-food needs of affected populations, including providing seasonal winter help, such as heating supplies, blankets, and clothing to vulnerable people affected by sudden onset natural disasters, conflict, and cross-border movements. The Cluster coordinates in consultation with more than 66 partners working across the country.

As lead agency, UNHCR enables the coordination architecture through dedicated staffing, allocating resources towards prepositioning of stockpiles, supporting needs assessments, providing oversight on the centrality of protection, and as the provider of last resort when the resources of other actors are exhausted.

With nearly one-third of households in Afghanistan residing in inadequate shelters, the Cluster provides comprehensive shelter support to those in dire need, enhancing their ability to withstand future shocks and improving their living conditions. In 2024, the Cluster is targeting 1.7 million Afghans in need of shelter assistance.

Camp Coordination and Camp Management Working Group

Displacement and conflict over the past four decades mean that large numbers of Afghans continue to live in informal settlements throughout the country, many in urban locations.

The Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Working Group has been collecting data on informal settlements to better understand the challenges and needs of the households, including those newly displaced as well as recent returnees from Pakistan, to be able to better assist those in urgent need, including women.

The 2024 UN humanitarian response targets 568,000 people in seven provinces, prioritizing cash assistance for 80% of beneficiaries and in-kind support for 20%, alongside profiling of all targeted individuals. The ES-NFI Cluster and CCCM Working Group jointly provide aid in informal settlements through shelter materials, household goods, and seasonal items.

National Durable Solutions Working Group (DSWG)

UNHCR is an active member of the National Durable Solutions Working Group (NDSWG) core group (comprising eight UN agencies) as well as of the five sub-national Regional Durable Solutions Working Groups (RDSWG) and participates in the National Steering Group, which is chaired by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General/Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator (DSRSG/HC/RC).

UNHCR contributes significantly to the work of the DSWG, based on its core protection mandate, to strengthen collaboration in the identification of priority interventions and ensuring complementarity and synergies in programming and implementation. This involvement

ensures a unified vision and strategic direction for collective action, which is essential for resolving protracted internal displacement.

Disability Inclusion Working Group (DIWG)

UNHCR is the co-chair of the Afghanistan Disability Inclusion Working Group, leveraging its protection mandate and expertise to advance inclusive humanitarian action in Afghanistan. Jointly with its co-chairs from Humanity and Inclusion as well as the Kabul Orthopedic Organization, a local organization supporting persons with disabilities, UNHCR advocates for the full inclusion and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in needs assessments, design, implementation and coordination of humanitarian response programming and policies. Targeted efforts will be placed on advancing data collection on disability prevalence and capacity building for stakeholders on inclusive humanitarian action.

Our Partners

Localisation is a top priority for UNHCR Afghanistan. UNHCR works closely with local and national actors to lay the ground for sustainable and durable solutions.

Local partners have extensive and long-standing experience in communities, with a substantive understanding of the needs, challenges, and opportunities. Harnessing this expertise and learning from it is critical for UNHCR to deliver effective and sustainable programmes. In line with our Grand Bargain

commitments, UNHCR is proud to work with 17 partners of whom 13 are national Afghan NGOs.

UNHCR also works with sister UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations, and the private sector, including the Afghan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry, AWCCI, in PARR locations to provide a comprehensive response for collective outcomes, impact and sustainability.



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