



# Afghanistan Earthquake

ONE-MONTH IMPACT REPORT

September 2025



## Overview

---

A series of earthquakes struck Afghanistan around midnight local time between 31 August and 1 September, hitting four provinces. Epicentres were in Badakhshan (northeastern Afghanistan), and Nangarhar, Kunar, and Nuristan provinces (eastern Afghanistan). The strongest quake, with a magnitude of 6.0, struck about 30 km from Jalalabad – Afghanistan’s fifth-largest city – with tremors even felt as far as Islamabad, Pakistan.

Roughly 3 million people live in the affected region – many in mud-brick homes that were either severely damaged or completely destroyed – and as many as 500,000 people are estimated to have been impacted. De facto authorities initially estimated at least 800 people killed and more than 2,500 injured, though casualty figures continued to evolve as search and rescue operations proceeded, eventually reaching estimates of over 2,200 killed and 3,600 injured – making the earthquake of 31 August among the deadliest in Afghanistan’s recent history. The majority of casualties were in Kunar province, the hardest hit by the earthquakes.

Entire villages and more than 6,300 homes were reported as destroyed and over 2,100 damaged, with impassable roads and difficult terrain complicating access to survivors in the remote, mountainous areas affected – a situation which only worsened with the continued aftershocks. This included another earthquake of 4.9 magnitude at

a depth of 10 kilometres on 23 September. Key infrastructure, including water sources, was also damaged, with reports of livestock and farmland decimated.

The most urgent needs of affected families are shelter and non-food items (as many were sleeping in the open in the initial days exposed to the elements), food (as livestock and crops have been destroyed), and clean water. Protection support is also critical for the most vulnerable (women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities) alongside psychosocial support, especially for children, and protection from exploitation and abuse.

The earthquake has added death and destruction to a country already facing multiple crises including a severe drought and the return of millions of Afghans from neighbouring countries. Since January, more than 2.7 million people have returned, among them over 2 million from Iran and over 700,000 from Pakistan, half of whom arrived since 1 August. In September alone, the month following the earthquake, more than 220,000 Afghans went back from Pakistan. Nangarhar and Kunar - two of the provinces hardest hit by the earthquake, as well as hit by flash floods in the weeks preceding – together host roughly one-quarter of all returnees from Pakistan assisted by UNHCR this year.

# UNHCR's response

As part of a coordinated humanitarian response with partners, 25 inter-agency assessment teams were deployed across the hardest-hit districts in Kunar and Nangarhar provinces to better understand the immediate requirements of affected communities and adapt the response accordingly. UNHCR's emergency response in the initial phase focused on two key areas: emergency shelter and essential supplies, and protection.

## Emergency shelter and essential supplies

UNHCR along with partners immediately mobilized assistance to support affected families across hard-hit Kunar villages, including emergency shelter kits, plastic tarpaulin, non-food items, and other supplementary aid.

This included some 1,000 cubic metres of prepositioned essential relief items dispatched from stockpiles in Kabul and Jalalabad, including family tents to shelter up to six people, jerry-cans, thermal blankets, plastic tarpaulins and solar lamps. These essential items are providing families who have lost their homes with support to create safe and dignified living conditions, enabling them to sleep, cook, and wash in safety.

Across nine villages in three districts of Kunar province, UNHCR and partners distributed some 13,500 relief items to support around 34,000 people – including in some of the hardest to reach areas. With cold temperatures on the way, UNHCR support also included winter accessory kits for tents for families to reinforce their shelters against harsh weather conditions, as well as winter clothing kits and LPG gas cylinders for warmth.



UNHCR family tents and other core relief items in UNHCR's warehouse in Kabul, Afghanistan, ready to be deployed to support families devastated by the earthquake. © UNHCR/Amaia Lezertua Martinez





*With roads and infrastructure devastated by the earthquake in eastern Afghanistan, UNHCR teams travel on foot to reach Afghans in areas affected by the earthquake, which hit already remote and mountainous areas. © UNHCR/Oxygen Media Empire*

## Protection

UNHCR is prioritizing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), prevention and response to gender-based violence, child protection, and targeted assistance for persons with specific needs. With protection programmes already in place in many areas to support recent returnees from neighbouring countries, UNHCR quickly scaled up and launched rapid protection assessments via the UNHCR-led Protection Cluster. As access improves, the response has expanded to include urgent cash assistance for returnees, support from community outreach volunteers, child and women protection services, MHPSS, and legal aid.

At the border itself, UNHCR and its partner have scaled up protection activities for new arrivals, taking into account the growing number of Afghans who are returning to quake-affected

areas. UNHCR is performing daily protection monitoring through interviews with returnees, in order to identify protection concerns, risks and their intended areas of return in Afghanistan. Help desks were also set up to boost the identification and referral of individuals to be assisted.

UNHCR continues to advocate to ensure the dignified return of Afghan nationals and that their rights are respected, and calls for Pakistan to uphold its long-standing humanitarian approach to Afghan refugees. This means extending legal stay for those still in need of international protection, such as groups who face heightened risks upon their return.

UNHCR maintains its advocacy at all levels to ensure dignified returns and respect for the rights of Afghan nationals as well as immediate and long-term assistance both at border points and areas of return to help families rebuild their lives.



## Ongoing needs

In parallel with support for earthquake survivors, UNHCR is also responding to other urgent needs of people returning. At the same time, UNHCR has been forced to temporarily cease assistance at some of its encashment centres - UNHCR facilities where Afghan returnees from neighbouring countries receive cash support, protection, and other assistance to support their reintegration after years of displacement and exile – due to restrictions imposed on female staff, making it impossible to support vulnerable groups such as women on their own and female-headed household, who together comprise some 30 per cent of returnees approaching UNHCR for assistance. Discussions with the authorities continue toward a resolution and as a temporary measure, UNHCR has been able to move some

operations, including cash assistance, to border and reception areas where national female partner staff are currently still able to work.

Immediate support is critical for affected Afghans, especially as winter approaches. Single-digit temperatures, snow and freezing rain will severely impact families living in makeshift shelters and traditional mud-brick houses, as well as those returning to Afghanistan. After decades of conflict, economic crisis and rampant poverty continue to worsen hardships of ordinary Afghans, and recovery efforts will be critical to boost the capacity of host communities and to assist those returning under adverse circumstances to earthquake-affected areas and across the country more widely.



*Omar Khail, 60, sits with his grandchildren in a tent at the Torkham border crossing with Pakistan. Originally from Kunduz province, he left Afghanistan as a child and returned with his family in the days following the earthquake. He plans to use assistance from UNHCR to feed his family, but is worried about where and how they will be able to set up a new home.*

© UNHCR/Oxygen Media Empire

## Donor acknowledgement

**UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by the following donors to its Afghanistan earthquake response. Donors that contributed \$100,000 or above:**

CERF | Grundfos Foundation

**UNHCR also extends its sincere appreciation to donors who have contributed earmarked funding to Afghanistan, as well as softly earmarked and unearmarked funding to UNHCR's operations in the region and globally, enabling a flexible and timely response:**

Australia | Belgium | Bulgaria | Canada | Denmark | European Union | France | Germany | Iceland | Ireland | Islamic Development Bank | Japan | Luxembourg | Netherlands (Kingdom of the) | Norway | Republic of Korea | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | CERF | Country-based pooled funds | Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan | AB MEDICA S.p.A | Adyen NV | Aotearoa New Zealand for UNHCR | Australia for UNHCR | COOP ITALIA | German Postcode Lottery | LONGi Green Energy Technology Co. Ltd. | King Baudouin Foundation | Private donors in Hong Kong SAR and Republic of Korea | Simmons and Simmons | UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe | UK for UNHCR

## Flexible funding

Flexible funds help UNHCR to prepare for the unpredictable, to kick-start an emergency response, and to help displaced people in forgotten or under-resourced crises. They also enable UNHCR to plan and manage resources efficiently and effectively to help save and transform lives.

Without flexible funding, we would not be able to properly prepare for any new emergency that may arise. Without flexible funding, the first phase of our emergency response, which delivers thousands of emergency supplies, essential shelter and protection assistance to families in need, would struggle to get off the ground.

Flexible funding is especially important not only for our emergency response but also for longer-term support we provide to displaced people and their host communities. When emergencies fade from the spotlight, flexible funding enables us to help those who are suffering most.

Cover photo: Rahmatullah sits outside the remains of his home in Awrak, Kunar province. Following the devastating earthquake in Afghanistan, the east of the country has borne the worst of the damage. Many survivors saw their homes collapse and spent the initial nights sleeping outside. © UNHCR/Oxygen Media Empire