

Annual Results Report

2025

Afghanistan

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Note:

The baseline values presented in this document reflect previous year's progress when available. If such data is not available, strategy baseline values are used instead.

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- 4.1 - Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

Section 1: Context and Overview

1.1 Changes to the Operational Context

UNHCR's operating environment in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan remained highly constrained in 2025. While the overall security situation was more stable than in the years immediately after the de facto authorities took power, conditions remained volatile.

Armed groups continued to operate. In late 2025, tensions with Pakistan escalated, leading to airstrikes, cross-border incidents and a fragile ceasefire. These developments increased risks for civilians and humanitarian staff. Humanitarian access remained uneven. Bureaucratic restrictions, security incidents and localized suspensions of activities continued to disrupt humanitarian operations in some areas.

As highlighted by UNAMA and OHCHR, the de facto authorities continued to restrict rights and civic space. At the same time, the country faced a deep economic crisis and poverty, and food insecurity persisted. The World Bank estimated that GDP per capita declined further, partly linked to the large-scale return of Afghans from neighbouring countries.

Since 2023, Afghan returns have increased sharply. Approximately 5.4 million people returned under adverse circumstances or were deported, including more than 2.8 million in 2025 alone, mainly from the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan. This represented more than 10% of the Afghan population returning in less than two years. Mass Afghan returns were driven by deportation campaigns, the invalidation of documents, their exclusion from rights and services, and the general deterioration of protection conditions in countries of asylum.

The profile of returnees changed compared with 2023 and 2024. A growing share were refugee returnees, particularly from Pakistan, as well as other forcibly displaced and stateless people in need of international protection. More than 70% of returnees were women and children. Many had heightened protection needs, including female-headed households and people with specific needs.

Most returnees settled in a limited number of provinces. This placed additional pressure on already overstretched services, host communities and fragile labour markets, and increased the risk of social tensions. While only a small proportion of returnees said they had immediate plans to leave Afghanistan, many more indicated that they knew of other returnees who had already left the country again. This raised concerns about the sustainability of returns and the risk of repeated or onward movements given the dire situation inside Afghanistan.

The operating environment further deteriorated from a protection and access perspective. The de facto authorities continued to impose restrictions on the rights and freedoms of all Afghans, particularly women and girls, limiting progress towards rights and solutions for the most vulnerable. The stricter enforcement of the ban on Afghan women entering UN premises severely affected the participation of Afghan female staff and limited UNHCR's direct engagement with women and girls, constraining principled, gender-sensitive programming.

Drastic funding cuts affecting all aid actors in Afghanistan coincided with escalating needs at border areas and in locations receiving large numbers of returnees. In response, UNHCR reviewed its strategy and prioritized emergency response, protection, housing and livelihoods, and narrowed its geographic focus to the areas most affected by returns. These developments significantly shaped UNHCR's work in Afghanistan. It had to adapt how assistance was delivered, strengthen community-based approaches, and work closely with partners. This helped UNHCR maintain life-saving assistance while also supporting progress towards durable solutions and sustainable reintegration for returnee, displaced and host communities.

1.2. Progress Against the Desired Impact

1. Impact Area: Attaining Favorable Protection Environments

More forcibly displaced people, returnees, and vulnerable host communities, particularly women and girls, will be able to exercise their rights in safety and dignity.

Population Type	Indicator	
	Baseline	Actual (2025)
1.1 Proportion of people seeking international protection who are able to access asylum procedures		
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	69.70%
1.2 Proportion of people who are able to move freely within the country of habitual residence		
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	25.14%	0.00%

The protection environment in Afghanistan continued to deteriorate after August 2021. The Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, together with more than 100 restrictive edicts, further limited women's and girls' rights, including movement, association and education. Stricter enforcement in 2025, including the ban on Afghan female UN staff entering UN premises, further reduced women's and girls' safe access to services and narrowed humanitarian space.

Despite these constraints, some positive changes towards a more favorable protection environment were achieved. More than 37,700 civil documents were issued, strengthening legal identity and facilitating access to services and justice, particularly for women and girls who were previously undocumented. This helped reduce the risks of exploitation, arbitrary arrest and family separation.

Access to specialized protection services also expanded. In 2025, 55,482 women and girls received survivor-centred support, reinforcing their right to protection from violence. Child protection services also reached 73,730 children and parents.

Participation mechanisms, including community-based structures and hotlines, enabled 327,674 people to seek information, report risks and influence decisions affecting their lives. These mechanisms helped create more accountable and protective environments.

While progress towards a national asylum framework remained limited, asylum space for non-Afghan refugees was preserved. During the year, 33 asylum-seekers and refugees were identified; 23 were registered, biometrically enrolled and issued UNHCR documentation; and no cases of refoulement were recorded. Overall, despite the shrinking civic space, these results indicated that key elements of the protection environment for forcibly displaced and stateless people were preserved and, in some areas, incrementally strengthened.

2. Impact Area: Realizing Rights in Safe Environments

More forcibly displaced people, returnees, and vulnerable host communities, particularly women and girls, can meet their basic needs in safety and dignity.

Population Type	Indicator	
	Baseline	Actual (2025)
2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities		
IDPs	39%	7.00%
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	1%	2.05%
Returnees	11%	4.00%
2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services		
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	82.00%	100.00%

In 2025, against a backdrop of economic fragility and reduced aid, conditions for returnees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and vulnerable host communities in Afghanistan improved modestly in terms of safety and access to basic services. UNHCR and partners scaled up cash-based and shelter support in 20 priority areas of return and reintegration, helping households cover essential needs, avoid negative coping mechanisms and reduce exposure to secondary displacement and evictions. These positive changes were most visible in high-return provinces where pressures on housing, services and social cohesion were most acute.

More than 500,000 returnees received emergency cash assistance at the border and more than 50,000 people received cash in areas of return. Most were refugee returnees and just over half (51%) were women. Compared with 2024, a higher share of households were able to meet basic needs in the first months after arrival. Post-distribution monitoring showed that more than 90% of recipients reported better living conditions and reduced stress, 99% reported improved family relations, and 81% preferred cash to in-kind assistance. This indicated progress towards more dignified, people-centred support and greater choice in how assistance was used.

Access to services in high-return areas also expanded, contributing to safer and more protective environments. In 2025, 27,626 children gained access to education, 486,718 people benefited from improved health facilities, 87,567 from safer water, sanitation and hygiene, 9,857 from renewable energy solutions, and 32,080 from strengthened community infrastructure. These gains were the result of combined efforts by communities, the de facto authorities and multiple humanitarian actors. Within this broader response, UNHCR's investments advanced the realization of rights, particularly for women, children and others facing heightened protection risks among the forcibly displaced, returnees and host communities.

3. Impact Area: Empowering Communities and Achieving Gender Equality

More forcibly displaced people, returnees, and vulnerable host communities, particularly women and girls, benefit from enhanced livelihoods and socioeconomic self-reliance opportunities.

Population Type	Indicator	
	Baseline	Actual (2025)
3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work		
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0.00%	0.00%
3.2a Proportion of children and young people enrolled in primary education		
IDPs	Data not available	36.09%
Returnees	Data not available	28.00%
3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education		
IDPs	Data not available	23.00%
Returnees	Data not available	12.00%

3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark		
IDPs	Data not available	92.00%
Returnees	Data not available	94.00%

On top of a worsening economic situation, vulnerable people faced complex barriers to achieving self-reliance. The absence of asylum legislation and formal permits for refugees and asylum-seekers limited access to work and essential services, leaving many in legal and economic limbo.

Restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities prevented women and girls from attending post-primary education and from moving freely outside the home. This curtailed their livelihoods and limited their social and economic inclusion. Returnees also faced particular challenges in accessing these opportunities. Many lacked documentation, assets or social networks after years – and sometimes decades – living abroad.

As part of a broader response to support the reintegration of returnees, UNHCR prioritized livelihoods and economic inclusion in areas with high numbers of returns, aiming to strengthen resilience and promote greater self-reliance. In 2025, UNHCR supported income-generation opportunities for 4,541 people. Women made up 49% of participants, reflecting efforts to address the specific barriers they face.

Interventions included training for small and medium-sized businesses, cash assistance, asset provision, technical and vocational education and training, job placements, investment in production, and livelihood-related infrastructure.

UNHCR also used cash-based approaches whenever feasible. Cash-for-work initiatives – including teacher training, IT skills development and other activities – supported 2,751 people in 2025.

UNHCR introduced new approaches, including the launch of a project providing microgrants to returnee entrepreneurs.

Through these interventions, UNHCR advanced the economic empowerment and self-reliance of vulnerable communities, especially returnees, women and young people. This support helped people to generate their own income, meet basic needs with dignity, and develop skills that bolstered their reintegration in Afghanistan.

These efforts also contributed to economic recovery and job creation in areas of return and supported social cohesion and stability with local host communities benefitting as well.

4. Impact Area: Securing Solutions

Refugees, IDPs and returnees have greater access to durable solutions.

Population Type	Indicator	
	Baseline	Actual (2025)
4.1 Number of refugees who voluntarily return in safety and dignity to their country of origin		
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0
4.2a Number of people who departed on resettlement		
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	5
4.2b Number of people who departed through complementary pathways		
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0
4.3b Number of refugees for whom residency status is granted or confirmed		
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0

In 2025, progress towards solutions for returnees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities was most visible in high return areas, where efforts by communities, de facto authorities, UNHCR and other actors converged. Concentrating work in 20 priority areas of return and reintegration helped create conditions that better support sustainable reintegration. Efforts placed particular emphasis on women, young people and other groups facing heightened protection risks.

Access to safe and dignified housing improved for 27,846 people following the construction and repair of shelters, reducing exposure to secondary displacement and overcrowding. Expanded civil documentation for returnees supported legal identity, social cohesion and prospects for self-reliance. Livelihoods support, including assistance to micro and small enterprises and skills development, contributed to greater income-earning opportunities in communities of return, particularly for women and young people, even if needs remained high.

Investments in community infrastructure and basic services helped strengthen local conditions for communities. In 2025, 32,080 people benefited from upgraded community infrastructure, 27,626 children accessed safer learning environments, 486,718 people gained improved health services, and 87,561 community members benefited from safer water, sanitation and hygiene. These improvements supported more stable conditions for returnees, displaced people and host communities and reduced some of the pressures that could lead to renewed movement.

While there were no departures through resettlement or complementary pathways during the year, continued engagement on solutions helped sustain prospects for future pathways and reinforced community-level protection and support mechanisms, laying the groundwork for more durable solutions when conditions allow.

1.3 Challenges to Achieving Impacts

Afghanistan's ability to progress towards solutions for returnees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities was significantly constrained in 2025. The return and deportation of an estimated 2.9 million Afghans from Iran and Pakistan – including approximately 1.4 million deportees, as well as many refugees and other Afghans in need of international protection – often under adverse conditions worsened the protection environment and created a large and highly vulnerable population with urgent needs at borders and in areas of return.

These movements intersected with chronic poverty, a fragile economy, food insecurity, overstretched basic services, limited livelihood opportunities, recurring climate shocks and entrenched restrictions on rights and freedoms, particularly affecting women, girls and other at-risk groups. Together, these factors limited progress towards strengthening protection, meeting basic needs, supporting self-reliance and advancing durable solutions.

The tightening implementation of decrees – including regulations governing women's movement, appearance and participation in public life, the ban on women's access to post-primary and medical education, and the stricter enforcement of the ban on Afghan women entering UN premises – directly affected programme delivery and results. These measures reduced women and girls' access to services and opportunities, weakened community engagement and complicated the delivery of gender-sensitive programmes. Operationally, they disrupted UNHCR's staffing arrangements, increased costs associated with mahram requirements and remote working arrangements, and contributed to uncertainty, fear and stress among staff and communities. In parallel, bureaucratic impediments, delays in authorizations, and attempts to interfere with humanitarian activities led to suspensions and slowed the scale-up of programmes, particularly those implemented through national NGO partners.

Drastic funding reductions forced cuts to UNHCR's workforce, presence in country and programme portfolio. Budgetary constraints forced UNHCR to prioritize life-saving border and immediate post-arrival assistance for returnees. It also had to scale back support to population groups, such as IDPs, as well as certain sectors – including education, health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) –

despite high needs. Limited emergency cash assistance and fewer shelter programmes contributed to high levels of debt, food insecurity, and onward or secondary movements among returnees, undermining prospects for sustainable reintegration and durable solutions.

Prospects for fully overcoming these barriers remained uncertain given the political context, restrictions on women and girls, Afghanistan's deep structural challenges, and shrinking protection space in neighbouring countries. Nonetheless, UNHCR sought to mitigate these barriers by concentrating resources on a smaller number of high-need locations and focusing on areas of work where its expertise has strong added value such as protection, housing and livelihoods. Looking ahead to 2026, UNHCR will intensify advocacy with the de facto authorities, strengthen partnerships and community engagement, and adapt the way it delivers assistance and services to safeguard women's participation. It will also enhance its use of data, including post-return monitoring, to support evidence-based prioritization and resource mobilization. These efforts will help safeguard critical protection and basic services, as well as area-based reintegration support, even in a highly constrained environment.

1.4 Collaboration and Partnerships

In 2025, UNHCR deepened its collaborative approach in Afghanistan, recognizing that progress towards impact depended on strong partnerships, especially in the context of refugee return and reintegration. Cooperation with local organizations and community-based initiatives ensured that protection, shelter and livelihoods support in the 20 priority areas of return and reintegration remained grounded in community priorities and accessible to the most vulnerable. Partnerships with nine national NGOs were critical, enabling sustained access to hard-to-reach districts and supporting community-driven responses despite insecurity and restrictions.

UNHCR worked more closely with development partners and international financial institutions to support local programmes that strengthen resilience. These efforts were aligned with global frameworks on refugee protection and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, including the Global Compact on Refugees and UNHCR's strategic directions.

A partnership with the Islamic Development Bank supported construction of essential infrastructure, including health facilities for returnee, displaced and host communities. With funding from the Japan International Cooperation Agency and in partnership with the First Microfinance Bank, UNHCR launched a new microgrant, entrepreneurship and financial literacy project, which will contribute to self-reliance and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on poverty reduction, decent work and reduced inequalities in 2026.

Close coordination with UN Women, UN Habitat, UNICEF, UNDP, IOM and others underpinned planning, appeals and multi-sectoral assistance in response to large-scale returns. Joint initiatives, including reintegration-focused projects under the UN Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan, helped combine protection, basic services and livelihoods in high-return areas and supported progress on the SDGs related to health, education and sustainable cities. Shared assessments, integrated service delivery and joint monitoring improved programme quality and reduced duplication across impact areas.

At the regional level, UNHCR remained an active contributor to the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees' support platform, including through the Afghanistan Local Core Group established in January 2025. This platform, together with follow-up to Global Refugee Forum pledges on solutions and responsibility sharing, strengthened cross-border information sharing and advocacy with host countries, supporting more predictable, coordinated approaches to protection and durable solutions for Afghans across the region.

Section 2: Results

2.1. Outcomes and Achievements

1. Outcome Area: Access to Territory, Reg. and Documentation

More refugees, IDPs, returnees and people at risk of statelessness, particularly women and girls, obtain civil and other documentation that enables access to services.

Core Outcome Indicators

Population Type	Indicator		
	Baseline	Target (2025)	Actual (2025)
1.1 Proportion of refugees and asylum seekers registered on an individual basis			
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
1.2 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority			
IDPs	Data not available	50.00%	0.01%
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Returnees	Data not available	50.00%	0.13%
1.3 Proportion of people with legally recognized identity documents or credentials			
IDPs	41.67%	60.00%	0.19%
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%	2.46%

Core Output Indicators

Population Type	Indicator	
	Actual (2025)	
01.1.1 Number of people registered on an individual basis		
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	23	
01.2.1 Number of people supported to obtain civil status, identity or legal status documentation		
IDPs	6,204	
Returnees	25,732	

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2025, progress was made in improving access to registration and documentation for asylum-seekers, refugees, refugee returnees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and IDP returnees in Afghanistan. More people were able to establish or confirm their legal status and access essential services, as data showed coverage continued to expand. These gains came despite a continued deterioration of the overall protection environment.

In the absence of a national asylum framework, UNHCR maintained a minimum protection space by issuing asylum-seeker certificates, a key safeguard against refoulement. All newly identified asylum-seekers who

approached or were referred to UNHCR in 2025 were registered and documented. Certificates were issued to 23 new asylum-seekers from Pakistan, supporting the recognition of their status and facilitating residence and freedom of movement.

More broadly, UNHCR and partners expanded their access to legal assistance and civil documentation, including Tazkiras and birth certificates. Through legal information and counselling, which reached more than 139,298 forcibly displaced and stateless people, 37,746 new civil documents were issued for asylum-seekers, refugees, refugee returnees, IDPs and IDP returnees. Women represented 44% of those receiving legal assistance, demonstrating that adapted modalities still enabled a significant proportion of women and girls to secure documentation, despite severe restrictions on their rights and mobility.

Refugee returnees were the primary beneficiaries of these gains, accounting for 77% of those receiving legal assistance and 68% of those obtaining civil documents. This directly supported more sustainable reintegration, as legal identity was a precondition for accessing education, healthcare, microfinance and formal employment, and for strengthening social cohesion in high-return areas.

These results were achieved through combined efforts.

UNHCR set the strategic direction, provided technical guidance and ensured continuity of registration and documentation for forcibly displaced and stateless people. National and local legal NGOs delivered frontline counselling and representation, while relevant authorities issued the civil documents themselves. Together, these contributions helped preserve and incrementally improve key aspects of the protection environment for forcibly displaced people and returnees.

3. Outcome Area: Protection Policy and Law

Protection measures for IDPs, returnees and refugees are coordinated effectively and efficiently.

Core Outcome Indicators

Population Type	Indicator		
	Baseline	Target (2025)	Actual (2025)
3.1 Extent national legal framework is in line with the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol			
None	Not yet aligned	Not yet aligned	Not yet aligned
3.2 Extent national legal framework is in line with the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness			
None	Progressing toward alignment	Not yet aligned	Not yet aligned

Core Output Indicators

Population Type	Indicator	
	Actual (2025)	
03.1.1 UNHCR has engaged in legislative and judicial processes to strengthen laws and policies for the protection of refugees, IDPs, returnees and stateless people and/or the reduction and prevention of statelessness		
IDPs	No	
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	No	
Returnees	No	

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

N/A

4. Outcome Area: Gender-based Violence

More refugees, returnees and IDPs have access to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse prevention and response services.

Core Outcome Indicators

Indicator			
Population Type	Baseline	Target (2025)	Actual (2025)
4.1 Proportion of people who know where to access available GBV services			
Host Community	Data not available	30.00%	44.00%
IDPs	Data not available	30.00%	38.00%
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Data not available	30.00%	12.00%
Returnees	Data not available	30.00%	44.00%
4.3 Proportion of survivors who are satisfied with GBV case management services			
Host Community	Data not available	70.00%	75.00%
IDPs	Data not available	70.00%	70.12%
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Data not available	70.00%	70.00%
Returnees	Data not available	70.00%	68.85%

Core Output Indicators

Indicator	
Population Type	Actual (2025)
04.1.1 Number of people who benefitted from specialized GBV programmes	
Host Community	12,077
IDPs	24,153
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	109
Returnees	46,175

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

Gender-based violence remained widespread in Afghanistan in 2025, putting an estimated 11.4 million Afghans at risk. Despite this, there was modest progress in access to protection for refugee, IDP and returnee women and girls.

Even with a shrinking protection space driven by restrictive edicts and strict enforcement of the 2024 Law on the Promulgation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, more women and girls were able to access safe spaces, gender-based violence services and psychological and social support than in 2024.

UNHCR expanded specialized women’s protection activities from five to eight regions and operated women’s community centres, including new centres in Ghazni and Kandahar. These centres provided safe spaces and structured support for 8,054 women and girls, strengthening their well-being, social networks and coping capacities in a highly restrictive environment. Integrating mental health and psychological and social support enabled 6,129 women and girls to receive individual and group counselling, as well as case management. Referrals through the interagency gender-based violence system also increased to 413, showing improved coordination and use of available services. UNHCR directly managed 45 high-risk cases of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. It also piloted cash support for survivors to address immediate safety and subsistence needs.

Community-level engagement continued to expand in 2025. Dignity and hygiene kits were distributed to 7,022 vulnerable women and girls, including returnees at border points with Pakistan and Iran, linked to inter-agency safety audits. In addition 2,556 community members (55.5% women and girls) took part in these audits to identify risks and suggest ways to reduce them. Overall, 53,385 community members (57% women and girls) and 4,841 community leaders (48% female) were engaged on gender-based violence risks, rights and available services. These activities helped challenge harmful social norms and encourage early help-seeking among those affected.

These gains were the result of joint efforts. UNHCR provided strategic direction, technical leadership and operational delivery for refugee, IDP and returnee communities, while local partners implemented women’s centres, mental health and psychological and social support, as well as community outreach. UN Women, UNFPA and other gender-based violence specialists contributed expertise, joint advocacy and campaigns, such as the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. Together, these actors helped maintain and, in some areas, strengthen access to gender-based violence prevention and response services for forcibly displaced and returnee women and girls, even as overall risks continued to rise.

5. Outcome Area: Child Protection

Afghanistan’s child protection system, working with humanitarian actors, children, families and communities, effectively protects refugee, internally displaced and returnee children from abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence and family separation, while promoting solutions that uphold the best interests of the child.

Core Outcome Indicators

Population Type	Indicator		
	Baseline	Target (2025)	Actual (2025)
5.1 Proportion of children at heightened risk who are supported by a Best Interests Procedure			
IDPs	54.97%	60.00%	7.56%
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Data not available	60.00%	0.00%
Returnees	54.96%	60.00%	57.38%
5.2 Proportion of children who participate in community-based child protection programmes			
IDPs	0.00%	10.00%	3.00%
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0.00%	10.00%	0.00%
Returnees	100.00%	40.00%	9.30%
5.3 Proportion of unaccompanied and separated children who are in an alternative care arrangement			
IDPs	0.00%	60.00%	6.84%
Returnees	100.00%	55.00%	62.53%

Core Output Indicators

Population Type	Indicator	
	Actual (2025)	
05.1.1 Number of children and caregivers who received child protection services		
IDPs	38,621	
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	
Returnees	35,109	

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2025, protection for refugee, IDP, returnee and host community children expanded and became more structured. UNHCR and partners identified and registered 9,748 children, including 3,800 girls, with specific protection risks for enrolment in best interests procedures. The full roll-out of CPIMS+ (Child Protection Information Management System) strengthened the quality, timeliness and consistency of case management and follow-up.

Coverage of mental health and psychosocial support also expanded, with 20,053 children (11,825 girls) accessing psychosocial support and recreational activities through 26 child-friendly spaces, including 13 newly-established sites at schools and in communities, contributing to safer, more nurturing environments.

Community-based mechanisms were significantly reinforced. By the end of 2025, 39 community-based child protection networks were in place across four regions, 19 of them newly created. This helped detect risks earlier and promote protective behaviours.

Awareness-raising sessions on key child protection concerns reached 43,929 children and parents (23,579 females), improving their knowledge of risks, rights and available support. UNHCR also expanded the use of cash assistance to vulnerable child protection cases, enabling timely, tailored support for children at highest risk.

UNHCR's contribution lay in setting the strategic direction, leading on case management for children at risk, establishing and supporting child-friendly spaces and community networks, and building the capacity of 109 UNHCR and partner staff to apply child protection standards. National NGOs, community structures and caregivers played a central role in operating networks, identifying children at risk and sustaining safe spaces for children.

Other stakeholders were critical to achieving these results. UNICEF, in particular, contributed through a new collaboration framework, data-sharing agreement and cross-border case management standard operating procedures between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which improved coordination on best interests procedures and family reunification for unaccompanied and separated children.

Joint work on birth registration, using participatory assessments, helped build stronger evidence on the barriers families faced. These efforts also supported more predictable, coordinated and child-focused protection outcomes for children in Afghanistan.

7. Outcome Area: Community Engagement and Women's Empowerment

Forcibly displaced and returnee communities are empowered to actively participate in decision-making that affects them.

UNHCR and partners use timely, credible data and analysis on refugees, statelessness and forced displacement to inform protection and solutions programming.

Core Outcome Indicators

Population Type	Indicator		
	Baseline	Target (2025)	Actual (2025)
7.1 Extent participation of displaced and stateless people across programme phases is supported.			
IDPs	Moderate	Extensive	Extensive
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Moderate	Extensive	Moderate
Returnees	Moderate	Extensive	Extensive
7.2 Proportion of people who have access to safe feedback and response mechanisms			
Host Community	36.91%	100.00%	0.15%
IDPs	42.25%	100.00%	0.05%
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	80.00%	100.00%	5.06%
Returnees	33.41%	100.00%	0.28%

Core Output Indicators

Population Type	Indicator	
	Actual (2025)	
07.1.1 Number of people consulted through Participatory Assessments		
Host Community	664	
IDPs	992	
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	250	
Returnees	2,996	
07.2.1 Number of people who used UNHCR- supported feedback & response mechanisms to voice their needs/ concerns/feedback		
Host Community	12,454	
IDPs	9,148	
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	476	
Returnees	41,974	
07.3.1 Number of people who received protection services		
IDPs	153,341	
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	3,238	
Returnees	997,589	

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2025, progress in community engagement and women's empowerment was reflected in stronger participation, better two-way communication and greater use of protection information to guide decisions affecting refugees, IDPs, returnees and host communities.

Through 337 community outreach volunteers, half of whom were women, 263,622 people accessed information and services, with women and girls comprising 44% of those reached. Initiatives led by the

community and young people benefited 15,095 people, while six community centres and small grants to women- and disability-led organizations helped reinforce local protection capacities and promote more inclusive participation.

Accountability mechanisms expanded during the year. Complaints and feedback channels were used by 64,052 individuals in 2025, which was a 25% increase compared with 2024. More than a third (38%) of queries came from women, indicating sustained access despite restrictions.

Community-based protection monitoring covered all 34 provinces and 179 districts, generating 8,038 household assessments (48% women-headed), 1,021 key informant interviews (42% women) and 1,657 focus group discussions. UNHCR's data accounted for 39.2% of household-level assessments and 33% of key informant interviews analyzed by the Afghanistan Protection Cluster, informing interagency advocacy and planning.

Access to protection support also improved in 2025. UNHCR and partners provided mental health and psychosocial support to 65,599 people. This included 20,344 people (56% women) who received counselling through 36,501 sessions, and 45,235 people (51% women and girls) who participated in awareness-raising and service-orientation activities across 17 provinces, focusing on areas with high returns and significant needs.

Protection case management supported 8,366 people (47% women, 24% people with disabilities) following 8,859 intake assessments. 4,869 people were referred to multi-sectoral services, and 4,459 received cash assistance, including for child protection and gender-based violence cases.

UNHCR contributed by setting the strategic direction on community-based protection, leading the Afghanistan Protection Cluster, generating and analyzing protection data, and strengthening systems such as the household multi-sectoral needs assessment, proGres and token-based deduplication to improve targeting and data integrity.

Community volunteers, local NGOs, women- and disability-led groups, along with Afghanistan Protection Cluster Afghanistan partners, played a central role in outreach, monitoring and service delivery.

Collaboration with UNAMA and IOM helped harmonization of returnee figures and joint analysis to support durable solutions.

UNHCR's education activities supported 759 teachers and students (65% women and girls) through digital skills programmes, further contributing to community resilience and protection outcomes.

8. Outcome Area: Well-Being and Basic Needs

More IDPs, asylum-seekers, refugees and returnees have access to services that enable them to meet their basic needs.

UNHCR delivers coordinated, effective and efficient emergency preparedness and contingency planning.

Core Outcome Indicators

Population Type	Indicator		
	Baseline	Target (2025)	Actual (2025)
8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items			
Host Community	15.84%	3.00%	3.43%
IDPs	1.55%	3.00%	0.44%
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	7.80%	8.00%	3.53%
Returnees	100.00%	15.00%	31.63%
8.2 Proportion of people with primary reliance on clean (cooking) fuels and technology			
Host Community	Data not available	5.00%	59.00%
IDPs	Data not available	5.00%	59.00%
Returnees	Data not available	5.00%	39.00%

Core Output Indicators

Population Type	Indicator	
	Actual (2025)	
08.1.1 Number of people who received cash assistance		
Host Community	20,567	
IDPs	13,977	
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	751	
Returnees	626,781	
08.2.1 Number of people who received non-food items		
IDPs	130,487	
Returnees	156,068	

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2025, cash assistance supported the most vulnerable returnees, IDPs, IDP returnees, refugees, asylum-seekers and host community members to meet urgent basic needs, access essential services and move towards longer-term solutions. The 626,781 returnees assisted with cash includes IDP returnees and refugee returnees who were assisted with various CBIs including 494,445 returnees assisted with return and transportation grants.

Overall, 662,076 people (150,204 households) received cash assistance. Women and girls made up just over half (51%) of those supported, and one third (33%) of households were headed by women. Nearly all recipients (90%) were returnees,

reflecting UNHCR's strategic focus on prioritizing people in high-return areas with heightened vulnerabilities.

Cash assistance at borders and in areas of return helped stabilize households in the first months after arrival, while reintegration, shelter, livelihoods, legal assistance and seasonal cash strengthened their medium-term coping capacity. Targeted cash assistance for legal and civil documentation (48,441 people), shelter (19,878 people), and livelihoods (2,751 people) contributed to better housing conditions, access to identity documents and income opportunities. Multi-purpose and seasonal cash assistance supported households facing acute shocks, including during winter.

UNHCR designed and managed a coordinated cash assistance portfolio across population groups, prioritizing the most vulnerable and progressively shifting from over-the-counter distributions to digital delivery.

Around 90% of payments were delivered through mobile money, blockchain-enabled prepaid cards and bank transfers. These approaches improved timeliness and security, supported financial inclusion and increased cost-effectiveness. Regular post-distribution monitoring confirmed that cash remained the preferred form of assistance and was linked with improved living conditions, reduced stress, better relations within households, and positive effects on local markets.

Progress was also underpinned by strong collaboration with partners. Financial service providers and telecom operators enabled large-scale digital delivery in a challenging operating environment. NGOs and third-party monitors supported targeting, community engagement and monitoring outcomes. Through active participation in the inter-agency cash working group, UNHCR helped ensure transfer values remained aligned with needs and market prices and were harmonized with those of other actors. This promoted coherence and complementarity across humanitarian cash assistance. Together, these contributions supported more predictable, dignified and people-centred assistance for households of concern in Afghanistan.

9. Outcome Area: Sustainable Housing and Settlements

More refugees and returnees live in adequate and sustainable shelter.

Core Outcome Indicators

Population Type	Indicator		
	Baseline	Target (2025)	Actual (2025)
9.1 Proportion of people living in habitable and affordable housing			
IDPs	1.65%	5.00%	2.20%
Returnees	43.38%	75.00%	4.98%
9.2 Proportion of people that have energy to ensure lighting			
IDPs	1.07%	1.00%	1.72%
Returnees	5.10%	25.00%	1.38%

Core Output Indicators

Indicator	
Population Type	Actual (2025)
09.1.1 Number of people who received shelter and housing assistance	
IDPs	8,738
Returnees	13,107

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2025, more returnees, IDPs, and vulnerable host community members gained access to safe, dignified and durable housing, with stronger household ownership and financial inclusion. Supported families moved from overcrowded or substandard accommodation into structurally safer homes that better protected them from climatic shocks and provided greater privacy and security, particularly for women and children.

UNHCR contributed to these gains by shifting from in-kind shelter assistance to cash-based shelter support, placing households at the centre of the construction process. Direct cash transfers, linked to agreed construction milestones, enabled families to plan, manage and build or repair their own shelters in line with UNHCR technical standards. This approach strengthened their ability to make choices, oversight and accountability, while allowing shelter designs and materials to be adapted to local geographic, climatic and cultural contexts without compromising safety and durability.

UNHCR also sought to advance financial inclusion and local economic recovery. All participating households were registered in the national banking system and received funds through individual bank accounts, often accessing formal financial services for the first time. Local procurement of construction materials and labour stimulated community markets and created temporary income opportunities for skilled and unskilled workers, including among returnees and IDPs. Households reported improved financial planning and greater confidence in managing construction-related expenditure.

These results were enabled by coordinated efforts among multiple stakeholders. UNHCR set the strategic direction, defined technical standards and ensured overall accountability for cash transfers and shelter outcomes. A specialized shelter partner provided continuous technical oversight and coaching to

households, helping to ensure compliance with agreed standards. Local authorities and community leaders facilitated transparent targeting and community engagement, while financial institutions ensured timely and secure transfers. Local suppliers and labourers contributed to efficient delivery of materials and services. Together, these actors helped families achieve safer, more sustainable housing solutions and strengthened the foundations for resilience and self-reliance in Afghanistan.

13. Outcome Area: Self Reliance, Economic Inclusion and Livelihoods

More refugee and IDP returnees, as well as IDPs, have improved access to employment and greater financial and economic inclusion.

Core Outcome Indicators

Indicator			
Population Type	Baseline	Target (2025)	Actual (2025)
13.1. Proportion of people with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider			
IDPs	8.74%	25.00%	4.00%
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Data not available	25.00%	2.46%
Returnees	15.77%	25.00%	4.00%
13.2. Proportion of people who self-report positive changes in their income compared to previous year			
IDPs	Data not available	10.00%	1.00%
Returnees	Data not available	10.00%	1.00%

Core Output Indicators

Indicator	
Population Type	Actual (2025)
13.1.1 Number of people who benefitted from livelihoods and economic inclusion interventions	
Host Community	1,450
IDPs	653
Returnees	2,438

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2025 UNHCR expanded access to livelihoods and economic inclusion opportunities for refugee returnees, IDP returnees, IDPs and host community members in high-return areas. Overall, 4,541 people benefitted from livelihoods support. More households reported access to at least one source of income and a greater capacity to meet their basic needs compared with previous years, with gains particularly visible among women and returnees.

UNHCR contributed by providing market-oriented technical and vocational training to 1,426 people (966 women and 460 men), including 668 refugee returnees, 290 IDP returnees and 468 host community members. Training, notably in sectors where women were permitted to work, such as health and education, enhanced participants' employability and earning potential. Job placement opportunities for 253 women through teacher training and for 90 visually impaired women through dedicated empowerment initiatives further supported access to dignified work.

Self-employment and enterprise development also progressed. UNHCR supported 1,184 people (531 women and 653 men) to establish or expand micro-, small- and medium-sized businesses, including 829 refugee returnees, 131 IDPs and 224 host community members, contributing to more diversified and sustainable income sources. A further 1,148 individuals, more than 60% of them women, received value chain-oriented support in sectors such as agriculture, carpet weaving and petty trade, strengthening their participation in local markets. Short-term cash-for-work opportunities for 783 individuals provided temporary income while contributing to community assets and infrastructure.

These results were achieved through area-based and inclusive approaches under the Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration model, which fostered social cohesion between returnees, displaced people and host communities. UNHCR's role focused on setting the strategic direction, providing technical guidance and delivering targeted support, while local NGOs, training institutes, private sector actors and community structures delivered training, facilitated placements and linked participants to markets. Together, these efforts contributed to incremental improvements in self-reliance and economic inclusion for key population groups in Afghanistan.

14. Outcome Area: Voluntary Return and Sustainable Reintegration

Refugee and IDP returnees have access to reintegration support and sustainable solutions.

Returnees have improved access to information and support throughout all stages of their return.

Core Outcome Indicators

Population Type	Indicator		
	Baseline	Target (2025)	Actual (2025)
14.1 Proportion of returnees with legally recognized identity documents or credentials			
Returnees	40.02%	35.00%	39.63%

Core Output Indicators

Population Type	Indicator
	Actual (2025)
14.1.1 Number of people who received counselling and/or information on voluntary repatriation	
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2025, a over 2.8 million Afghans returned or were deported, many under adverse conditions. Despite this, UNHCR and partners were able to support 692,300 returnees, including 494,445 people who received cash assistance and nearly 200,000 who received core relief items, hot meals and transportation. This was an eleven-fold increase compared with 2024.

Cash grants at borders and in areas of return helped meet immediate basic needs and enabled safer, more dignified returns, while vulnerability-based targeting helped prioritize those at highest risk, including women, children and people with specific protection needs.

UNHCR contributed to these gains through contingency planning, stronger accountability systems and large-scale protection monitoring. Improved registration, verification and data integrity enabled the timely delivery of assistance and better tracking of trends. Systematic monitoring at official and unofficial crossing points, and in reception and return areas, generated age-, gender- and diversity-sensitive

evidence on movement drivers, access to territory and protection risks. This evidence informed continuous programme adjustments and advocacy, including on non-refoulement and access to services in high-return locations.

Progress towards more sustainable solutions was also more evident at community level. Through community-based protection and solutions programming in priority areas of return and reintegration, UNHCR reached 648,161 people, supporting more cohesive, resilient communities in key areas of return and laying the groundwork for longer-term reintegration.

These results were made possible through joint efforts. National and provincial authorities, including border and reception actors, facilitated access and reception arrangements.

International and national NGOs, together with community structures, implemented reception and community-based activities and contributed to monitoring. Close coordination with UNHCR and UNICEF offices in Pakistan and Iran, the Regional Bureau and members of the national and regional durable solutions working groups, including the data and analysis technical working group, supported harmonized analysis and planning. This was reflected in joint efforts, such as the Strategic Framework on Solutions for Afghanistan and the 2025 Integrated Response Plan for returnees from Pakistan. Together, these actors contributed to more predictable, protection-sensitive and solutions-oriented responses to large-scale return movements in Afghanistan.

15. Outcome Area: Resettlement and Complementary Pathways

More refugees have access to resettlement and complementary pathways.

Core Outcome Indicators

Indicator			
Population Type	Baseline	Target (2025)	Actual (2025)
15.1 Number of refugees submitted by UNHCR for resettlement			
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	10	50	1
15.3 Number of people admitted through complementary pathways from the host country			
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	35	0

Core Output Indicators

Indicator	
Population Type	Actual (2025)
15.1.1 Country issues machine-readable travel documents	
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	No

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2025, UNHCR made modest but important progress in supporting refugees' access to resettlement and complementary pathways, with a small number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Afghanistan accessing third-country solutions.

While resettlement opportunities remained limited, they were available for refugees facing the most acute protection risks in a context where local integration was not viable. Eight people were submitted for resettlement consideration during the year and five people (one family) departed to Finland.

UNHCR identified and prioritized refugees with heightened protection needs, including those facing serious security threats, movement restrictions and limited access to rights and services. Cases were prepared and submitted in line with UNHCR resettlement guidelines and global standards, ensuring protection safeguards, data integrity and compliance with organizational reporting requirements. In the absence of a national asylum framework, resettlement remained a critical protection tool and, for a few of the most at-risk refugees, the only realistic durable solution.

UNHCR worked closely with resettlement states and international partners to advance third-country solutions. Resettlement states, particularly Finland, continued to provide reception places and process cases despite limited global quotas and minimal diplomatic presence in Afghanistan. International partners, including IOM, supported pre-departure and movement arrangements, while national partners contributed to the identification and referral of refugees with acute protection needs.

Given the severe constraints on resettlement globally, UNHCR intensified efforts to strengthen complementary pathways. Although no admissions were recorded under such pathways in 2025, UNHCR advanced “solutions readiness” by improving data collection on refugees’ education, skills and language capacities and by supporting English language learning through community-led initiatives. In coordination with education partners and potential pathway stakeholders, these efforts established a more structured foundation for expanding access to third-country solutions in 2026 and beyond.

Other Core Output Indicators

Population Type	Actual (2025)
06.1.1 Number of people who received legal assistance	
IDPs	10,139
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0
Returnees	39,202
10.2.1 Number of consultations in UNHCR supported mental health and psychosocial support services	
Host Community	5,840
IDPs	7,300
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	3,285
Returnees	20,076
11.1.1 Number of people who benefitted from education programming	
Host Community	19,232
IDPs	5,630
Returnees	3,523
16.1.1. Government Social protection system is inclusive of forcibly displaced and stateless people	
IDPs	Limited
Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Not at all
Returnees	Limited

2.2. Age, Gender and Diversity

In 2025, UNHCR continued to collect age-, gender-, and population group-disaggregated data across various activities implemented through partners, countrywide protection and border monitoring, as well as UNHCR's complaints and feedback mechanisms. The Washington Group Short Set of Questions, designed to identify people with functional limitations, was integrated in all data collection exercises.

As lead of the Afghanistan Protection Cluster and the disability inclusion working group until April 2025, UNHCR also advanced inter-agency efforts to gather information on the specific needs, risks and barriers faced by returnees, IDPs and refugees in the country. UNHCR formalized and expanded its engagement with organizations of people with disabilities and women-led organizations in 2025 by piloting small grant agreements and dedicated projects for visually impaired women and deaf children.

The 2025 participatory assessment exercise enhanced UNHCR's commitment to accountability to affected populations by incorporating feedback into programmes and strategic decision-making. More than 4,902 people across 26 provinces were consulted during the year – around 50% more than in 2024. Nearly half of those consulted (47%) were women. Discussions covered the impact of the Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities, and local absorption capacity affecting reintegration, documentation and the priority needs of returnees.

This participatory assessment was complemented by UNHCR's safety audit exercise, which engaged 2,329 people – more than half of whom were women and girls (55%) – to identify risks faced by women and girls when accessing support and assistance.

UNHCR's community engagement project supported two-way communication and participation among community members, including women, girls, returnees and people with disabilities. Women made up around 52% of UNHCR's community outreach volunteers, enabling women-to-women engagement in communities. Women also continued to be represented among partner staff, despite the restrictions affecting women and girls.

Section 3: Resources

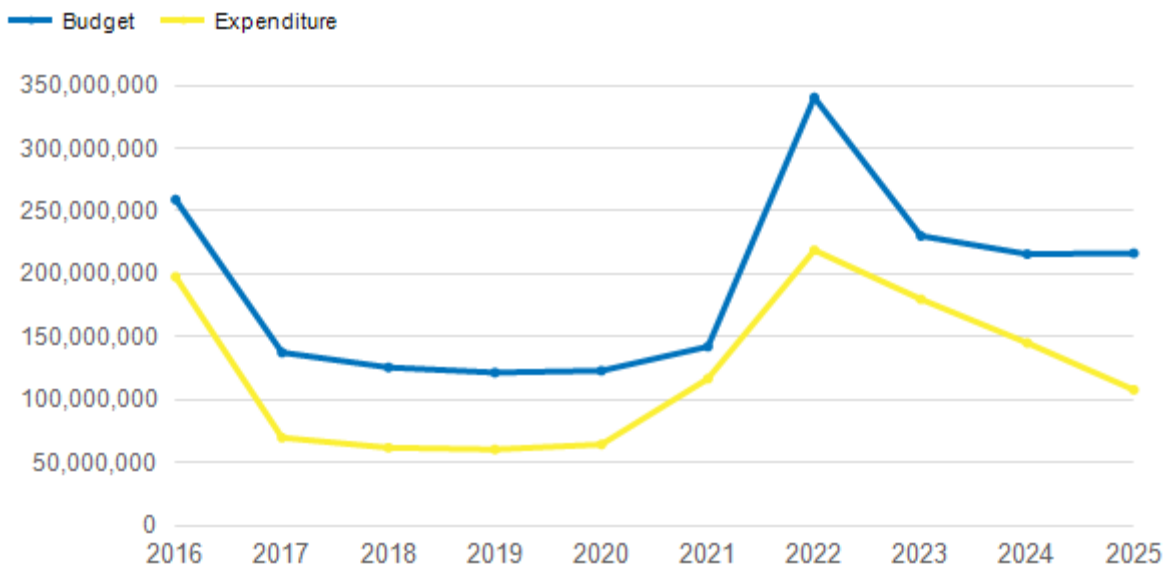
3.1 Financial Data

(Financial figures in USD)

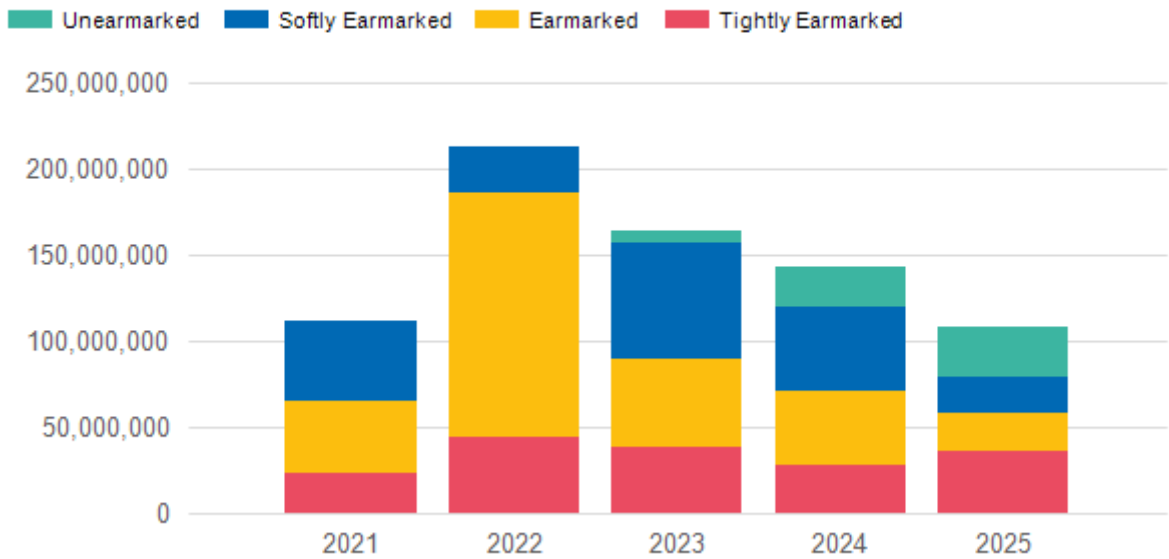
Impact Area	Final Budget	Funds Available	Funds Available as % of Budget	Expenditure	Expenditure as % of Funds Available
IA1: Protect	40,634,444	17,851,132	43.93%	16,929,506	94.84%
IA2: Respond	107,703,698	59,611,842	55.35%	59,412,688	99.67%
IA3: Empower	30,485,152	16,067,820	52.71%	16,018,296	99.69%
IA4: Solve	37,796,529	16,144,197	42.71%	15,631,688	96.83%
All Impact Areas		567,419			
Total	216,619,823	110,242,410	50.89%	107,992,179	97.96%

Outcome Area	Final Budget	Funds Available	Funds Available as % of Budget	Expenditure	Expenditure as % of Funds Available
OA1: Access/Doc	7,039,326	2,966,561	42.14%	2,912,123	98.16%
OA3: Policy/Law	1,046,503	256,192	24.48%	256,192	100.00%
OA4: GBV	9,187,985	3,364,411	36.62%	3,196,523	95.01%
OA5: Children	6,074,213	2,094,012	34.47%	2,094,012	100.00%
OA7: Community	17,286,416	9,786,898	56.62%	8,470,655	86.55%
OA8: Wellbeing	69,375,610	43,059,736	62.07%	42,917,141	99.67%
OA9: Housing	30,350,349	13,216,048	43.54%	13,159,489	99.57%
OA13: Livelihood	30,485,152	16,018,296	52.54%	16,018,296	100.00%
OA14: Return	37,005,102	15,940,575	43.08%	15,428,066	96.78%
OA15: Resettle	396,751	101,811	25.66%	101,811	100.00%
EA17: Systems	3,066,096	1,303,400	42.51%	1,303,400	100.00%
EA18: Support	4,911,643	2,032,659	41.38%	2,032,659	100.00%
EA20: External	394,677	101,811	25.80%	101,811	100.00%
Total	216,619,823	110,242,410	50.89%	107,992,179	97.96%

Budget and Expenditure Trend



Contributions Trend by Type



3.2. Resources Overview

In 2025, UNHCR’s work in Afghanistan was significantly reshaped by a sharp reduction in available funding alongside the unprecedented scale of returns. While maintaining critical border activities, UNHCR consolidated its footprint in return areas, focusing predominantly on the 20 priority areas of return and reintegration,

While budgeted needs remained high in light of mass returns to Afghanistan, deteriorating protection conditions and deepening socioeconomic vulnerabilities. However, as available resources declined, the gap widened between requirements and funding. This gap drove difficult prioritization decisions.

UNHCR focused its limited resources on lifesaving assistance at borders and in high return areas, as well as on areas where UNHCR's expertise provided the greatest added value, such as protection, shelter, core relief items and targeted livelihoods support. This meant deprioritizing some population groups and sectors, including reduced investments in water, sanitation and hygiene programmes as well as education, and limiting the geographic spread of programmes.

There were lower levels of emergency cash assistance available for returnees, fewer shelter interventions despite rising needs, and more limited support to communities outside the 20 priority areas. These gaps increased vulnerability, pushed households towards taking on debt to meet basic needs and contributed to onward movements.

Two UNHCR offices in Gardez and Bamyan were closed in 2025, while sub-offices in Mazar and in Herat were substantially downsized. All international resource management positions were discontinued, with coordination, guidance and support subsequently centralized at the country office.

A key operational adjustment in 2025 was the expanded use of cash-based assistance as a main modality to support returnees and vulnerable households. Cash assistance enabled families to address immediate needs with flexibility and dignity, particularly in high-return areas where services were strained. However, overall funding reductions resulted in lower levels of emergency cash assistance, fewer shelter interventions than required, and more limited support to communities outside priority areas, increasing vulnerability and, in some cases, contributing to onward movements.

Flexible and softly earmarked funding was critical to adapting quickly to evolving dynamics, particularly the sudden peaks in returns from neighbouring countries. This enabled UNHCR to reinforce its border reception and protection monitoring, sustain an area-based package of support in selected high-return districts, and bridge short-term gaps while more tightly earmarked project funding was mobilized. Development and third-party funding, including from international financial institutions and private sector arrangements, supported investments in community infrastructure and livelihoods initiatives that complemented humanitarian assistance and contributed to longer-term resilience.

Partnerships remained central to the response. Approximately 21 per cent of total expenditure in Afghanistan in 2025 was channelled through partners, with a growing share directed to national and local organizations that facilitated access to communities and supported the area-based approach. Around US\$15 million in operational activities (OPS) was allocated for partner implementation under UNHCR monitoring, reinforcing localization commitments while ensuring continuity of service delivery.

Looking ahead, resource mobilization will focus on consolidating multi-year, flexible and development financing for high-return areas and leveraging Global Compact on Refugees and Global Refugee Forum commitments to narrow the gap between needs and resources, while supporting more sustainable reintegration outcomes.

Section 4: Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

4.1 Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

The below lessons learnt and strategic shifts planned for 2026 and beyond are derived from cross-functional consultations with CO Kabul and field colleagues, including frequent brainstorming sessions and two Strategic Moments of Reflection (SMR) s conducted during the first quarter of 2026, which helped agree on the learnings from 2025 and align on shape the operation's common strategic directions.

As UNHCR faced one of the most severe funding shortfalls in recent years, 2025 highlighted important lessons on prioritization and the consequences of difficult trade-offs.

Mass returns in 2025 shifted the dynamics of humanitarian and basic human needs response inside Afghanistan. Arrivals at the border and the large population influx stretched local capacity and exacerbated existing challenges faced by the country.

While the humanitarian community rapidly mobilized, and an inter-agency response and appeal were developed, needs quickly outpaced resources. Severe budgetary constraints made it difficult to deliver an effective emergency response, leading UNHCR to focus on ensuring longer-term considerations were increasingly built into its programming in Afghanistan, which helped stretch available funding further. Funding constraints, together with the humanitarian reset and the review of the humanitarian coordination structure in Afghanistan led by the Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator, initiated a process to strengthen coordination across the UN system. This included clarifying roles and responsibilities based on mandates, avoiding duplication among aid actors, and making best use of limited resources. These reflections will provide an important foundation for 2026, as UNHCR and other relevant actors turn their focus to reintegration efforts, for which multi-stakeholder collaboration, complementarity of interventions and partnerships are crucial.

To maximize impact and optimize resources, UNHCR prioritized support to refugee returns and focused on activities directly linked to its mandate and expertise – namely protection, shelter and livelihoods. It also worked to gradually transition support for other population groups and areas of work to appropriate partners and actors. This process will continue in 2026 and will include continued efforts to diversify partnerships and funding sources. It will also look to further align activities with longer-term basic needs programming and expand collaboration with development actors to advance reintegration and durable solutions.

In addition, monitoring and oversight will be enhanced to mitigate the risk of misconduct, maintain trust and credibility in operations and nurture relationships with donors to continue investing in UNHCR operations in Afghanistan.

UNHCR will continue to work within regional frameworks as a key lesson learnt from 2025 is the importance of coordinated regional efforts, both to advance advocacy for more gradual, dignified returns and durable solutions for displaced Afghans, and to enhance joint analytics on trends, forecasts and political developments to improve planning and response to large movements. It is also essential to work on a joint narrative and understanding on the international protection needs of displaced Afghans, considering the increase in protection risks among returnees in 2025. UNHCR Afghanistan will continue to prioritize support to returnees who were refugees or in need of international protection in host countries.

Lastly, UNHCR will strengthen community-based approaches as an important means of advancing protection and solutions for returnees and other vulnerable populations. As restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities increasingly affect the work of the UN and its partners, greater community ownership and participation in programming will become even more important.

In 2025, community-based protection monitoring played a key role in identifying gaps and emerging needs, while community-led initiatives demonstrated strong results in supporting both

protection and solutions outcomes. Building on this experience, UNHCR will continue to support capacity-building and other initiatives for community-based organizations, encouraging local communities to play a greater role in advancing sustainable solutions.

The lessons learned in 2025 will be instrumental in shaping future strategies in Afghanistan, informing not only 2026 interventions but the broader framing and planning for UNHCR's role in advancing durable solutions for displaced populations.



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