

# AFGHANISTAN 2026-2029



## COUNTRY PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

“A better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world.”





## UN-Habitat ROAP Country Programme Overview

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Acknowledgements: This publication was developed by UN-Habitat's Asia-Pacific country office managers with the support of the ROAP team as well as members of the country teams.

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# OPENING

UN-Habitat's mandate on advancing sustainable urbanization and ensuring that urbanization has a positive social, economic and environmental impact on people's lives is more important than ever in Afghanistan – in a time, when the population increases rapidly, due to massive returns from neighboring countries and as climate change forces people to leave rural areas to seek for alternative livelihoods – in cities. Many of them settle in unplanned and underserved settlements, due to the absence of alternatives.

Afghanistan is a country of extremes: extreme beauty, an extremely strategic location, and a country with many natural resources and extremely resilient people but is still a country where people face extreme socio-economic and human rights challenges, specifically for women and girls.

As Afghanistan urbanizes, there are challenges but also opportunities to support Afghanistan's people. UN-Habitat has been active in the country since 1992 – aiming to improve living conditions, access to basic services and livelihood opportunities, but also fostering integration and social cohesion.

Our teams stay committed to continue supporting Afghanistan's people – for a better life in safe, inclusive and sustainable human settlements of all sizes.





01

# COUNTRY ANALYSIS

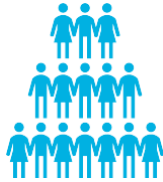
The Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) 2026 names high numbers of returnees, climate change-induced and natural hazards, inadequate or lack of service provision, decades of conflict and geopolitical dynamics, a weak economy and the socio-political restrictions (among many others) as reasons, why almost half of the population are estimated to require humanitarian assistance of any form. Constraints on women's and girls' access to education, employment, and public life add additional challenges.

The UN's Common Country Analysis (CCA/2025) states that "environmental and climate-related pressures further compounded risks. Widespread drought, water scarcity, and major earthquakes during 2025 underscored the growing role of climate shocks as a driver of poverty, displacement, and humanitarian need", while the current war and the regional dynamics further increases vulnerabilities, in a context of structural fragility.

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02

# FACTSHEET



50 M

**POPULATION**



12 %

**POPULATION GROWTH**

(including nearly 2.9 million returnees from neighboring countries in 2025 alone)



417 USD

**GDP PER CAPITA**

Projected to decline around 4%



0.495

**HDI INDEX – among the lowest 10 globally**



2.8 million people

**(forcibly) RETURNED TO AFGHANISTAN in 2025**



85%

**HOUSEHOLDS AFFECTED BY ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS**



4.7% - 5.7%

**HEADLINE INFLATION RATE YEAR-ON-YEAR**

## 03

# URBAN CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

More than 73 per cent of the urban population live in unplanned, informal settlements with inadequate housing conditions, lack of tenure rights; inadequate access to water, sanitation and services, at risk of climate change impacts and disasters, among other challenges. Massive returns and climate-induced displacement accelerate urbanization.



### CHALLENGE 1:

#### Massive population increase

Protracted internal displacement and massive forced returns lead to an increase in people living in unplanned and informal settlements, which often lack tenure rights, adequate housing solutions, community infrastructure, access to WASH/ sanitation and other basic services.

### CHALLENGE 2:

#### Climate change

The country experiences increasingly severe and frequent extreme weather events, notably heavy rains and floods which are the most devastating and costly hazard, as well as protracted drought and temperature extremes. These slow- and rapid-onset events put people's lives, health, livelihoods and assets at risk, strain further already limited resources, and destroy critical public infrastructure.

### CHALLENGE 3:

#### Natural disasters

Afghanistan is recurrently impacted by natural disasters, including massive earthquakes. Without proper investments in resilience but also adequate build back better approaches, risks remain high and people and assets are at risk.

### CHALLENGE 4:

#### Exclusion of women and girls

Afghanistan's social and economic development is massively hindered by the restrictions for women and girls, regarding access to education (above the age of 12 years), livelihood and job opportunities as well as access to health and other services. Inadequate housing and lack of access to services also impact on women's health, well-being and safety.

# HOUSING, LAND AND BASIC SERVICES

## HOUSING FOR ALL

Afghanistan faces significant challenges due to the complex convergence of prolonged armed conflict and violence, political instability, and severe economic hardships. The country has seen a substantial increase in the number of people living in informal settlements, with many of them (forced) returnees from neighboring countries, people in vulnerable situations due to protracted internal displacement, and the acute impacts of climate change, but also due to a continuously high birthrate.

Housing is often inadequate in informal settlements (in urban, peri-urban and rural areas), with many people being forced to construct housing with little means and little technical knowledge, making them vulnerable to earthquakes, landslides and flooding.

The fact that people are at risk of forced evictions, if land and tenure rights are not secured, also hinders investments in housing, property and the surrounding living environment.

### HOUSING



### LAND RIGHTS (HLP)



### BASIC SERVICES



Specifically for the millions of returnees and internally displaced people, adequate housing is either unavailable or unaffordable. Many lack shelter and settle in risk-prone areas.

The absence of formal tenure rights is a major concern in Afghanistan, specifically in areas of massive returns and in rapidly growing informal settlements.

After forty years of conflict, access to basic services is dire: including WASH, education, health, and administrative and financial services.

# CLIMATE CHANGE

Acute and accelerating adverse impacts from climate change on assets, livelihoods and lives add to constraints to Afghan people. The country experiences increasingly severe and frequent extreme weather events, notably heavy rains and floods which are the most devastating and costly hazard, as well as protracted drought and temperature extremes.

## CHALLENGE 1: Lack of urban data

There is a lack of urban data to understand risks, vulnerability and capacities to anticipate and prepare for future shocks and crises and apply integrated, cross-sectoral approaches that support the transition from humanitarian to basic human needs, including long-term considerations on adaptation and resilience

## CHALLENGE 2: Lack of investments

There is lack of investments for reconstruction or construction of disaster resilience community infrastructures and strengthening basic services at the community level including a specific focus on life-saving infrastructure (water, sanitation, flood protection), applying a gender-sensitive approach and supporting people to (re-)build better through improving their skills and knowledge of materials and techniques.



# HUMANITARIAN CRISIS



Protracted internal displacement and massive forced returns lead to an increase in people living in unplanned and informal settlements

The continuously high number of returnees and forcibly displaced from neighboring countries, as well as more than 7 million people facing protracted internal displacement due to conflict and/or climate change impacts, has led – and will continue to lead - to a high number of people in vulnerable situations and in need of humanitarian, basic human needs or livelihoods support.



**5.5 million  
RETURNEES**  
since 2023



**3.1 million  
INTERNALLY  
DISPLACED  
PEOPLE**

# RECENT AND ONGOING INTERVENTIONS

1

## The Project for the Improvement of Living Environment for Vulnerable People in Urban Areas

2024 - 2027

The project objective is to improve the living environment of the urban poor through rehabilitating essential community infrastructure in Kabul and Herat Provinces in a sustained and disaster-resilient manner. The project includes different components and is cross-sectoral in its approach, including construction and rehabilitation of roads, health and WASH facilities, but also empowering people for livelihoods through vocational trainings and cash-for-work.



7.8 M USD



Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)



2

## Weaving Afghanistan's Hope and placement Actions Together (WAHDAT)

2026 - 2027

The project's main objective is to support returnees, internally displaced people, and displacement affected communities through an integrated and interagency approach. The project, implemented in cooperation with IOM, UNDP and UNHCR, includes shelter and housing (as well as HLP) components, community infrastructures (for improved access to services, but also to reduce climate and disaster risks) and livelihood trainings.



Overall 12 M USD (UN-Habitat 2.8 M)



Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA)



IOM, UNDP, UNHCR



3

2026 - 2027

## Facilitating Opportunities through Revitalization of Settlements and Traditional Community-held Assets (FORSAT)

The project's main objective is to improve living conditions, increase access to basic services and enhance the climate and disaster resilience of the most vulnerable in the Bamiyan valley while supporting the preservation of historic sites. These activities are complemented by livelihood skill trainings, that focus specifically on cultural industries. The project is implemented in partnership with UNESCO.



2.8 M USD (UN-Habitat 1.4 M)

Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA)

UNESCO



4

2025 - 2027

## Participatory Action for Integrated Developmental Assistance to Areas of Return - PAIDAAR

The project will improve access to gender-responsive housing, essential services and disaster resilient infrastructure in the displacement affected communities; foster improved and equitable economic resilience of displacement affected communities and enhance social cohesion through participatory processes. The project is implemented in cooperation with IOM, UNDP and UNHCR.



16 M USD (UN-Habitat 2.6M)

Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA)

IOM, UNHCR, UNDP



5

2024 - 2025

## Construction of Transitional Shelters in Nijrab District of Kapisa Province in Afghanistan

The project provided support for the construction of transitional shelter for more than 200 families, which had been impacted by floods. The shelter support helped people in vulnerable situations to reconstruct their homes through a Build Back Better (BBB) and to increase their skills for disaster resilient constructions.



500 000 USD

Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF)



6

2024 - 2025

## Enhancing Provision of shelter repair support and Seasonal winter assistance to vulnerable households affected by recent floods in Kabul, and Nangahar provinces

The project helped more than 4000 people to repair and rebuild their shelters and homes after floods. The project also included the provision of Non-Food-Items (NFI), such as heating systems, household items, and clothing.



800 000 M USD

Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF)



# IMPACT STORY

## Empowering women for their community



*"I was a teacher in one of the schools here in Mazar, but due to the Taliban restrictions on women, I had to leave my work, and I was just staying at home without anything to do. Hearing of an opportunity that UN-Habitat will be providing a free training on tailoring to women, I showed interest and luckily, I was selected as one of the beneficiaries."*  
Ms Zulekha Ahmadi

Mrs. Zulekha Ahmadi, a resident of PD4, in Mazar-i-Sharif city who lives with her husband, three children, mother, and mother-in-law, had lost her livelihood income after August 2021 take-over of the Taliban. Zulekha used to work as teacher but due to the restrictions on women, she lost her only source of income.

UN-Habitat, funded by the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA), has been supporting and empowering women to contribute to their community's development and improve their livelihood opportunities through the construction of women empowerment centers, provision of vocational skills trainings, and support for women- led SMSEs.

Zulekha is one of the women who has benefitted from such support through a three-month vocational tailoring training.

# COUNTRY FOCUS



## RESILIENT HOUSING & INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Support the most vulnerable people by creating and enabling dignified living conditions and livelihood opportunities



## RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE & RECONSTRUCTION

Enhance preparedness, response, recovery, and reconstruction



## CLIMATE ACTION

Accelerate environmental and climate actions to save lives, livelihoods and assets

## UN-HABITAT AFGHANISTAN'S PRIORITIES



Protracted internal displacement and massive forced returns lead to an increase of people living in unplanned and informal settlements



Lack of access to shelter / housing, adequate living conditions & basic services and livelihood opportunities



Acute and accelerating adverse impacts from climate change on assets, livelihoods and lives & addressing environmental degradation



Widespread abuse of Human Rights, especially those associated with gender equality and women's empowerment

# PLANNED INTERVENTIONS

## 1

**Integrated Approaches for Durable Solutions  
for enabling the Integration of displaced people and  
returnees in Afghanistan's rapidly growing urban areas**

**Project's Aim:** Fostering integration of returnees through improved living conditions (shelter/housing, access to basic services) and livelihood opportunities in urban and peri-urban areas

**Relevance to regional implementation plan:** Resilient, risk-informed and climate-sensitive housing and community for all

**Additional Priorities:** Access to resilient, risk-informed and climate-sensitive basic services and infrastructures



**TOTAL BUDGET:**  
7M USD



**TIME FRAME:**  
2026 - 2028



**LOCATION:**  
AFGHANISTAN

### OUTPUT, OUTCOME AND IMPACT:

1. People in vulnerable situations (and in underserved, informal settlements) can live in dignified, safe housing and have access to basic services;
2. Through urban planning, settlement upgrading, and increased service provision, returnees and local communities feel less competition for adequate housing and basic services, thus social cohesion and integration is fostered;
3. People in vulnerable situations (in displacement affected communities) have improved skills for (urban) livelihoods and become self-reliant.



Millions of people have been forcibly returned to Afghanistan.



For them, access to shelter and housing is the basis for resilience and integration in communities.

# PLANNED INTERVENTIONS

## 2

**Resilient shelters and sanitation  
for earthquake affected families:  
Integrated assistance for improving living conditions  
for vulnerable population in Kunar, Afghanistan**

**Project's Aim:** Supporting people in vulnerable situations for recovery and improved living conditions after natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods and increasing resilience of households and communities as a whole

**Relevance to regional implementation plan:** Resilient, risk-informed and climate-sensitive housing and community infrastructures for all

**Additional Priorities:** Access to resilient, risk-informed and climate-sensitive housing, basic services and infrastructures



**TOTAL BUDGET:**  
10M USD



**TIME FRAME:**  
2026 - 2028



**LOCATION:**  
AFGHANISTAN

### OUTPUT, OUTCOME AND IMPACT:

1. People in vulnerable situations, affected by natural disasters, including earthquakes or floods have dignified and safe housing and access to basic services (WASH) through build back better (BBB) approaches;
2. People and communities at risk of disasters and hazards are more resilient to future shocks.



# PLANNED INTERVENTIONS

## 3

### Road safety: Reducing casualties and accidents through improved (urban) planning and increased awareness

**Project's Aim:** Improving urban health through safer roads, improved awareness and increased access to recovery services. While this project will create pilots in different urban areas, it will also inform health policies as well as urban planning policies – for reducing casualties in the rapidly growing urban areas. This project is designed with WHO.

**Relevance to regional implementation plan:** Access to resilient, risk-informed and climate-sensitive basic services and infrastructures

**Additional Priorities:** Urban management transformation through integrated planning, participatory governance and advanced technology



TOTAL BUDGET:  
20M USD



TIME FRAME:  
2027 - 2029



LOCATION:  
AFGHANISTAN

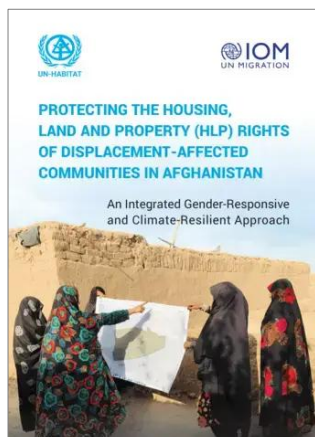
#### OUTPUT, OUTCOME AND IMPACT:

1. People in Afghanistan's rapidly growing urban areas are safer due to better planned roads and increased safety measures (planning and implementation);
2. People are more aware of risks and change behavior patterns;
3. There are increased recovery (health) services (WHO);



Crossing a road in Afghanistan is dangerous - and many people die in road accidents

# PUBLICITY AND OUTREACH



## Protecting the Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) Rights of Displacement-affected Communities in Afghanistan

### HIGHLIGHTS:

- Afghanistan faces complex displacement and reintegration challenges as more than 5.5 million people have forcibly returned since September 2023.
- Afghanistan's informal settlements are emerging as key sites of displacement, hosting large populations of both protracted IDPs and recent returnees.
- Residents of informal settlement face severe HLP risks, including growing threats of eviction, which have limited investments in housing, critical infrastructure and services.



## 10 Gender Gaps in Afghanistan's Urban Neighborhoods: Emerging Trends

### HIGHLIGHTS:

- Afghanistan's rapid urbanization, fueled by internal displacement, forced returns, and a worsening economic crisis, continues to intensify gender inequalities in urban and peri-urban informal settlements across the country.
- For women and girls in urban informal settlement areas in particular, these restrictions intersect with a unique set of vulnerabilities—including insecure housing and land rights, unsafe public spaces, limited access to WASH services, and shrinking livelihood opportunities—to compound the inequality.



## UN-Habitat Shelter and Housing Initiatives in Afghanistan | Selected Projects

### HIGHLIGHTS:

- Displaced populations, as well as other vulnerable groups, frequently settle in informal, unplanned, and underserved areas with inadequate access to basic infrastructures (including WASH facilities).
- Many have built houses with limited resources and technical knowledge in risk-prone areas, leaving them especially vulnerable to environmental hazards such as earthquakes and floods.
- Without secure tenure rights (HLP rights), they are vulnerable to forced evictions, which in turn prevents long-term investment in their housing and property.



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