



**UNITED  
NATIONS  
AFGHANISTAN**  
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**Results Report**  
2025



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Women farmers with their electronic vouchers wait in line at the Sher Abad Wheat Seed Production Company's outlet in the Dehdadi District Centre Market, Balkh province, Afghanistan  
© FAO/Fahim Rahimi

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# Foreword

Afghanistan continues to face a complex and evolving set of challenges that affect the daily lives and prospects of its people. In 2025, declining international assistance, large-scale population movements, climate pressures, and operational constraints placed increasing strain on households, markets, and essential services. At the same time, communities across the country demonstrated remarkable resilience, and national stakeholders continued engaging with the United Nations and partners on pathways to address immediate needs while strengthening longer-term stability and self-reliance.

Against this backdrop, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), together with national counterparts, civil society, international financial institutions, and development partners, remained committed to supporting the Afghan people through the implementation of the United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (UNSFA) 2023–2027. Building on the strategic shift initiated in recent years, our collective efforts continued through a comprehensive architecture review to further strengthen the linkages between humanitarian assistance, basic human needs programming, and longer-term resilience building. This integrated approach reflects a shared commitment to ensuring that international support remains principled, needs-based, and responsive to the evolving realities on the ground.

Throughout 2025, the United Nations system sustained delivery of life-saving assistance and essential services across Afghanistan despite a highly constrained operating environment. Millions of people benefited from health services, education and literacy programmes, food security support, water and sanitation interventions, protection services, and livelihoods initiatives. These efforts helped preserve critical service delivery systems, support vulnerable communities affected by shocks, including natural disasters and large return movements, and strengthen the resilience of households and local economies.

At the same time, the year highlighted the importance of sustained engagement and partnership. The United Nations continued to facilitate dialogue and coordination through platforms such as the High-Level

Coordination Forum, the Afghanistan Coordination Group, and thematic working groups addressing issues including private sector development and counternarcotics. These mechanisms help align international assistance with national priorities while ensuring that support is delivered in a principled and coordinated manner.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the continued commitment of our donor partners and the vital contributions of international financial institutions. Their support remains essential to sustaining basic services, strengthening community resilience, and enabling the Afghan people to navigate an increasingly challenging environment.

Looking ahead, the needs of the Afghan people remain significant, and continued collaboration among national stakeholders, regional partners, and the international community will be critical. By sustaining coordinated and strategic engagement, we can help preserve essential services, expand economic opportunities, and strengthen resilience across communities.

The United Nations remains steadfast in its commitment to work with all partners in support of a more stable, inclusive, and resilient future for Afghanistan. Above all, we recognize the perseverance and determination of the Afghan people, whose resilience continues to guide and inspire our collective efforts.



**Indrika Ratwatte**

Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General  
Resident Coordinator / Humanitarian Coordinator



After the 2024 flashflood destroyed Shah Mohammad’s home in Firuz Koh in Ghor province, the UN built him and his family a new home. The DSRSG/RC/HC visited Shah Mohammad to hear his story and see the impact of the work of the UN and partners.  
© UN/Abdul Rahman Zaeem

# United Nations Country Team

## Resident United Nations agencies, funds, and programmes



## Non-resident United Nations agencies, funds, and programmes



### Afghanistan coordination group partners



Australia



Italy



Sweden



Belgium



Japan



Switzerland



Canada



South Korea



Turkiye



Czechia



Spain



United Kingdom



Denmark



Luxembourg



United States of America



Finland



Netherlands



European Union



France



Norway



Germany



Qatar



The World Bank



Asian Development Bank



Islamic Development Bank



International Monetary Fund



Aga Khan Development Network

### Other development partners



Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development



Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance



Global Child Nutrition Fund



Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria



Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation



Global Partnership for Education

# Chapter I

## Key developments in Afghanistan

In 2025, Afghanistan faced compounding pressures on households, markets, and service delivery, driven by declining international assistance, large-scale population returns, recurrent cross-border disruptions with Pakistan, growing climate pressures, and tightening constraints on women's participation in public and economic life. At the same time, the de facto authorities advanced a five-year national development strategy and continued structured engagement with the United Nations and partners, while the UN system further operationalized the humanitarian-to-Basic Human Needs (BHN) transition under the UN Strategic Framework.

International assistance declined further during the year, forcing difficult prioritization across both humanitarian response and United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (UNSAFE)/BHN programming. Available data indicate that **UNSAFE funding reached approximately US\$1.77 billion (about 62 per cent of the US\$2.85 billion required)**, leaving significant gaps in essential service delivery and resilience investments. In 2025, **about 22.9 million people in Afghanistan, nearly half the population, require humanitarian assistance. Still, the humanitarian funds received reached almost US\$913 million (about 38 per cent of the US\$2.42 billion required)**. Funding shortfalls increasingly constrained early recovery activities and reduced operational flexibility at the subnational level.

Population movements have remained a major systemic shock. **Approximately 2.78 million Afghans returned in 2025, around 1.88 million from Iran and 899,000 from Pakistan**, placing severe pressure on border reception systems, basic services, land availability, and host communities. Evidence indicates emerging tensions in areas of return alongside rising rental and land prices. Women and children accounted for a large share of returnees, while restrictions on female staff in some locations disrupted assistance delivery and reduced women's access to services. Environmental

factors compounded complex mobility dynamics, with 79 per cent of internal displacement in quarter one of 2025 driven by environmental pressures, while return and host communities struggled with access to basic water services.

In parallel, **the 31 August 2025 earthquake in eastern Afghanistan** added a significant localized humanitarian and recovery burden. The earthquake and subsequent aftershocks struck Kunar, Nangarhar and Laghman provinces, causing extensive destruction to housing, infrastructure, and livelihoods. **More than 1,992 people were killed, and 3,631 were injured, while over 8,200 houses were destroyed or severely damaged**, displacing thousands of families and disrupting access to essential services and markets. The Joint Rapid Recovery Needs Assessment estimates total damages and losses at **US\$86.8 million**, and recovery needs at approximately **US\$128.8 million**, with housing and social sectors most affected. The disaster compounded pre-existing vulnerabilities in the eastern region, already characterized by high poverty, food insecurity, and large returnee inflows. It underscored the need to link humanitarian response with resilient recovery and Basic Human Needs programming.

Cross-border instability with Pakistan significantly disrupted Afghanistan's trade and humanitarian supply chains in late 2025. Following the closure of major crossings from **10 October 2025**, bilateral trade flows contracted sharply. Afghan exports to Pakistan fell from

**22.9  
million  
people**



**nearly half the population,  
required humanitarian  
assistance in 2025**

an average of about **US\$70 million per month (July–September)** to roughly **US\$5 million in November–December, an estimated 93% decline**, while imports from Pakistan dropped from about **US\$137 million monthly to US\$8.5 million on average, representing a 94% contraction**. The disruption affected critical imports such as food, fuel, and medicines, and curtailed key Afghan exports, including coal and fresh fruit. Prolonged closures generated significant losses for traders, transporters and border communities, with local economies reported as “paralysed” in some crossing areas. The shocks also accelerated trade diversion toward Iran and Central Asia, contributed to localized price pressures, particularly in health and food supply chains, while further constraining livelihoods in border provinces.

Restrictions affecting women and girls deepened during 2025 and had direct operational consequences for the United Nations and partners. Since September 2025, enforcement measures by DFA authorities in several locations have limited Afghan women personnel from accessing UN premises, while provincial-level restrictions in some border areas have temporarily interrupted assistance delivery involving female staff. These developments reduced the reach of gender-responsive programming and heightened risks for women-headed households and returnee women and girls.

Against this backdrop, the de facto authorities approved a first five-year national development strategy (2025–2029) focused on governance, economic and social development, and external relations. The strategy featured prominently in aid coordination discussions, including calls for stronger alignment of external assistance with national priorities, while partners continued to emphasise principled delivery and humanitarian access. At the Fifth High-Level Coordination Forum on 17 November 2025, authorities and partners underscored the need to improve effectiveness and accountability amid declining aid volumes, maintain space for female aid workers, and strengthen technical-level follow-up through sectoral coordination mechanisms.

Humanitarian needs remained high and increasingly structural. Chronic poverty, climate shocks, explosive ordnance contamination, and the returnee influx continued to drive vulnerability, while access constraints and gender-related restrictions complicated delivery.

Assessments indicate declining food security and WASH access among returnee households in some areas, reinforcing the need for integrated humanitarian and resilience responses.

Macroeconomic conditions in 2025 showed modest stabilization alongside persistent fragility. The World Bank’s **Afghanistan Economic Monitor projects per-capita GDP to decline by 4 per cent in FY2025**, reflecting weak investment and productivity. Inflation rose to **4.7 per cent year-on-year in November 2025**, with notable increases in housing and health costs partly linked to trade rerouting following Pakistan border disruptions. The trade balance remained under pressure amid declining exports and regional uncertainty.

Within the UN system, 2025 saw continued efforts to rebalance from short-term humanitarian delivery toward a more integrated Basic Human Needs approach, building on the UNSFA architecture. However, shrinking funding envelopes and operational constraints slowed the pace of transition in some sectors. Engagement with the de facto authorities continued through established coordination platforms, including the High-Level Coordination Forum and technical-level dialogues, with discussions focusing on access, alignment, returnee pressures, and the enabling environment for aid delivery.

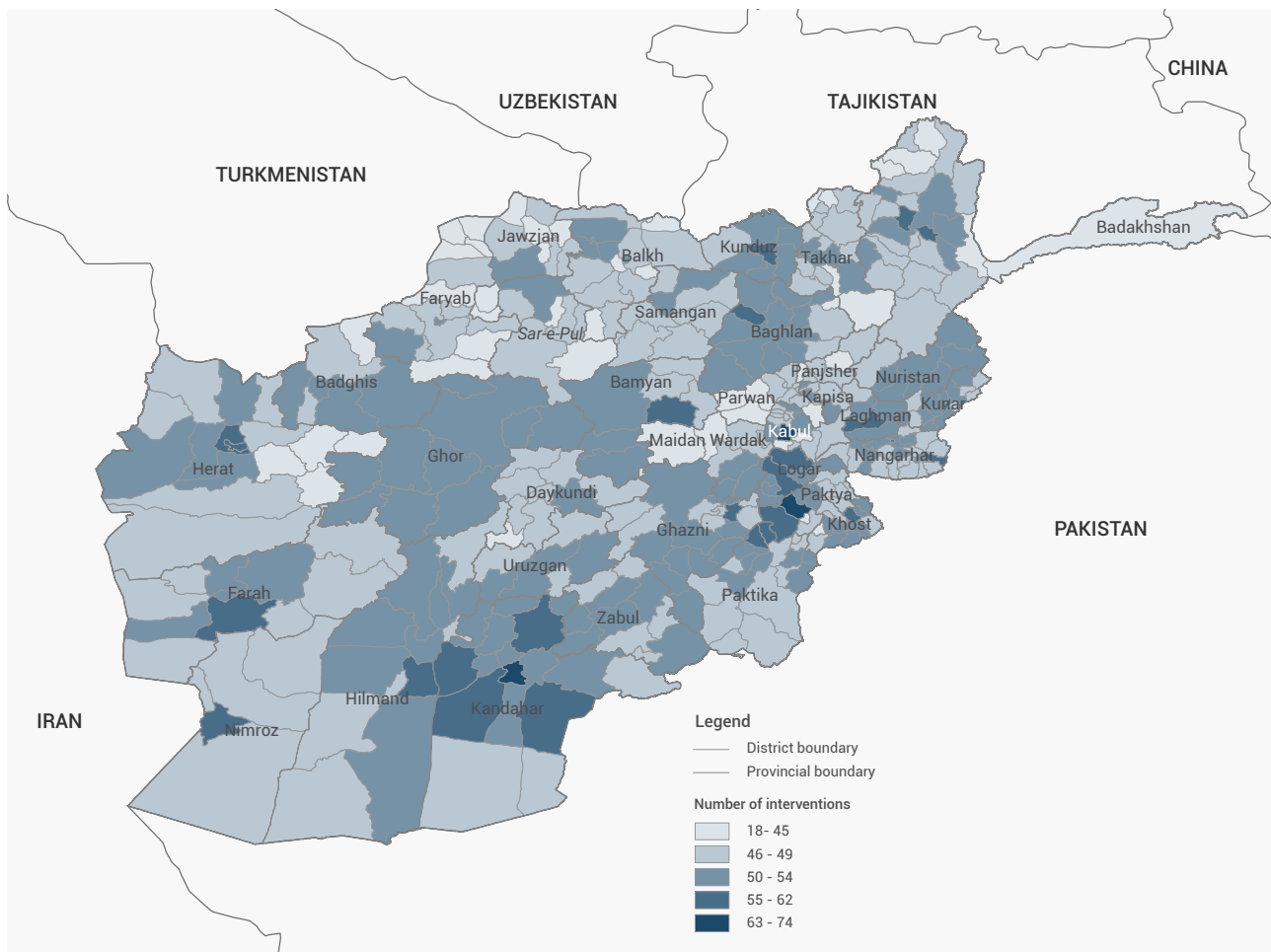
Developments in the counternarcotics space in 2025 reflected continued contraction of the opium economy alongside growing concern over evolving drug markets. **The UNODC Afghanistan Opium Survey 2025 reported that opium cultivation declined by around 20 per cent compared with 2024**, while parallel assessments pointed to emerging risks linked to synthetic drugs and the misuse of pharmaceutical substances. Engagement under the Doha Process Counternarcotics Working Group (CNWG) intensified, including technical exchanges following the third meeting on 30 June 2025 and the fourth CNWG meeting held on 3 February 2026 in Kabul in a hybrid format, which brought together 23 Member States, the de facto authorities, UN entities and Afghan experts. Discussions reviewed progress on the DFA narcotics ban and ongoing UN-supported programmes, while highlighting persistent gaps in funding, treatment services, and sustainable alternative livelihoods. Participants also flagged the **growing threat of synthetic drugs and precursor flows** and agreed to continue technical dialogue and practical cooperation across three priority pillars: alternative livelihoods, drug

use prevention and treatment, and law enforcement cooperation. Complementary UNODC analysis further underscored a shift in drug use patterns toward synthetic substances and pharmaceutical misuse, reinforcing the need for integrated, health-centred responses linked to broader socio-economic support measures

Private-sector engagement remained a central pillar of the UN's economic stabilization efforts in 2025, with momentum sustained through the Doha Process Private Sector Working Group (PSWG) and related technical platforms. The **third PSWG meeting**

**was held on 9 February 2026 in Kabul on a hybrid format that** brought together representatives from 23 Member States, international financial institutions, UN entities, Afghan private sector actors and the de facto authorities to review progress and identify priority actions. Discussions emphasized job creation,

**“Funding shortfalls increasingly constrained early recovery activities and reduced operational flexibility at the subnational level.”**



All national and regional level interventions are excluded

**Population:**  
**48.6 million**  
(UNOCHA, 2025)

**Food insecure (IPC 3-5):**  
**17.4 million**  
(IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, November 2025)

**Gender inequality index:**  
**0.661**  
(Human Development report, UNDP, 2025)

**Economic growth:**  
**4.3%**  
(Afghanistan Development Update, World Bank, November 2025)

**SDG score:**  
**49.10**  
(160/167 countries) (Sustainable Development Report, 2025)

entrepreneurship and market integration, alongside persistent structural constraints, particularly limited access to finance, weak banking linkages, infrastructure gaps, and energy reliability. Participants highlighted the need to scale support to MSMEs (including women-led enterprises), expand Islamic finance and credit guarantee instruments, strengthen correspondent banking dialogue, and improve regulatory transparency. Complementary UN-supported programmes reported

tangible progress, including support to **29,855 MSMEs (62 per cent women-led) and 44,809 jobs created or retained**, underscoring the private sector's role in livelihoods and resilience. The Working Group agreed to maintain regular technical engagement and deepen cooperation on financial sector recovery, regional market integration and women's economic participation as critical enablers of the transition from aid dependence toward more sustainable growth.



Children in Masti Kot village, on the outskirts of Gardez city, Paktia province, are happy to have access to drinking water.

© UNDP Afghanistan

# Chapter II

## UN Support in Afghanistan through the UN Strategic Framework

### 2.1 Overview of the Strategic Framework Results in 2025

In 2025, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) sustained delivery under Outcome 1 despite tightening fiscal space, operational constraints, and rising needs. Building on the joined-up approach highlighted in the 2024 Results Report, UN agencies continued prioritizing essential services in health, nutrition, education, WASH, social protection and protection, with a stronger focus on the Basic Human Needs (BHN) transition and support to the most vulnerable. Progress was uneven across sectors, reflecting funding shortfalls, access constraints, and data limitations in some areas. Nonetheless, key system-level interventions, particularly in education assessments, literacy programmes, and hygiene services, demonstrated measurable gains, while continued engagement with line ministries and technical counterparts supported service continuity. Persistent structural pressures, including high vulnerability among returnees, women and children, and communities affected by shocks, underscore the need to sustain coordinated investments in essential services and human capital to prevent further deterioration in outcomes.

#### Outcome 1. Sustained Essential Services

**By the end of 2025, more people in Afghanistan, particularly the most marginalized, can equitably access essential services that meet minimum quality standards.**

Progress toward equitable access to essential services in 2025 remained mixed, reflecting both targeted gains in service delivery and persistent structural pressures linked to widespread vulnerability and food insecurity. The operating environment continued to be shaped by elevated household stress: IPC-aligned analysis for September-October 2025 indicates that approximately **13.8 million people** were classified in crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity, while **74 per cent of households** experienced insufficient food consumption (rising to **86 per cent among female-headed households**). These dynamics continue to influence demand for and access to basic services across sectors.

Educational results were notable. The Grade 3 learning assessment reached **55,282 students across 34 provinces (36.9 per cent girls)**, with **43.5 per cent achieving minimum reading proficiency (47.6 per cent girls) and 25.4 per cent in mathematics (27.4 per cent girls)**. **Girls outperformed boys in both subjects**. In addition, 15,610 youth and adults enrolled in literacy programmes, exceeding mid-year performance and demonstrating sustained demand for foundational skills. However, the continued ban on girls' secondary education remains a major structural constraint on equitable human capital development.

In WASH, access to safely managed water improved to **97 per cent**, nearly surpassing the target. Nevertheless, basic sanitation services (**44 per cent**) and hygiene (**51 per cent**) remained below targets, reflecting infrastructure gaps and severe underfunding in capital-intensive services. Social protection data confirm continued household stress, with 55 per cent of households classified under crisis or emergency livelihood coping levels nationwide.

Protection services remained operational despite data limitations. Approximately **72,100 individuals**

accessed gender-based violence-related support, while **487 civilian** casualties from explosive ordnance were recorded; the actual figure is likely higher due to reduced mine action coverage and funding constraints affecting monitoring.

Across health and nutrition, several key population indicators, including modern contraceptive prevalence and geographic access to essential health services, lacked updated national data, constraining full outcome assessment. Overall, essential service delivery was maintained at scale in 2025, but results reflect a system operating under constrained resources, high food insecurity, and uneven sectoral performance, underscoring the need for sustained, multi-sector

investment to protect recent gains and improve equity.

Funding for Outcome 1 in 2025 was relatively stronger compared with other outcomes under the UNSFA, but remained uneven across sectors. The total **required funding for Outcome 1 reached approximately USD 2.15 billion**, calculated from the combined requirements for **Health and Nutrition (USD 1,010.8 million), Education (USD 371.9 million), Water, Sanitation and Hygiene - WASH (USD 248.8 million), Social Protection (USD 333.6 million), and Protection (USD 183.4 million)**. Available resources across these sectors totaled about **USD 1.56 billion**, resulting in an overall **funding gap of roughly USD 586 million, equivalent to around 73 per cent of requirements being funded**.

**Number of AFPs, funds required, available, and gap for Outcome 1 in 2025**



**Output markers and UNSFA outcome 1 expenditures by SDGs**

SDG 1 	<b>18.9M</b>	SDG 7 	<b>6.1M</b>
SDG 2 	<b>93.2M</b>	SDG 8 	<b>29.1M</b>
SDG 3 	<b>650.6M</b>	SDG 9 	<b>90K</b>
SDG 4 	<b>239.5M</b>	SDG 11 	<b>32.4M</b>
SDG 5 	<b>90.9M</b>	SDG 15 	<b>4.3M</b>
SDG 6 	<b>27.3M</b>	SDG 16 	<b>364.3K</b>

**Contributing agencies**



## 1.1 Health and Nutrition



**Health and nutrition systems have improved and resilient capacities and resources to deliver accessible, affordable, gender- and age-responsive, shock responsive, and culturally acceptable essential healthcare and nutrition services that prioritize the most vulnerable.**

Health and nutrition systems in Afghanistan continued to sustain essential service delivery at scale in 2025 despite tightening fiscal space, access constraints, and growing demographic pressures. Overall performance indicates that the service delivery platform remained operational but under sustained strain. Essential health services, including sexual and reproductive health, reached **34.3 million people**, surpassing the annual target and confirming continued nationwide reach of primary care delivery. System capacity was further reinforced through **3,325 health facilities** constructed, rehabilitated, equipped or maintained functional, helping preserve geographic access to services in a challenging operating environment.

Maternal and child health indicators showed generally positive but uneven progress. A total of **958,209 newborns** were delivered in health facilities by skilled birth attendants, indicating sustained utilization of facility-based delivery services. Immunization efforts remained substantial, with approximately **3.42 million children** receiving the third dose of pentavalent vaccine. However, performance remained slightly below the annual target, pointing to persistent last-mile delivery constraints, particularly in hard-to-reach and underserved areas. Preventive outreach activities reached over **25.9 million individuals**.

Health workforce strengthening emerged as a key system bottleneck. Only **24,043 health workers** received training against a target of **39,414** raising concerns about medium-term service quality, surge capacity, and the sustainability of expanded coverage. At the population level, important data gaps continue to constrain full performance assessment. Updated information on modern contraceptive prevalence was



52-year-old Bibi Maryam from Paktia Province receives hepatitis treatment at the National Infectious Disease Hospital in Kabul

not available during the reporting period. Similarly, updated national data on effective population access to essential health services within a 30-minute reach were unavailable.

Nutrition indicators reflect persistent structural vulnerability. While wasting among children under five was reported at **3.7 per cent**, below the emergency threshold and suggesting that life-saving treatment is reaching many children, stunting remained critically high at **44.7 per cent**, far above the 30 per cent benchmark. This highlights the continued impact of chronic poverty, food insecurity, inadequate dietary diversity, and repeated shocks.

Health and nutrition financing under Outcome 1 in 2025 demonstrated relatively strong mobilization compared with other sectors but remained insufficient to fully meet needs. Total requirements for health and nutrition were **US\$1,010.8 million, of which US\$849 million** was available, leaving a funding gap of roughly **US\$ 162 million** and an overall funding level of about **84 per cent**. This comparatively high coverage helped sustain large-scale service delivery nationwide, including primary health care, immunization, maternal services, and acute malnutrition treatment.

However, the remaining gap continued to constrain system quality, workforce expansion, and preventive programming. Available funding was heavily oriented toward maintaining core service delivery platforms rather than enabling deeper system strengthening or addressing chronic nutrition drivers.

Overall, the sector demonstrated operational resilience in 2025, maintaining broad service coverage under difficult conditions. However, persistent financing pressures, workforce gaps, chronic malnutrition, and monitoring limitations indicate a system operating close to its stress threshold, underscoring the need for sustained investment in primary health care, nutrition prevention, and health information systems to safeguard gains and improve equity.

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“Essential health services, including sexual and reproductive health, reached **34.3 million** people, surpassing the annual target .”

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## Key achievements in 2025

**Essential health services reached 34.3 million** people exceeding the annual target.

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**3,325 health facilities** were constructed, rehabilitated, equipped or maintained functional.

---

**958,209 skilled birth deliveries** were supported in health facilities.

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**3.42 million children** received Penta-3 vaccination.

**24,043 health workers**

trained to support service continuity.

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**Preventive health outreach** reached over **25.9 million** individuals nationwide.

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**Acute malnutrition treatment** is maintained at scale, with wasting at **3.7%** (below emergency threshold).

## Health support reaches remote communities in Khost's mountainous districts

For the inhabitants of Kaskay, a remote village deep in the mountains of Gurbaz district in Khost province, seeing a doctor or accessing vaccinations for children often felt out of reach. That changed when a team from the World Health Organization (WHO)-supported Zanshora Sub-Centre arrived in the village to help remote communities access health care services.

"When we arrived we were warmly welcomed," said WHO-supported community mobilizer Rahmanullah Atal. "The villagers, especially the elders, showed their appreciation by the way they greeted us. It was clear that trust was growing and the health needs of the village residents mounting." Rahmanullah gathered a group of men and spoke about vaccines, why they're important, how they work and why some side effects like a mild fever are a good sign. Many of the villagers said they used to think vaccines were harmful, but that listening to someone with whom they could relate had made a real difference.

The team's female health workers – midwives Aziza and Kochay and vaccinator Zarghona – quietly visited homes to provide health care to women. The private and respectful health services they offered included antenatal and postnatal check-ups and family planning advice. Meanwhile, the team's male vaccinator Naqibullah administered oral polio drops to children.

By the end of the day, the team had provided outpatient consultations to 65 people. Eleven pregnant women received antenatal care, 2 women received postnatal check-ups and 6 accessed family planning services. Ten children were vaccinated with the pentavalent vaccine, 3 received the measles vaccine, and 129 children under 5 were given oral polio drops. **"We didn't know how important these vaccines were. Now we understand, and we will make sure our children stay protected,"** one father told the team as the day drew to a close.

**"No community should be left behind,"** said WHO Representative in Afghanistan Dr Edwin Ceniza Salvador. "It is our responsibility to ensure that even the most remote families have access to lifesaving health services. When we reach people with care, we earn their trust and help them build healthier futures.

**With support from donors and partners, WHO Afghanistan is committed to reaching many more villages like Kaskay, helping families live healthier and safer lives.**



The team's female health workers – midwives Aziza and Kochay and vaccinator Zarghona – visit homes to provide health care to women and children. © WHO Afghanistan Social Mobilizer

## A mother's fight against malnutrition

In the remote, snow-clad valley of Ishkashim district in Badakhshan Province, life is a daily struggle against isolation, harsh winters and economic hardship. For Zubaida, a 30-year-old mother of five, these challenges once meant facing pregnancy while malnourished and watching her children grow weak from lack of nutritious food.

"We are eight people at home, including my sick mother-in-law. We borrow from shopkeepers just to survive," Zubaida explains. **With limited income and soaring prices, fruits and vegetables are a luxury available only for three short months each year when the winter recedes.** The rest of the time, families rely on whatever is available, even if it's just tea and bread. When she was pregnant and malnourished, Zubaida received specialized nutritious food as part of the WFP's target nutrition programme, which helped improve her health. Today, her daughter, once moderately malnourished, is also recovering thanks to a fortified supplement given to her by WFP. **This assistance goes beyond food - it brings hope.** In a region where winter locks families indoors with no food, and snow piles high against doors, this life-saving support not only means survival but a chance for a better future. "Every mother and father wants their children to be successful," Zubaida says. "We work hard, but without this help, it would be impossible."

WFP's support ensures that mothers like Zubaida can raise healthy children despite economic challenges. However, due to a massive decline in funding, WFP has been forced to prioritize food assistance to only a fraction of the most vulnerable. **Zubaida hopes that humanitarian assistance will continue, and that the international community will not forget families like hers.** "WFP's assistance is a lifeline for me and for the people of Ishkashim, especially for children, mothers and women who are pregnant," she says.

WFP can reach some of the most vulnerable families across the country thanks to contributions from our partners like the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Australia, Canada, the European Union, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the World Bank.



Zubaida, with her 27-month-old daughter Rahil, at a WFP-supported clinic in Ishkashim district of Badakhshan Province.  
© WFP/Ziauddin Safi

## 1.2 Education



**Formal and non-formal public, private, and community-based education systems are better able to sustain and increase access to inclusive, safe, and quality education opportunities for girls, boys, youth, and adults – especially girls and young women – across all levels of education.**

Education interventions in 2025 sustained broad access to learning opportunities despite a highly constrained operating environment. However, the continued ban on girls' secondary education remained the single most significant structural barrier to equitable human capital development. The restriction continued to exclude adolescent girls from formal secondary schooling nationwide, reinforcing gender disparities, increasing risks of early marriage and negative coping strategies, and placing additional pressure on alternative and community-based learning pathways. While education partners maintained support for basic education and skills programming, the policy environment continued to limit system-wide progress on gender equity in education outcomes.

Within these constraints, education service delivery demonstrated strong reach in selected areas. A total of 4,611,786 children accessed public education with support, including 2,675,666 boys and 1,936,120 girls, substantially exceeding the annual target and confirming continued demand for basic education services. Learning outcomes monitoring also advanced: the Grade 3 student learning assessment reached 55,327 students across 1,871 schools nationwide, including 42,602 boys and 12,725 girls, providing critical system-wide evidence on learning performance under current conditions.

Foundational skills programming showed positive momentum. 15,610 youth and adults were enrolled in basic literacy courses, of whom 12,680 were female and 2,930 male, reflecting strong uptake among women and girls. In parallel, 559,640 individuals adult completed education and skills training initiatives, (informal and non-formal education) including 356,216 females and 203,424 males.

System support measures have also progressed. 427 schools were constructed, rehabilitated or provided with alternative (clean and renewable) energy and equipped with gender-appropriate infrastructure, out of wish 185 schools were equipped with solar energy solutions, helping sustain service delivery in energy-constrained areas. Teacher workforce strengthening continued, with 65,594 teachers trained (including 21,122 female and 44,472 male teachers). At the governance level, four key sector frameworks were developed to strengthen education planning, monitoring, and financing functions.

### Key achievements in 2025

**4.6 million** children accessed public education (2.7 million boys/ 1.9 girls).

**National Grade 3 assessment** reached **55,282** students (37% girls) across 34 provinces.

**15,610** youth and adults enrolled in literacy programmes (12,680 female; 2,930 male).

**559,640** individuals completed education and skills training (36% female).

**427** education facilities were constructed and rehabilitated

**65,594** teachers trained (32% female).

**Four** sector policy frameworks were developed to strengthen planning, monitoring, and financing.

Education financing in 2025 remained comparatively strong within the Sustained Essential Services portfolio.

Total requirements reached US\$371.9 million, of which US\$357.9 million was available, approximately 96 per cent funded, leaving a gap of about US\$14 million. This high funding coverage was a key enabler of expanded access to public education and literacy programming during the year.

Nevertheless, the funding profile suggests a continued emphasis on maintaining access rather than fully addressing quality and system bottlenecks. The relatively modest scale of teacher training and system strengthening output indicates that available resources have not yet fully translated into balanced sector performance. Going forward, sustained and more strategically targeted financing will be required to address learning quality, workforce capacity, and the

gender disparities exacerbated by restrictions on girls' secondary education.

Overall, education results in 2025 reflect a system that has maintained strong basic education reach and literacy expansion despite policy and operational constraints. However, the continued exclusion of girls from secondary education, combined with modest progress in teacher development and system depth, indicates that gains remain uneven and fragile.

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“The continued ban on girls’ secondary education remained the single most significant structural barrier to equitable human capital development.”

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Aysha, 12 years old, is studying. © UNICEF/UNI791529/Meerzad

## From literacy to livelihoods in Nuristan

When her father lost his job on a local hydropower construction project, Habiba's role within her family changed overnight. Living in a remote district of Afghanistan's mountainous Nuristan province, the 22-year-old became the primary caregiver for her parents and her three younger brothers, taking on extra work on a nearby farm to help supplement the family's income. As she adjusted to her new responsibilities, Habiba (not her real name) enrolled in a UNESCO-supported community-based literacy and skills programme, which provides women and young people in hard-to-reach areas with foundational reading, writing and numeracy skills. Encouraged by her mother to seize the opportunity, she attends classes daily, even during planting and harvesting seasons. **"I leave the house for a few hours to attend class and try not to miss a single day,"** she said.

Habiba quickly emerged as one of the most committed learners. Through regular attendance and active participation, her literacy and numeracy skills have improved so much that she now helps her brothers—aged 8, 12, and 15—with their schoolwork. She also gained the confidence to apply her lessons beyond the classroom. Recognizing an unmet need in her community, Habiba surveyed the prices of fabric sold in shops at her local market and began planning a small tailoring and trading business. With limited access to materials, she is currently practicing sewing with the reused fabrics and basic tools.

After class, Habiba continues working in the fields with her mother, prepares meals for her family and studies late into the night. Literacy has strengthened her ability to balance daily responsibilities while contributing economically and supporting her family's education.

**"Habiba's story reflects the determination of women across Afghanistan to keep learning, even in the most difficult circumstances,"** said Soohyun Kim, Officer in Charge, UNESCO Kabul. "When women gain literacy and practical skills, the impact extends to families, livelihoods and entire communities."

From January 2024 to May 2025, the community-based literacy programme implemented by UNESCO, with grant support from UN Women and funding from the European Union, enabled literacy and skills initiatives to reach more than 3,900 women and girls in underserved communities across Afghanistan. By reaching learners in hard-to-access areas where educational opportunities remain limited, the programme strengthens resilience, livelihoods, and learning outcomes for families across the country.



Tahira Rahimi, a dedicated Early Childhood Development (ECD) facilitator, turns the pages of a colorful storybook. Beside her, little Rafiullah sits, completely captivated by the tale unfolding—a story that teaches the vital importance of drinking clean water.

## 1.3 Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene



**Stakeholders at national and subnational level are better able to manage and provide access to equitable, gender responsive, sustainable, climate resilient, and safe drinking water, improved sanitation, and positive hygiene practices in rural and poor urban communities.**

WASH interventions in 2025 delivered important localized gains, but overall performance remained constrained by severe financing shortfalls and uneven scale-up. Results indicate that while hygiene promotion and selected infrastructure investments progressed, access to safely managed water and sanitation services continues to lag behind targets, reflecting structural service gaps in rural and underserved areas.

Generally, during 2025, access to safely managed water improved to 97 per cent, nearly exceeding the target and showing efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. However, access to basic sanitation services reached only 44 per cent, of the target, and access to hygiene services stood at 51 per cent of the target. These gaps highlight persistent infrastructure deficits and the slow pace of network expansion relative to population needs.

Output-level delivery showed mixed progress. Approximately 840,826 people gained access to basic water services (including 428,518 males and 412,308 females), representing the strongest area of performance. In contrast, basic sanitation services remained limited, with only 621,655 people gaining access (44%) (318,447 males; 303,208 females), far below needs and targets. Hygiene investments were more visible but still localized, reaching 709,444 people (360,187 males; 349,257 females), reaching 51% of the target. Institutional WASH support remained low, with 69 facilities (58 schools and 11 health facilities) receiving upgraded services, covering only 19% of the target.

Financing for WASH remained one of the most critical bottlenecks under Sustained Essential Services. Total requirements reached US\$248.8 million, but only US\$41.3 million was available, approximately 17 per cent funded, leaving an 83 per cent funding gap. This represents one of the largest proportional shortfalls across the Outcome 1 sector.

The severe underfunding directly helps explain the limited progress in expanding hygienic and sanitation coverage in 2025. Available resources were largely sufficient only for targeted hygiene promotion and small-scale infrastructure support rather than systemwide service expansion. Without a significant increase in predictable financing, risks remain that WASH access gaps, particularly in basic hygiene and sanitation, will persist or widen, with knock-on effects for health, nutrition and overall human development outcomes.

Taken together, the 2025 WASH results reflect a programme that is successfully driving hygiene behaviour change but struggling to scale capital-intensive water and sanitation infrastructure at the pace required. The imbalance between hygiene gains and water/sanitation expansion suggests that upstream system constraints, particularly financing, infrastructure costs, and implementation access, continue to limit sector-wide progress.

### Key achievements in 2025

**840,826 people** gained access to basic safe water (49% female).

**Basic hygiene access** recorded 51% of the target.

**69 institutions** (58 schools and health facilities) received WASH upgrades.

**709,444 people** gained access to basic hygiene services (49% female).

**621,655 people** gained access to sanitation (49% female).

## UN joint efforts to improve access to clean water in Southern Afghanistan

“Before, there was no water. We had to walk very far, 60 to 90 minutes, just to bring water. We had to go for water three or four times a day. I had pain in my back and feet.” Eid Bibi, a 40-year-old single mother of eight, recalls the daily struggle she faced in her village, Naw Abad, near Gardez city, in southeastern Afghanistan, struggles which are common to many people living in rural areas of the country. Local communities living at the high altitude of Gardez face extraordinary hardships, including extreme temperatures in both summer and winter, and, like Eid Bibi, many live a long way from a source of water.

With support from the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA), UN-Habitat and UNDP joined forces to transform Naw Abad, and with it, the lives of the people living there. On 20 January 2025, **with financial support from the multi-donor Special Trust Fund of Afghanistan, UNDP installed a 7.5 kW solar PV system in New Abad.** The PV system powers a WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) facility previously constructed by UN-Habitat. The project is aimed at ensuring Eid Bibi’s community can access water even when electricity is unavailable, a common problem in Afghanistan. As part of the intervention, 119 water taps were distributed throughout Eid Bibi’s community. Water taps are now installed in each home and street. “Now, thankfully, we have water,” says Bibi. “We wash dishes and clothes, and we are happy to have water. Now I do not have to go far because the water is here. We are glad.”

While providing access to water, the initiative also supported the local community and labourers with short-term employment opportunities, helping them meet their basic needs. As a result, over 120 households were supported directly while thousands of others benefited indirectly.

**This joint UN-Habitat/ UNDP intervention was prioritized as part of a complementary approach under the Delivering as One framework for UN agencies in the country,** ensuring all agencies can support the Afghan people efficiently with their expertise.



Drinking water reservoir in Masti Kot village, a part of Gardez city, Paktia province. © UN-Habitat/UNDP Afghanistan

## 1.4 Social Protection



**Inclusive, equitable, shock responsive national safety net systems are established and operational providing support to and strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable and marginalized people in Afghanistan.**

Social protection interventions in 2025 provided targeted support to vulnerable populations amid intensifying socioeconomic pressures, but results point to growing stress among households. Short-term employment and income support mechanisms remained operational, reaching 3,240,414 individuals (including 2.9 million males and 346,470 females). While this confirms continued delivery of labour-based safety net activities, the strong gender imbalance underscores persistent barriers to women's participation in livelihoods programming under the current operating environment.

Household-level assistance reached 403,981 households (210,954 female-headed households), nearly reaching 95% of the annual target and demonstrating that core social assistance mechanisms remained functional and responsive to immediate vulnerability. This support helped cushion some of the most at-risk populations, particularly in areas affected by displacement, returnee inflows and livelihood disruption. However, the relatively limited scale of employment generation suggests that programming continues to prioritize short-term relief over pathways to sustainable income recovery.

Food security and coping data further highlight the depth of household stress. The nationwide Seasonal Food Security Assessment (SFSA) conducted in September-October 2025 found that 55 per cent of households were classified under "crisis" or "emergency" levels of livelihood coping strategies, exceeding the 50 per cent benchmark. This indicates widespread reliance on negative coping mechanisms and confirms that vulnerability remains deeply entrenched despite ongoing assistance. The persistence of elevated coping stress suggests that current support levels are mitigating but not reversing household fragility.

Financing for social protection showed moderate coverage but remained insufficient to fully meet demand. Total requirements reached US\$333.6 million, of which US\$197.9 million was available, approximately 59 per cent

funded, leaving a 41 per cent funding gap. While this funding level enabled continuity of core assistance programmes, the remaining gap likely constrained the scale-up of employment schemes and more comprehensive safety net expansion.

The 2025 financing pattern largely explains the observed programmatic profile: social protection efforts were able to sustain targeted household assistance but remained constrained in scaling labour-intensive and resilience-oriented interventions. With funding still limited and uneven, the response continues to function predominantly as short-term relief rather than transitioning toward more inclusive and economically productive safety net systems.

Overall, delivery in 2025 confirms that essential support is reaching vulnerable households, yet the breadth, gender balance and resilience impact remain restricted. Elevated livelihood coping stress, the relatively small scale of employment generation, and continued reliance on temporary assistance all point to persistent structural fragility. Moving forward, strengthening productive safety nets, expanding women's participation in economic support programmes, and securing more predictable and flexible financing will be critical to shift the system toward durable household resilience.

### Key achievements in 2025

**403,981 households** received social assistance support, exceeding the annual target.

**3.2 million individuals** benefited from short-term employment (10.6% female).

#### Nationwide Seasonal Food Security

**Assessment (SFSA)** completed, indicating that 55 per cent of households were classified under "crisis" or "emergency" livelihood coping levels, providing updated evidence of elevated household stress.

**Safety net mechanisms** remained operational despite rising vulnerability pressures.

**Assistance** helped cushion households affected by displacement, returnee inflows and income shocks.

## Pooling hope: collective funds bolster Afghanistan's returnee crisis response

Afghanistan faces one of the world's largest and fastest-growing returnee-related displacement crises, with approximately 5 million people, around 10 per cent of the population, returning over the past two years. **In 2025 alone, 2.78 million Afghans returned, including 1.88 million from Iran and 899,000 from Pakistan**, placing unprecedented pressure on communities and already overstretched services. Nearly one-third of returnees were women and girls, driven primarily by tightened migration policies, mass deportations and deteriorating protection environments in neighbouring countries. At key border crossings between Afghanistan and Iran and Pakistan, families arrive by bus and truck, carrying only what they could hold, unsure where they would go or how they would survive. The scale of returns is compounding existing displacement and **placing extraordinary pressure on Afghanistan's humanitarian needs, particularly housing, education, health services, and local labour markets**. In June and July, daily arrivals from Iran at key border points peaked at 30,000 – 40,000 people, forcing families to navigate uncertain futures while host communities struggled to cope with the sudden influx.

**Aid agencies are responding around the clock at the key entry points and in high-return areas. The OCHA-managed Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) and the UN Global Emergency Response Fund (CERF) together have mobilized \$23.7 million in 2025, including \$13.7 million from AHF and \$10 million from CERF to provide life-saving support to over one million people**, including food assistance, emergency shelter and essential commodities, water and hygiene supplies, health and nutrition services, cash assistance, and protection services, delivered through coordinated multi-agency interventions at border crossing points and in areas of high return.

Maryam, a widow from Kunduz Province who had lived in Iran for nearly a decade, was forced to return after her husband's death in June 2025 and, lacking legal documents to remain, had no choice but to leave. Staying at a transit center in Herat city, she said, **"My children ask where we will live, but I have no answer. I don't know what will happen."** For families like Maryam's, **it is crucial to sustain support – not just emergency relief, but also long-term assistance that helps them reintegrate into their communities with dignity.**



After being forced to return from Iran, Edris receives multipurpose cash assistance at the Islam Qala reception centre, with support from the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund, to help him start again. © OCHA/Abdullah Zahid

## 1.5 Protection



**Relevant providers and stakeholders have strengthened capacities to increase access to and improve the provision of preventive, mitigating, and responsive protection services - including on child protection, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and explosive hazards - to the most vulnerable at family and community levels.**

Protection programming in 2025 continued to deliver critical life-saving and preventive services across multiple risk areas, though results reflect uneven scale and persistent protection risks. Awareness and prevention activities expanded, with 2,193,505 people (1,483,500 female) reached through protection services awareness initiatives, contributing to community-level risk mitigation and knowledge of available services.

Explosive ordnance risk education and related protection interventions reached 647,540 individuals (including 364,575 males and 282,965 females), indicating continued prioritization of mine action risk reduction despite operational constraints. However, casualty data underscore the continued severity of explosive hazards, with 487 people killed or injured by explosive ordnance during the year (397 males, including 264 boys and 133 men, and 90 females, including 61 girls and 29 women). The narrative notes that the actual number of civilian casualties is likely higher due to reduced mine action team coverage, pointing to significant residual contamination risks and monitoring limitations.

Protection and psychosocial support services expanded substantially, reaching 1,237,944 individuals (78% female), representing one of the largest protection service outputs in 2025 and demonstrating strong demand for mental health and psychosocial assistance. Institutional capacity also improved, with 260 organizations, including national entities, strengthened to deliver protection services, exceeding the target and contributing to system sustainability.

Child protection interventions showed important reach. 23,146 girls and boys at risk of violence received assistance, while 14,616 unique beneficiaries

(6,058 female) accessed direct protection assistance and services, of whom 99 per cent were returnees, highlighting the growing protection burden associated with large-scale population movements.

Protection financing remained moderately constrained in 2025. Total requirements reached US\$183.4 million, with US\$116.5 million available, approximately 64 per cent funded, leaving a 36 per cent gap. While this funding level enabled continuation of core protection services, the shortfall likely limited geographic coverage, mine action capacity and specialized protection programming.

The funding pattern aligns with observed results: strong delivery in psychosocial support and awareness activities

### Key achievements in 2025

**1.2 million individuals** (78% females) received protection and psychosocial support services.

**647,540 people** reached with explosive ordnance risk education (44% female).

**2.2 million people** (68% female) reached through protection services awareness activities.

**260 organizations** strengthened to deliver protection services.

**23,146 at-risk children** received protection assistance.

Continued **nationwide monitoring of explosive ordnance** incidents despite capacity constraints.

alongside continued gaps in risk reduction outcomes, particularly explosive ordnance casualties. Without more predictable and flexible financing, protection programming risks remaining heavily response-oriented rather than achieving broader preventive impact and durable risk mitigation.

Overall, protection results in 2025 demonstrate that core services remain operational and responsive,

particularly in psychosocial support and risk education. However, the persistence of high explosive ordnance casualties, concentrated vulnerability among returnees, and reliance on awareness-driven approaches indicate that protection risks remain acute. Expanded coverage, stronger field monitoring, and sustained financing will be essential to move from largely reactive protection delivery toward more preventive and system-wide risk reduction.



Salamati Circle in Kandahar, a UN initiative, offers women skills training and economic opportunities. © UN Afghanistan

## From rejection to dignified life

Each morning in Kandahar province of Afghanistan, Rahman (name changed to protect the privacy) opens his solar repair shop to serve his customers, an achievement that would have seemed unimaginable just a few years ago. Before joining the Vocational Skills Training Programme, Rahman struggled with drug use disorder and lived in isolation. Community members avoided and judged him, labeling him with humiliating names and perceived him as a threat rather than someone in need of help. He was excluded from social gatherings, and although he did not commit theft, trust was broken, even within his family. Loneliness, shame, and regret defined his days.

**The turning point came when Rahman's life changed when he enrolled in the 4-month Solar Repair vocational training programme supported by UNODC and Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR) with funding from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).** Through structured, hands-on training, and mentorship, he gained practical skills and renewed confidence. Upon graduation, the project provided him with a complete solar repair toolkit, enabling him to establish his own shop. **"Before, I had no respect in my family or community," Rahman says. "Now I have regained my dignity, and people call me Ustad (teacher in local language)."**

Today, Rahman earns a stable income, supports his family, and lives a healthy, drug-free life. Community members who once avoided him now bring their sons and younger brothers to his shop to learn solar repair skills. His transformation has restored trust within his family and contributed to improved safety and cohesion in the community.

This success demonstrates how **appropriate skills training and post-training support designed for people recovering from drug use disorders can restore dignity, livelihoods, and hope.** Rahman's story stands as a powerful example of resilience, second chances, and sustainable impact.



Rahman recovers from drug use disorder after graduating from the VST Programme running his own shop and actively engaged.  
© UNODC Afghanistan

## Outcome 2. Economic Opportunities and Resilient Livelihoods

**By the end of 2025, more people in Afghanistan, notably women and vulnerable groups, will benefit from an increasingly inclusive economy, with greater equality of economic opportunities, jobs, more resilient livelihoods, strengthened food value chains, and improved natural resources management.**

Progress toward Outcome 2 in 2025 reflects a fragile economic stabilization alongside persistent structural constraints affecting employment, private sector growth and rural livelihoods. Afghanistan recorded approximately 1.9 per cent real GDP growth in 2025, marking a modest recovery after several years of contraction. However, the recovery remains limited and uneven, with insufficient structural transformation to generate large-scale employment or significantly expand inclusive economic opportunities.

External trade dynamics illustrate the continuing structural imbalance of the Afghan economy. Imports remained high in 2025, reaching over USD 13.2 billion, while exports totaled approximately USD 1.8 billion, resulting in a substantial trade deficit and continued dependence on imported fuel, machinery and consumer goods. Petroleum products alone accounted for roughly one-third of total imports. Export growth showed some recovery, driven primarily by agricultural commodities such as dried fruits, nuts and saffron, which together represented around 82 per cent of total exports. India emerged as the largest export destination, while imports were concentrated among regional partners including Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan and China. These patterns highlight both the continued importance of regional trade corridors and the limited diversification of Afghanistan's export base. Despite a modest recovery in export performance, the export value remained below the UNSFA target of USD 2.185 billion, reflecting continued structural constraints affecting production capacity, logistics infrastructure, and market access.

Private sector development remained a key priority throughout 2025, with sustained dialogue between national authorities, international partners and Afghan businesses. Discussions under the Private Sector Working Group (PSWG) emphasized the importance of job creation, entrepreneurship and regional market integration as central drivers of economic recovery. Key constraints identified include limited access to

finance, unreliable energy supply, weak infrastructure, and complex licensing procedures, all of which continue to limit investment and business expansion. Afghan firms rely heavily on personal financing due to restricted engagement with formal banking channels, underscoring the need to expand microfinance, Islamic finance instruments and credit guarantees to support small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). MSMEs were widely recognized as a cornerstone of local economic resilience and employment generation, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas.

Women's economic participation emerged as a major cross-cutting concern. Restrictions affecting women's mobility, employment, and education were repeatedly highlighted as significant barriers to business development and foreign investment interest. Private sector representatives emphasized the need to ease registration procedures, improve access to markets and digital platforms, and strengthen vocational and financial literacy programs to enable women-led enterprises to expand.

Counternarcotics efforts also shaped economic outcomes in 2025, particularly in rural areas historically dependent on opium cultivation. Recent estimates indicate 10,200 hectares of land under opium cultivation, with approximately 296 tons harvested and an estimated sales value of USD 134 million, reflecting the continued role of the illicit drug economy in rural livelihoods. Under the Counternarcotics Working Group (CNWG), participants emphasized that sustainable progress would depend on scaling up alternative livelihoods, agricultural value-chain development, and rural employment opportunities to offset income losses following the poppy cultivation ban. Continued investment in irrigation, agro-processing, market access and community-based development programmes was identified as critical to supporting farmers' transition toward licit economic activities.

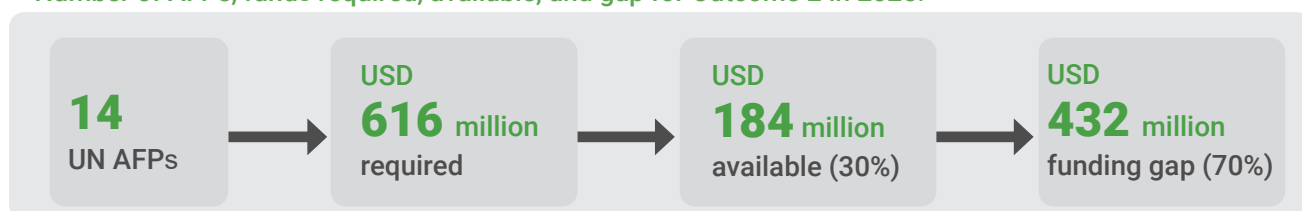
Funding for Outcome 2 in 2025 remained significantly below the level required to support broad-based economic recovery and livelihood resilience. The total required funding for Outcome 2 amounted to approximately USD 616.5 million, based on the combined requirements for Private Sector Development (USD 152.3 million), Rural Development, Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (USD 462 million), and Economic Stabilization (USD 2.1 million). Available resources across these areas reached about USD 184 million, resulting in an overall funding gap of approximately USD

432.4 million, meaning that only around 30 per cent of required funding was secured in 2025. This substantial financing shortfall limited the scale of interventions aimed at strengthening private sector activity, many of which is taking place in urban areas, supporting rural livelihoods, and expanding economic opportunities for vulnerable populations.

Overall, the 2025 results suggest modest macroeconomic stabilization but limited progress

toward inclusive economic transformation. Persistent data gaps across several indicators, particularly in employment, private sector development and financial sector performance, constrain comprehensive monitoring of outcomes. Moving forward, strengthening regional trade integration, MSME development, financial sector access, and alternative rural livelihoods will be essential to expand economic opportunities, reduce reliance on illicit economies and support more resilient and inclusive growth.

**Number of AFPs, funds required, available, and gap for Outcome 2 in 2025.**



**UNSAFE outcome 2 (JAN-DEC 2025) expenditure by SDGs in US\$**

SDG 1		14.9M	SDG 10		2.3M
SDG 2		30.3M	SDG 11		922.3K
SDG 3		4.8M	SDG 12		6.5M
SDG 4		1.4M	SDG 13		967.9K
SDG 5		7.8M	SDG 14		186.2K
SDG 6		5.8M	SDG 15		16.8M
SDG 8		29.6M	SDG 16		6.3M
SDG 9		19.6	SDG 17		2.1M

**Contributing agencies**



## 2.1 Economic Stabilization



**Economic and financial institutions and stakeholders have improved capacities to contribute to economic stabilization and pro-poor, private-sector-led economic recovery.**

Progress in economic stabilization during 2025 demonstrated tangible improvements in access to finance, financial sector innovation, and engagement of local businesses in economic activities, despite the broader constraints affecting Afghanistan’s financial system and private sector environment. Support to the Afghan private sector was primarily driven through credit guarantee mechanisms and financial intermediation initiatives aimed at expanding access to formal lending for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). By the end of 2025, a total of 10,432 loans had been disbursed to Afghan businesses (40% female), significantly exceeding the annual target of 6,027 loans. Financing through the UNDP supported risk-sharing and guarantee mechanism mobilized approximately USD 20 million in private sector lending, helping enterprises sustain operations, manage

liquidity constraints, and maintain employment in a challenging economic context characterized by limited banking access and constrained investment flows. The distribution of loans also indicates gradual progress toward gender inclusion in financial services, with 4,147 female beneficiaries alongside 6,285 male beneficiaries, reflecting targeted efforts to preserve and expand women’s participation in private sector-led economic activities under highly constrained operating conditions.

Beyond credit provision, initiatives during the year focused on strengthening the financial ecosystem and promoting innovation in financial instruments aligned with local market conditions. Implementation toolkits were developed for three Islamic finance products, including blended financing mechanisms designed to expand Sharia-compliant financing options and diversify available financial tools for businesses and financial institutions. These instruments not only expanded Sharia-compliant financing options but also served as risk-mitigation and confidence-building tools for



UN-supported biscuit factory in Herat empowers women and provides jobs for returnee women. © UN/Abdul Rahman Zaeem

participating financial institutions, supporting the gradual re-engagement of banks and MFIs in SME lending. Such innovations are particularly important in Afghanistan's context, where Islamic finance instruments represent a key entry point for strengthening financial inclusion and mobilizing domestic investment. Complementary capacity development efforts supported financial sector institutions and stakeholders through targeted technical assistance initiatives aimed at strengthening institutional capabilities, improving financial governance practices, and enhancing the enabling environment for private sector development.

In parallel, efforts to strengthen local economic participation within humanitarian and development supply chains contributed to expanding opportunities for Afghan businesses. Five local companies and vendors were engaged in delivering goods and services for humanitarian operations, and local vendors collectively delivered goods and services valued at approximately USD 616,828. These engagements demonstrate the growing integration of Afghan enterprises into operational supply

chains, which can contribute to strengthening domestic markets, supporting local employment, and building the capacity of local businesses to meet procurement and quality standards.

From a financial perspective, resources allocated to economic stabilization activities remained limited relative to broader economic needs. The thematic area received approximately USD 1.4 million in available funding against a requirement of USD 2.1 million in 2025, representing a funding coverage of about 65 per cent and a gap of roughly USD 0.74 million. While this level of financing enabled the implementation of key initiatives such as credit guarantees, financial product development, and capacity-building support, it constrained the potential to scale up financial inclusion programmes and expand support to a larger number of SMEs and entrepreneurs. Expanding predictable and flexible financing will therefore be critical to deepen financial sector support, strengthen credit access for businesses, and contribute more effectively to economic stabilization and private-sector-led recovery.

### Key achievements in 2025

**10,432** loans disbursed (40% female) to Afghan businesses, exceeding the annual target and expanding SME access to finance.

**USD 20 million** mobilized in private sector lending, supporting enterprise continuity and economic activity.

**Gender inclusion in financial access: 4,147** female beneficiaries accessed loans alongside 6,285 male beneficiaries.

**Two** Islamic finance products developed, expanding Sharia-compliant financial instruments available to businesses.

**2,000 plus** local companies and vendors engaged in humanitarian and development operations.

**USD 616.8 million** worth of goods and services delivered by Afghan vendors, supporting local market participation and economic linkages.

**Multiple financial sector capacity-development initiatives** implemented, strengthening institutional capabilities, risk management and governance technical assistance, digital finance readiness and professional certification training for banking sector staff.

## A loan, a lifeline

In Afghanistan's fragile economy, a small loan can mean the difference between survival and collapse. Years of conflict, political upheaval, and isolation have left the country's financial system deeply risk averse. Banks hesitate to lend, and most small businesses—the backbone of local economies—are locked out of formal finance. For entrepreneurs, especially women, a lack of credit often stalls growth before it begins. But a new initiative by the United Nations is quietly changing that reality. Launched in late 2024, a credit guarantee facility led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) is helping Afghan entrepreneurs access loans that banks once considered too risky. Rather than lending directly, the program guarantees part of a loan if a borrower defaults, reducing the risk for financial institutions and encouraging them to lend to small and medium-sized enterprises.

The impact has been remarkable. With just \$1 million in guarantees, the facility has mobilized nearly \$30 million in loans—a leverage ratio of 30 to 1. **In its first year, 7,500 small businesses received financing, including 2,255 women-owned enterprises, helping create more than 16,000 jobs, nearly 5,000 of them for women.** Behind these numbers are thousands of individual stories.

Azita, an entrepreneur who exports dried fruits, received a loan of 500,000 Afghanis. Before the loan, she struggled to invest in her business. Today, she processes raisins and almonds for export to Iran and employs ten women, up from six. “With the loan, I was able to expand,” she says. “My sales increased from about 70,000 Afghanis to more than 200,000.”



For Azita, Fatima, and thousands more, impact shows in new jobs, thriving businesses, and families regaining stability.

© UNDP Afghanistan

For Fatima in Herat, the loan changed her family's future. She used 300,000 Afghanis to buy medicines in bulk for her husband's pharmacy and purchased sewing machines so her sister could start a tailoring business.

**"Before the loan, we earned only about 3,000 Afghanis a month," she recalls. "Now our situation has improved. We can send our children to private school, and my sister has her own job." Stories like this highlight why credit guarantees can be transformative in fragile economies.**

The programme does more than unlock financing. It also helps banks and microfinance institutions develop Sharia-compliant financial products, ensuring loans align with Islamic finance principles. At the same time, new digital payment systems have reduced loan processing times from seven days to just 48 hours, cutting transaction costs by 30 per cent and expanding access in remote areas. Together, these innovations restore trust in the financial system and help entrepreneurs move beyond subsistence-level businesses. **What makes the model especially powerful is its efficiency. Each donor dollar mobilizes nearly twenty dollars of private lending, proving that even modest public funding can unlock significant capital for development. And the idea is not limited to Afghanistan.**

Many fragile economies face the same problem: viable businesses need credit, but lenders fear the risk. Guarantee mechanisms bridge that gap, enabling banks to lend while protecting them from potential losses. **When combined with technical assistance, digital tools, and strong local partnerships, they can spark broader economic recovery. In a world where development resources are increasingly stretched, this approach offers a practical lesson: smart financial instruments can multiply impact.**

**For Azita, Fatima, and thousands of other Afghan entrepreneurs, the effect is already visible—not in policy papers or balance sheets, but in new jobs, growing businesses, and families regaining stability.** These enterprise-level gains contribute to broader economic stabilisation by preserving jobs, sustaining local markets, and reinforcing confidence in private-sector-led recovery pathways. Sometimes, all it takes to change a future is a loan-and someone willing to guarantee it.

## 2.2 Private Sector Development



**Private sector enterprises, particularly MSMEs, have improved access to finance, asset support and business development services, and increased business opportunities that stimulate growth and decent job creation.**

Progress in private sector development during 2025 reflects the gradual expansion of enterprise support and employment generation despite persistent structural constraints affecting Afghanistan's business environment, including limited access to finance, regulatory uncertainty, and restricted market opportunities. Support programmes targeting micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) contributed to strengthening entrepreneurial activity and sustaining business operations in several sectors, including support to agri-food systems. During the reporting period, 29,855 MSMEs, formal and informal, received integrated support, including access to finance, business development services, and asset support, reaching 70% of the target. Of these beneficiaries, 18,616 (62%) were women, indicating that programmes have played an important role in maintaining women's participation in economic activities despite broader restrictions affecting women's employment and mobility.

Efforts to stimulate decent employment also showed moderate progress. A total of 44,809 long-term jobs were created for decent employment and income generation, contributing to livelihood stabilization and local economic activity, almost reaching the annual target (46,019 jobs). The interventions helped sustain economic opportunities in a highly constrained labour market. In Afghanistan's highly constrained labour market, job preservation and improvement represent a critical contribution to economic

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“Support programmes targeting micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) contributed to strengthening entrepreneurial activity and sustaining business operations in several sectors, including support to agri-food systems.”

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stabilization, often preventing enterprise closure and further income loss rather than generating net new employment. Programmes supporting enterprise growth and value-chain development also contributed to broader employment outcomes beyond direct job creation. According to programme reporting, 44,409 jobs were improved or sustained through technical and financial support initiatives, demonstrating the multiplier effects of enterprise support and capacity-building programmes.

Institutional strengthening also formed part of the effort to improve the enabling environment for businesses. 125 business associations and chambers of commerce received technical and financial support,

### Key achievements in 2025

**29,855** MSMEs supported, 70% of the annual target, and expanding enterprise development opportunities.

From these MSMEs,

**18,616** women

entrepreneurs were supported, strengthening women's participation in economic activities.

**44,809** long-term jobs

created through enterprise and employment initiatives.

**125** formal and informal business associations

and chambers supported, strengthening institutional capacity for private sector representation and coordination.

Expanded **technical and financial assistance**

programmes contributing to enterprise resilience and local market activity despite constrained economic conditions.

helping strengthen the representation of employers and improve dialogue between the private sector and economic institutions. Although modest in scale, these interventions contributed to strengthening market coordination mechanisms and supporting local entrepreneurship ecosystems. From a private sector development perspective, maintaining functional business associations and chambers also preserved channels for private sector dialogue, representation, and coordination with economic institutions. Taken together, the results suggest that targeted enterprise support and institutional strengthening initiatives are helping sustain private sector activity under difficult conditions, although the scale of interventions remains limited relative to the size of Afghanistan's informal economy and the broader need for employment generation.

Financing available for private sector development in 2025 remained significantly below programme requirements, constraining the potential scale of enterprise support and

employment generation initiatives. The thematic area required USD 152.3 million, while USD 57.4 million was available, representing approximately 38 per cent funding coverage and a funding gap of about USD 94.9 million.

This substantial funding shortfall limited the ability to scale up MSME support programmes, expand value-chain development initiatives, and strengthen broader private sector recovery mechanisms. The funding gap also constrained the expansion of catalytic instruments, such as blended finance, guarantees, and value-chain partnerships that have demonstrated strong multiplier effects for employment and enterprise resilience. While available funding enabled targeted enterprise support and job creation initiatives, significantly higher and more predictable financing will be necessary to expand market opportunities, strengthen business resilience, and support inclusive economic recovery, particularly for women-led businesses and small enterprises operating in vulnerable communities.



DSRSG/RC/HC meets members of the Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industries in Ghor, reaffirming women's role in the private sector © UN/Abdul Rahman Zaeem

## Afghan women embrace cooperatives to strengthen livelihoods

Women entrepreneurs gain practical skills in cooperative governance and group enterprise management under an ILO-led initiative. **Women in Afghanistan are learning how cooperative models can help them access markets, pool resources, and build stronger, more sustainable businesses.** In November 2025, the ILO organized a women-only cooperative training for 60 agro-based businesses from Laghman and Nangarhar provinces. Participants included women entrepreneurs, business owners, community members and those operating in women's markets. The practical training introduced participants to the basics of cooperative development, governance and management. It was delivered by a cohort of Cooperative Trainers previously trained by the ILO in northern Afghanistan.

The ILO worked closely with FAO to identify women-owned businesses from among its beneficiaries to take part in the training, which was based on the ILO's Think.COOP and Start.COOP modules in line with ILO's strategy and action plan on decent work and the social and solidarity economy (SSE). The activity was funded by the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA). Implemented in partnership with UNDP, UN Women, and other UN agencies, **the initiative formed a core component of the broader Durable Solutions Programme** which was developed in response to the large influx of Afghan returnees from Pakistan and the increasing number of protracted internally displaced persons (IDPs) seeking sustainable livelihoods in the Eastern Region.

**“Cooperative models offer women in Afghanistan a pathway toward improved livelihoods and shared prosperity while strengthening local economies. By supporting women-led enterprises, we help build the foundations for lasting social cohesion and community resilience,”** said Tite Habiakare, Senior Coordinator, ILO Office for Afghanistan. ILO's cooperative development initiatives in Afghanistan contribute to broader efforts to create sustainable economic opportunities, enhance social cohesion and build community resilience. By equipping women entrepreneurs with practical skills in cooperative governance, business planning, and group enterprise management, the ILO is nurturing an inclusive local economy. These initiatives help communities generate collective economic value, improve access to decent work, and strengthen their capacity to withstand shocks.



Training of ILO's cooperative development tools in Nangarhar, Afghanistan. © ILO Afghanistan

## 2.3 Sustainable Agriculture and Livelihoods



**Rural communities can better and sustainably manage natural resources, increase agricultural productivity and value addition, manage and reduce disaster risks, and enhance biodiversity, contributing to increased resilience, food security and nutrition, decent work, and sustainable livelihoods for all Afghans.**

Progress in sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods during 2025 reflects substantial support to agricultural production systems, rural infrastructure, and natural resource rehabilitation aimed at strengthening food security and household resilience. Agricultural livelihood programmes reached a significant number of rural producers, with 610,221 farmers and livestock owners (50% females) receiving production support, including inputs, training, and technical assistance to improve productivity and strengthen agricultural value chains. Women represented a more or less an equal share of beneficiaries, with 302,205 female participants compared to 308,016 male beneficiaries, indicating efforts to maintain women's engagement in agricultural livelihoods despite broader economic constraints.

Institutional strengthening of rural producer organizations and agricultural value chain actors also expanded during the reporting period. A total of 2,270 rural producers' organizations and agricultural actors (686 females) received support, exceeding the mid-year performance and contributing to improved coordination, access to inputs, and market linkages. Strengthening these organizations is particularly important in Afghanistan's predominantly agrarian economy, where collective production and market access mechanisms can significantly enhance rural incomes and resilience.

Significant investments were also directed toward strengthening agricultural infrastructure and water resource management. 2,821 water resources and irrigation structures, including bridges, irrigation systems, and storage facilities, were constructed or rehabilitated, improving water availability and climate resilience in agricultural areas. In parallel, 25,196 hectares of rangeland and forest land were rehabilitated, contributing to ecosystem restoration and improved natural resource management in areas affected by

environmental degradation and overuse. Land restoration and agricultural productivity initiatives also generated substantial livelihood benefits. 102,784 hectares of land were newly brought under cultivation, strengthening agricultural production capacity and improving local food availability. As a result of agricultural land rehabilitation and improved production systems, 2,640,025 people benefited from improved agricultural productivity and livelihood opportunities, including 1,288,135 women and 1,351,890 men. These interventions helped strengthen rural economies, enhance food production systems, and improve resilience to climate shocks and environmental degradation.

Housing and rural infrastructure interventions also contributed to improved living conditions and livelihood stability. 4,632 durable dwellings or housing facilities were constructed or rehabilitated, benefiting vulnerable rural households and supporting community stability in areas affected by displacement and economic hardship.

In addition, 54 assessments, surveys, knowledge products, and studies were produced during the reporting period, strengthening the evidence base for agricultural and rural development programming. These analytical outputs supported evidence-based planning, informed policy dialogue, and improved targeting of agricultural interventions, enabling programmes to respond more effectively to evolving rural livelihood challenges and natural resource management needs.

Overall, results in 2025 demonstrate significant progress in strengthening agricultural livelihoods and natural resource management. However, the scale of rural vulnerability, climate risks, and structural agricultural constraints, including limited irrigation coverage, environmental degradation, and market access barriers, means that sustained investment will be required to consolidate gains and support long-term rural economic recovery.

Financing for rural development, agriculture, and natural resource management remained below overall programme requirements in 2025, limiting the potential scale of agricultural productivity and rural livelihood interventions. The thematic area required USD 462 million, while USD 125.3 million was available, representing

approximately 27 per cent funding coverage and a financing gap of about USD 336.8 million.

This substantial funding shortfall constrained the expansion of irrigation systems, land rehabilitation programmes, and agricultural value-chain development initiatives that are critical for strengthening rural livelihoods and food security. While available funding enabled large-scale support to farmers, land restoration, and agricultural

infrastructure development, the gap in financing limited the ability to scale climate-resilient agriculture, improve water resource management, and strengthen rural economic systems at the level required to meet growing food security pressures. Greater and more predictable financing will therefore be essential to expand agricultural productivity programmes, strengthen rural resilience, and support sustainable livelihood opportunities for Afghanistan's still predominantly rural population.

## Key achievements in 2025

**610,221** farmers and livestock owners (50% females) supported with agricultural production inputs and technical assistance.

**2,270** rural producer organizations and agricultural actors (686 females) supported, strengthening value-chain coordination and market access.

**2,821** irrigation and water resource structures constructed or rehabilitated, improving agricultural water management.

**25,196** hectares of rangeland and forest rehabilitated, supporting ecosystem restoration and natural resource management.

**102,784** hectares benefited from agricultural land rehabilitation and productivity improvements, including over 1.29 million women.

**2.6 million** people benefited from agricultural land rehabilitation and productivity improvements, including over 1.29 million women.

**4,632** durable dwellings constructed or rehabilitated, improving housing conditions and rural stability.

**54** assessments, surveys, knowledge products, and analytical studies were produced, strengthening the evidence base for agricultural and rural development programming and supporting more informed, data-driven planning and policy dialogue.



Uzra, a farmer, weeding her potato field. Potatoes are a key crop in Bamyan, providing food security and income for local households.  
© FAO/Hashim Azizi

## Rehabilitating irrigation systems and protecting farmland

**Water determines whether Afghan farmers harvest or lose a season.** While much of the country's agriculture depends on rainfall, irrigated land relies on community-managed canals and karezes that have supported farming for generations. Years of drought, flooding, sedimentation and deferred maintenance weakened many of these systems, reduced water reaching farms, intensified disputes between upstream and downstream users and increased pressure on already scarce groundwater.

For Khal Mohammad, a farmer in Takhar Province, those pressures shaped every growing season. The 2.5-kilometre Hashmat Canal had deteriorated to the point where water rarely reached downstream fields when it was needed most. "Sometimes we waited weeks," he recalls. "By then, it was too late for the crop." **With support from the World Bank, FAO rehabilitated the Hashmat Canal by repairing the main canal, secondary branches and on-farm structures together.** This work restored flow control, reduced leakage and improved water distribution along the entire system. As water began reaching his fields more regularly, Khal was able to plant on time and manage his crops more effectively. His rice yields increased from about 1 400 kilograms to roughly 2 100 kilograms. "Our land is greener now," he says. "Our harvest is richer."

**Reliable irrigation also changes how farmers use their land. When water arrives on time, they cultivate a larger share of their fields, reduce losses during dry spells and complete second harvests that were once too risky to attempt.**

In Parwan Province, rehabilitation of the Bayazid irrigation system has eased long-standing tensions between upstream and downstream farmers. Years of seepage and uneven distribution meant water pooled near the head of the canal, leaving downstream fields dry during critical periods. FAO rehabilitated 2 500 metres of canal and constructed 120 structures to regulate flows and support community water use.

Farid, a farmer and head of the local Irrigation Association, says the difference this year was clear. "We grow wheat and vegetables," he explains. "In the past, downstream farmers lost part of their second crop. This year, water reached them on time, and they harvested better."



The photos show rehabilitation of Bayezed canal before (top) and after (bottom). © FAO Afghanistan

### Outcome 3. Social Cohesion, Inclusion, Gender Equality, Human Rights, and Rule of Law

**By the end of 2025, more people in Afghanistan can participate in an increasingly socially cohesive, gender-equal, and inclusive society, where the rule of law and human rights are progressively upheld, and more people can participate in governance and decision-making.**

Progress toward Outcome 3 in 2025 remained constrained by the broader political and institutional environment, with limited improvements across several governance, rule of law, and human rights indicators. Data availability also remained uneven across multiple outcome indicators, reflecting both operational constraints and the limited availability of updated national statistics. In particular, indicators related to representation in national and provincial decision-making structures, perceptions of safety, open government performance, and several justice sector indicators lacked updated reporting data during the year. These gaps highlight the continuing challenges of monitoring governance and social cohesion outcomes in a highly constrained operating context. Despite these limitations, available evidence points to continued engagement by UN entities and partners to sustain civic space, cultural heritage protection, and human rights monitoring. The situation of media freedom and civic participation remained fragile. According to monitoring data compiled by the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee, 53 cases of detention of journalists and media workers were recorded in 2025, including 44 male and 9 female journalists, underscoring the continued vulnerability of media professionals and the constrained environment for independent journalism. Afghanistan ranked 175th out of 180 countries in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index with a score of 17.88, reflecting a highly restrictive media environment despite a slight movement in ranking compared with 2024.

At the same time, cultural heritage preservation and cultural participation initiatives continued to support social cohesion and identity preservation. Six cultural institutions and heritage sites were supported to promote cultural diversity and inclusive cultural participation. These included major restoration and conservation efforts at the National Museum in

Kabul, as well as conservation activities at World Heritage sites in Bamiyan and the Minaret of Jam, which combined heritage protection with vocational training and community-based tourism initiatives aimed at strengthening local livelihoods and cultural engagement.

Gender equality and women's rights indicators continue to highlight significant structural disparities. Afghanistan remains among the lowest-ranking countries globally on gender equality metrics. The Gender Inequality Index places Afghanistan at 162 out of 166 countries, while the Global Gender Gap Index ranks Afghanistan last (146 out of 146 countries). Complementary analysis from the Afghanistan Gender Index, developed by UN Women based on the twin indices introduced by UN Women and UNDP in 2023, further illustrates the magnitude of gender disparities. The assessment indicates that Afghan women achieve only 24.4 per cent of the outcomes achieved by men across key human development dimensions, implying a gender gap of approximately 75.6 per cent, among the largest globally. These figures underscore the profound structural barriers affecting women's participation in economic, social, and political life.

Civil society organizations, particularly women-led organizations (WLOs), faced increasing operational constraints during 2025. Survey data indicate that only 43 per cent of women-led organizations reported receiving new project funding after October 2025, reflecting a sharp decline compared with earlier in the year. This contraction in financing mirrors the broader reduction in humanitarian funding flows to Afghanistan and the impact of regulatory restrictions affecting women's participation in humanitarian and development activities. Despite these constraints, targeted advocacy and coordination by the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group led to a substantial increase in funding reaching women-led organizations through the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund, rising from USD 250,000 in 2023 to USD 5.07 million in 2025, demonstrating continued efforts to maintain women's participation in humanitarian response and civil society engagement.

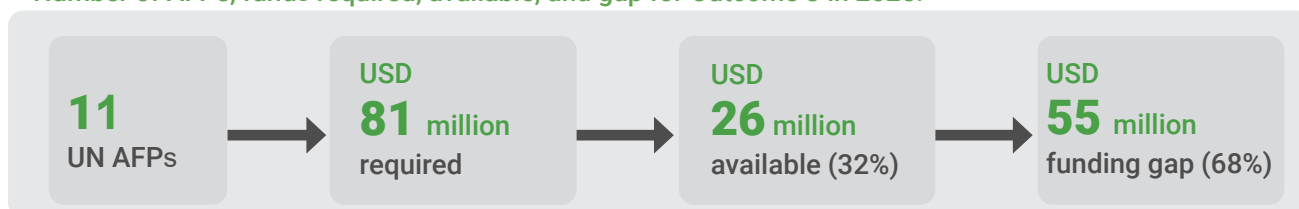
Funding levels for Outcome 3 remained limited relative to requirements. Thematic areas contributing to this outcome, including social cohesion, inclusion and reconciliation, rule of law, and human rights and gender equality, required approximately USD 81.4 million in

2025, while available funding reached about USD 26 million, leaving a funding gap of more than USD 55 million. This means that only around 32 per cent of the required resources were available, significantly constraining the scale of programming aimed at strengthening governance systems, protecting civic space, supporting human rights monitoring, and advancing gender equality initiatives.

Overall, the results for 2025 indicate that progress toward Outcome 3 remains highly constrained by structural political and institutional factors. While targeted interventions supported cultural heritage protection, civil society engagement, and human rights monitoring, broader improvements in governance participation, rule of law indicators, and gender equality outcomes remain limited. Sustained international

engagement, protection of civic space, strengthened support to women-led organizations, and improved monitoring of governance and justice indicators will remain essential to advancing social cohesion, inclusion, and human rights in Afghanistan. Many UN agencies, including UN-Habitat, UNOPS and IOM, increased efforts to establish community-driven processes and locally led decision-making processes, through building capacity and setting up community representative committees, Local Implementation Committees or similar structures as follow up to Afghanistan's Community Development Councils (CDCs). Agencies put strong efforts to continuously include women, but also displaced people into those councils and ensure their voices are being heard and to foster social cohesion through participatory processes.

**Number of AFPs, funds required, available, and gap for Outcome 3 in 2025.**



**UNSFSA outcome 3 (JAN-DEC 2025) expenditure by SDGs in US\$**

SDG 1  392.3K	SDG 8  90.4K
SDG 2  307.6K	SDG 9  84.7K
SDG 3  307.6K	SDG 10  1.5M
SDG 4  84.7K	SDG 11  259.7K
SDG 5  14.1M	SDG 15  900K
SDG 6  386.6K	SDG 16  3.9M

**Contributing agencies**



### 3.1 Social Cohesion, Inclusion, and Reconciliation



#### Formal and informal governance mechanisms, community-based institutions, and decision-making platforms are more inclusive, responsive, accountable, and better able to contribute to social cohesion and reconciliation.

Progress under this output in 2025 focused on strengthening community-level governance mechanisms and participatory platforms that enable communities to engage in local decision-making and reconciliation processes. Despite a highly constrained civic environment, UN-supported initiatives continued to facilitate inclusive community dialogue, strengthen local institutions, and support community-driven initiatives aimed at promoting social cohesion and conflict mitigation.

Implementation results indicate that 2,942 community-based structures and mobilization activities were supported during the reporting period, contributing to strengthened local governance mechanisms and improved community participation in development planning processes. In addition, 4,427 individuals (2,508 males and 1,919 females) had their capacities strengthened through training, community engagement initiatives, and participation in community-led development activities. These efforts focused on enhancing dialogue mechanisms, strengthening mediation capacities, and improving the ability of local communities to identify and address shared development priorities.

Furthermore, 5,532,924 people (2,764,622 females) were reached through formal and informal community engagement processes, including consultations, community mobilization sessions, and participatory planning activities. These processes enabled communities to identify priority needs, promote inclusive participation, including women and vulnerable groups where feasible, and strengthen locally driven approaches to reconciliation and social cohesion. The results demonstrate continued demand for community-based governance platforms, particularly in rural and underserved areas where formal governance structures remain limited.

Financial resources available for social cohesion and reconciliation interventions remained significantly below requirements. According to the UNSFA funding dashboard, the Social Cohesion, Inclusion and Reconciliation thematic

area required approximately USD 53.3 million in 2025, while only USD 10.1 million was available, leaving a funding gap of approximately USD 43.2 million and meaning that less than 19 per cent of the required resources were secured. This substantial shortfall constrained the geographic reach and scale of programming aimed at strengthening community institutions, facilitating inclusive dialogue, and supporting reconciliation processes.

Despite these financial limitations, UN agencies continued to support localized initiatives that promote community engagement and social cohesion, particularly through partnerships with community-based structures and civil society organizations. Expanding such initiatives will remain essential to strengthening inclusive governance mechanisms and mitigating social tensions, particularly in contexts where formal governance and participatory platforms remain limited.

#### Key achievements in 2025

**2,942** community mobilization and governance-support activities implemented to strengthen community-based institutions and inclusive decision-making platforms.

**4,427** individuals (41% female) strengthened their capacities through community engagement, training, and participatory governance initiatives.

**5.5 million** people reached

through community consultations and dialogue platforms, supporting locally driven development priorities and social cohesion efforts.

Continued support to **community-based governance mechanisms**, including Community Development Councils (CDCs) and other local structures facilitating dialogue, reconciliation, and participatory planning.

## Engaging Afghan youth: volunteers assisting returnees home

Herat, Afghanistan – At the dusty Islam Qala border in Herat, thousands of Afghan families pour back into their homeland every day, forced to leave behind lives they once built in Iran. In the middle of this chaotic scene stands Zainab Khairandish, a youth volunteer helping families survive the first days of return.

Zainab is one of the youth volunteers for UNFPA's Last Mile Assurance (LMA) program deployed to Islam Qala to support the border response for the returning Afghans from Iran. "We act as social mobilizers," she says. "We help people, primarily women, girls and children, access the services they need."

In the cramped camp, there are only basic emergency services. Bathrooms and temporary shade are available for women and girls, but the stay is only temporary. Still, Zainab and her team move quickly to make sure urgent needs are met. "Yesterday alone, we had five pregnant women looking for maternal healthcare. My team and I guided them to the UNFPA-supported clinic in the camp so the midwives and doctors could take care of them," she explains.

Zainab has seen firsthand the two heavy burdens returnees carry. "Some families have no idea where to go—it's their first time back in Afghanistan in years," she says. Many of the women are deeply anxious. "They've heard stories of how different life is here for women. Some girls had been studying or even working in Iran, and now they are terrified of this unfamiliar context." Housing is another looming crisis. "I live in Herat City, and I know how hard it's become to find a house," Zainab says.



Female youth volunteers for last mile assurance support the response for Afghan returnees at Islam Qala border crossing. © UNFPA Afghanistan/Arlene Alano

**Another burden is poverty**

These families left Afghanistan in the first place for a better life. Now, forced to return, they have no job, no home, and no money.

One mother told me that, in Iran, at least they had an income to satisfy their primary needs. “Here, we will be a burden on society because there is nothing to do, and my daughter, studying in fourth grade in Iran, will soon be out of school in Afghanistan.”

For Zainab, seeing the camp for the first time was overwhelming. “It was an emotional shock. Everything felt like it was moving in slow motion—women, children, boys, and men everywhere. Some needed medical help, food, and water. Others were lost in desperate thoughts of their unknown future. Then there are the dust storms of Herat, which are hard enough in a house, let alone in the open desert,” she recalls. “I had no words. I just rushed to help.”

**Finding strength in a noble mission**

Despite it all, Zainab finds strength in her faith and her mission. “It’s a grim scene, but I am grateful that Allah gave me the chance to serve my people in these hard times,” she says. “I talk to mothers, reassure them that everything is going to be fine, even though I don’t know it myself. But I believe and look forward to a better future.”

She sees health workers giving everything they have to care for the returnees. But she knows this is only the beginning. “Overall, it’s a temporary relief,” she says quietly. “It doesn’t solve the bigger problem—how will they cope with this new life?”

## 3.2 Justice and Rule of Law



**Justice institutions, including customary and traditional community systems, are better able to provide accessible, effective, equitable, inclusive, transparent, and timely services, and these services are increasingly provided in line with international norms and standards, benefiting all communities, especially vulnerable groups such as women, children, and minorities.**

Progress under this output in 2025 focused on strengthening access to justice, improving legal awareness, and supporting justice service delivery through both formal and community-based mechanisms. Despite the challenging institutional environment and limited operational space for justice programming, UN-supported initiatives continued to promote legal awareness, facilitate access to justice services, and strengthen community level understanding of legal rights and procedures.

During the reporting period, 34,424 individuals (19,997 males and 14,427 females) received legal aid and also advice through participating in online and in-person information sessions designed to increase awareness of legal rights and available justice services. These sessions were delivered through partnerships with civil society organizations and community networks and covered key topics including access to justice, dispute resolution mechanisms, and available legal assistance channels. The activities contributed to improving community understanding of justice processes and strengthening confidence in available dispute resolution pathways.

Funding available for justice and rule of law interventions remained extremely limited. According to the UNSFA funding dashboard, the Rule of Law thematic area required approximately USD 0.96 million in 2025, while no funding was reported as available during the year, resulting in a 100 per cent funding gap. This lack of financial resources significantly constrained the scale of justice programming and limited opportunities to expand legal aid services, institutional capacity-building, and broader rule-of-law interventions.

Despite these constraints, UN agencies continued to support awareness-raising activities and community outreach initiatives aimed at strengthening access to

justice and promoting equitable dispute resolution. Expanding such initiatives, alongside improved funding for justice programming, will be essential to enhance the accessibility, transparency, and effectiveness of justice institutions and community dispute resolution mechanisms.

### Key achievements in 2025

**34,424 individuals (42% females) received legal aid and participated in justice awareness and legal information sessions.**

Expanded **community outreach on access to justice, legal rights, and dispute resolution mechanisms**, particularly through civil society partners.

Continued **engagement with community-based justice actors and customary systems** to promote inclusive and accessible justice pathways.

**“Lack of financial resources significantly constrained the scale of justice programming and limited opportunities to expand legal aid services, institutional capacity-building, and broader rule-of-law interventions.”**

## When the de facto authorities shut down the Internet, women lost their lifeline to aid, learning, and each other

The October 2025 blackout exposed how vital the Internet has become for Afghan women and how, when that connection is lost, hope fades and isolation takes hold. When the Taliban [cut off the Internet and phone networks across Afghanistan](#), millions of women and girls were silenced. For those with connectivity, the blackout severed their last link to the outside world – **a fragile connection that had kept education, work, and hope alive. Many women in Afghanistan still lack access to the Internet, a basic phone, or the literacy to use digital tools.** For those that do, that connection is a rare lifeline to life-saving services and the outside world. Nevertheless, access has largely been restored. But the message was clear: in Afghanistan, this valuable gateway to learning, expression, and services for women and girls can be shut down at any moment.

**Afghan women are already banned from secondary and higher education, from most forms of work, and public spaces such as parks, gyms, and sports clubs.** Many women are also receiving humanitarian aid, including in earthquake-affected eastern Afghanistan, and among those returning – many forcibly – from Iran and Pakistan.

**The digital and phone blackout intensified feelings of stress, isolation and anxiety among women and girls.** What happens when Afghan women and girls go offline?

**In Afghanistan, the impact of Internet and phone blackouts falls more heavily on women and girls.** It eliminates what is, for many, a final means of learning, earning, and connecting.



Women entrepreneurs participate in business development training in a UN Women-supported Multi-Purpose Women's Centre in Parwan province, eastern Afghanistan in January 2025. © UN Women/Ali Omid Taqdisyan

When women and girls lose Internet access, they lose the ability to:

- » **Access aid:** Those who are connected can use the Internet or phones to find out about support available, and aid agencies rely on connectivity to continue operations.
- » **Learn about disasters:** Recent data shows 9 per cent of women use the Internet to access information on climate disasters.
- » Seek services and reporting mechanisms for survivors of gender-based violence or those at risk.
- » **Learn:** Online classes and study groups were a lifeline for girls banned from secondary schools, and women banned from universities.
- » **Work:** Online businesses are a vital source of income for many women to sustain their families after being pushed out of many formal roles.
- » **Connect:** Social apps and social media provide safe spaces to support one another and exchange information.
- » **Be visible:** For women already excluded from public life, the digital world is one of the last places to exist and resist.

### Going dark in the middle of humanitarian crises

The national internet blackout started a month after a 6.0 earthquake struck eastern Afghanistan on 31 August, with major aftershocks continuing throughout September and the emergency response and early recovery continuing. Despite facing many challenges, women-led organizations have played a crucial role delivering life-saving aid and services to women and girls affected by the earthquake, and Afghan women and girl returnees from neighbouring Iran and Pakistan. During the blackout, NGOs were forced to halt humanitarian operations and cease field missions to emergency sites. Staff could not process payments or place orders for essential goods destined for women and their families. When banks went offline, women affected by humanitarian crises were unable to access emergency cash assistance to buy essentials such as food. The shutdown also made it much harder for survivors of gender-based violence to access help at a time when household tensions were rising across the country, and the risk of violence was escalating.

### Online livelihoods switched off

**In Afghanistan, waves of directives banning women from most jobs and restricting their movement without a male guardian have systematically pushed them out of public life.** For many women entrepreneurs, the Internet offers a rare space to work, build small businesses, and sell their products – such as nuts, spices, handicrafts, clothes and artworks – to customers within Afghanistan and overseas.

**“There is no space for us to work outside our homes,”** explained business owner Sama\*, from Parwan in eastern Afghanistan. **“There’s also no local market where we can display and sell our products.”** With the support of UN Women, Sama built an online shop selling knitted bags, purses and jewelry. “Through my online shop, I became well known,” she says. “I’m earning money, solving my financial problems, and becoming self-sufficient.” When the blackout struck, women like Sama lost their only source of income overnight – a warning that for many Afghan women, connectivity is not a luxury, but a lifeline.

### From blackout to global action

The Internet blackout in Afghanistan was a stark reminder that the digital world is not neutral. It can be a space for empowerment. It can also be a tool for exclusion and isolation. **The stories of Afghan women remind us of what is at stake: education, mental health, livelihoods, and hope. When women are silenced online, they are cut off further from opportunity and from the world.**

*\*Name changed to protect identity.*

### 3.3 Human Rights and Women Rights



**Communities, civil society organizations, vulnerable groups, women, and other relevant stakeholders are more aware of and better able to promote and protect their human rights, aligned with international norms and standards, and mitigate threats to their safety and wellbeing.**

Implementation under this output in 2025 focused on strengthening the role of civil society, media actors, and community stakeholders in promoting human rights awareness and protecting civic space, despite a highly constrained operating environment. Progress was primarily driven through support to media and civil society actors, documentation of the human rights situation, and advocacy aimed at promoting the respect for and fulfilment of human rights for all in Afghanistan, including women, girls, and vulnerable groups.

Results reporting indicate that 1,641 journalists and media activists were employed and trained across different media platforms, significantly exceeding the annual target of 900. Of those supported, 1,069 were males, and 572 were females, including 12 individuals from IDP and returnee communities, highlighting efforts to maintain inclusive participation in the media sector despite shrinking civic space. These interventions contributed to sustaining media operations, strengthening professional capacities, and supporting continued public access to information in Afghanistan's challenging media environment.

Support to media actors was particularly important given the deteriorating operating conditions for journalists and civil society organizations. The reporting period documented 53 reported cases affecting journalists and media personnel, reflecting continued risks faced by media actors and underscoring the importance of UN engagement to maintain independent information channels and support professional protection mechanisms. Sustaining employment and training opportunities for journalists, therefore, played a critical role in maintaining access to information and supporting public dialogue.

Human rights monitoring and advocacy remained central components of the UN's engagement under this output. UNAMA's human rights reporting continued to document restrictions affecting Afghans, including women and girls,

given limitations on their access to education, employment, freedom of movement, and participation in public life. These limitations significantly affected women's enjoyment of a wide range of human rights and fundamental freedoms and remained a major barrier to inclusive development and social participation in Afghanistan.

Funding for activities under the Human Rights and Women's Rights / Gender Equality thematic area remained limited relative to overall needs. In 2025, approximately USD 27.2 million was required while USD 15.9 million was available, leaving a funding gap of roughly USD 11.3 million (around 41 per cent). This constrained the scale of human rights monitoring, protection programming, and civil society support activities across the country.

Despite these constraints, UN agencies and partners continued to support human rights monitoring, advocacy, community-level awareness initiatives, and awareness-raising for relevant de facto authorities. Strengthening the resilience of civil society organizations, protecting media space, and maintaining domestic and international human rights engagement remain essential to safeguarding fundamental rights and supporting an inclusive pathway for Afghanistan's recovery.

#### Key achievements in 2025

**1,641 journalists and media activists** employed and trained, exceeding the annual target of 900.

**572 women journalists** supported, contributing to the continued participation of women in the media sector despite severe restrictions.

Continued **human rights monitoring and reporting** by UNAMA documenting human rights violations.

Sustained advocacy for alignment with **international human rights obligations** and protection of civic space.

## Homeward bound

After seven years of unsafe labour abroad, Bashir returns to Afghanistan to reclaim the last few years of his childhood and reunite with his family. **Bashir stepped off the bus into a tangled knot of people, each jostling to retrieve their belongings.**

Just as his bus disembarked, another pulled up, with dozens more travelers unloading themselves and their families. Bashir himself had only a small backpack, which he swung over his shoulder to gently push his way through the crowd and chaos, straight into the reception center. In the near distance behind him, just over the border he crossed this morning, was Iran – and the memories of a few dangerous years – which he hoped to leave behind. **In front of him, drawing closer with each step: Afghanistan. Home.**

“I was only 10 years old,” he recalls. “I went with a big group of my relatives, including my mother.” His father had passed away years ago, buried near his home in rural Herat province. “I didn’t really understand why we were going there.” Like many other families, Bashir’s relatives had left Afghanistan seeking better economic opportunity. But as undocumented migrants, Bashir’s family had few opportunities for formal employment. Days crawled by; their savings dwindled. Bashir’s mother became desperate. **“I had to go to work,” Bashir says. “I could not continue school. We did not have any papers, and we did not have any money.” “First, I worked in a supermarket, then I started working in construction. It was so hard.”**



“Bashir has changed so much, but I am so happy to see him. I am happy he is home.” Sultan Ahmad, Bashir’s grandfather. © UNICEF/UNI727598/Khan

Construction work was tough, especially for Bashir's young body. Each day, he performed dangerous, unregulated labor with little food, water, or breaks. He pushed the wheelbarrows of cement. He moved bricks. He wore no safety equipment, not even gloves. Bashir remembers the day of his deportation, and that it began like any other. He put on his only pair of shoes and joined 10 other boys – all of them under 18 – at the daily construction site.

"But that day," he says, the memory crisp, "the authorities came to our construction site and rounded us up. They put handcuffs on us and took us to a small jail at the border." Luckily, his mother had time to collect a few of his things, passing them off through a policeman. But Bashir was not allowed to see his family. "The next day, they put us on a bus back to Afghanistan," Bashir says, "and now I'm here."

A short time at the border and Bashir moves to the 170-bed Guzara Transit Centre with a few other children. This centre, situated in Herat city, operated by UNICEF and partners – with support from the European Union – provides a safe place to rest, take a shower, change clothes, eat a hot meal and play sports to decompress.

Bashir also speaks with a psychosocial counsellor, so he can talk about what he went through in a supportive environment. Trained facilitators conduct group sessions, educating children on the risks of migration and planning to help them reintegrate.

While Bashir enjoys a friendly football match, social workers trace his family. On average, tracing and reunification takes just one or two days. For Bashir, it was less than 12 hours.

Luckily, Bashir's family lives nearby, so his grandfather Sultan Ahmad made rapid arrangements to come see him. Throwing open the transit center gates; Bashir's grandfather spread his arms wide. With tears welling at the corners of his eyes, mumbling prayers and gratitude for the reunion, he embraced Bashir with palpable affection and a warm smile. "I have not seen Bashir in eight years," he gushes.

## 2.2. Support to Partnerships and Financing the 2030 Agenda

### DONOR ENGAGEMENT THROUGH THE AFGHANISTAN COORDINATION GROUP (ACG)

Throughout 2025, the United Nations continued to play a central role in facilitating strategic donor engagement and coordination for basic human needs (BHN) support to Afghanistan through the Afghanistan Coordination Group (ACG). Co-chaired by UNAMA, the World Bank Group, and the European Union, the ACG serves as the primary multi-stakeholder platform bringing together bilateral donors, international financial institutions, United Nations entities, and international partners to align financing, policy dialogue, and programmatic priorities in support of the Afghan people.

In 2025, donor engagement through the ACG focused on sustaining international support for essential services, strengthening coordination across humanitarian and basic human needs assistance, and advancing longer-term resilience and economic recovery pathways. Discussions highlighted the increasingly complex operating environment in Afghanistan, characterized by overlapping crises including severe funding constraints, environmental shocks, large-scale returnee movements, and restrictions affecting women and girls. Participants reaffirmed the importance of maintaining principled engagement while ensuring continued delivery of assistance to vulnerable populations.

The ACG in-person meeting held in Tashkent in October 2025 represented a key milestone in strengthening international coordination and strategic dialogue. The meeting brought together major development partners and international institutions to discuss priorities for resilience, durable solutions for displaced and returning populations, and pathways to strengthen livelihoods and private sector activity. Key thematic discussions addressed the sustainability of basic services in the context of declining aid flows, opportunities to promote economic recovery and job creation, and approaches to strengthen regional engagement and cross-border cooperation.

Participants reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the Afghan people through coordinated and efficient assistance, while emphasizing the importance of protecting human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls, as a fundamental principle guiding international

support. The ACG also stressed the importance of strengthening the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, promoting sustainable livelihoods and private sector resilience, and supporting locally driven solutions through strengthened engagement with Afghan civil society and community stakeholders.

The meeting also endorsed a roadmap to further strengthen the effectiveness of the ACG, including the development of formal terms of reference, the establishment of an ACG Secretariat, and the continuation of the tri-chair arrangement with the European Union representing donor partners. These steps aim to enhance the operational efficiency, inclusiveness, and strategic orientation of the coordination platform while ensuring stronger alignment between donor financing priorities and Afghanistan's evolving needs.

Donor financing trends discussed through the ACG also highlighted the growing pressure on available resources. Since August 2021, ACG members have committed approximately US\$7.02 billion in basic human needs support, of which US\$5.22 billion has been disbursed, demonstrating continued international engagement despite an increasingly constrained funding environment. However, commitments peaked in 2022 and have since declined, with disbursements falling sharply in 2025, underscoring the widening gap between pledged and delivered resources and the need for improved prioritization and coordination of available funding.

To address these challenges, the ACG continued to support efforts to strengthen the aid coordination architecture in Afghanistan. Extensive consultations throughout 2025 led to proposals for a revised coordination framework aimed at improving efficiency, accountability, and cross-pillar collaboration between humanitarian and basic human needs actors. The revised architecture seeks to enhance complementarity between humanitarian clusters and development-oriented coordination platforms while maintaining their distinct mandates, thereby strengthening the overall coherence of international assistance.

Through these efforts, the United Nations continued to facilitate dialogue among donors and partners, strengthen strategic coordination, and support a more coherent and sustainable approach to financing basic human needs and resilience in Afghanistan.

## AFGHANISTAN RESILIENCE TRUST FUND (ARTF)

The Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund (ARTF), administered by the World Bank and supported by 31 development partners, remained a central financing platform for sustaining essential services and livelihoods in Afghanistan during 2025. ARTF-funded programmes delivered measurable results across health, education, livelihoods, agriculture, and community infrastructure. In the health sector, ARTF-supported programmes facilitated 492,000 births in project-financed health facilities. At the same time, 491,000 children received the third dose of the pentavalent vaccine, and 2.7 million children benefited from growth monitoring and nutrition counselling services. Additionally, 68,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women received quarterly health and nutrition safety-

net support, helping sustain maternal and child health outcomes across multiple provinces. ARTF investments also generated large-scale livelihood and service delivery outcomes through community resilience and agricultural programmes.

In 2025, 2.9 million people benefited from improved access to community infrastructure services, including transport and irrigation systems, while 1.8 million rural residents gained access to sustainable community transport infrastructure. Livelihood interventions created 395,000 short-term jobs through cash-for-work programmes, and 240,000 households received livelihood support through labour-intensive works, with 88 per cent of rural female-headed households participating in livelihood activities. In agriculture, 30,000 hectares were cultivated using

## Key Results of the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund (ARTF) in 2025

**ARTF-supported programmes continued to deliver large-scale results across health, education, livelihoods, agriculture, and financial inclusion sectors in Afghanistan:**

### Health and Nutrition

- » **492,000 births** occurred in ARTF-supported health facilities.
- » **491,000 children** received the third dose of the pentavalent vaccine.
- » **2.7 million children** benefited from growth monitoring and nutrition counselling.
- » **68,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women** received quarterly health and nutrition safety-net support.

### Community Infrastructure and Services

- » **2.9 million people** gained improved access to community infrastructure services.
- » **1.8 million rural residents** benefited from sustainable community transport infrastructure.

### Livelihoods and Employment

- » **395,000 short-term jobs** created through cash-for-work programmes.
- » **240,000 households** received livelihood support through labour-intensive works.
- » **88% of rural female-headed households** participated in livelihood activities.

### Agriculture and Climate Resilience

- » **30,000 hectares** cultivated using distributed improved seeds.
- » **67,000 hectares** benefited from new or improved irrigation and drainage services.
- » **1,800 hectares** planted with climate-resilient vegetation.

### Education

- » **2.1 million students** supported through improved learning opportunities.
- » **16% of community-based education classes** completed the full three-year cycle.

### Private Sector and Financial Inclusion

- » **507 micro and small enterprises** became credit-ready.
- » **11,000 loans** disbursed through microfinance providers.
- » **85% of supported MSMEs** were women-owned enterprises.

**Source:** World Bank Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund Annual Progress Report 2025.

distributed improved seeds; 67,000 hectares benefited from new or improved irrigation and drainage services, and 1,800 hectares were planted with climate-resilient vegetation. Education programmes supported 2.1 million students with improved learning opportunities, including community-based education programmes that reached a high proportion of girls. Through financial inclusion interventions, 507 micro and small enterprises became credit-ready, while 11,000 loans were disbursed through microfinance providers, 85 per cent of which supported women-owned enterprises. These results illustrate the continued importance of the ARTF as a large-scale mechanism sustaining essential services, supporting livelihoods, and strengthening community resilience in Afghanistan's fragile operating environment.

### SPECIAL TRUST FUND FOR AFGHANISTAN (STFA)

The Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA) continued to serve in 2025 as the United Nations' principal pooled funding mechanism for operationalizing the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus in Afghanistan and supporting the delivery of basic human needs under the United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (UNSFA) 2023–2027. Established in October 2021 following the political transition in Afghanistan, the Fund provides a coordinated platform enabling donors to channel resources through joint UN programmes to sustain essential services, support livelihoods, and strengthen community resilience.

The STFA operates through area-based regional joint programmes implemented by multiple UN agencies, enabling integrated responses tailored to local needs. The Fund aligns with UNSFA priorities across three main thematic areas: sustained essential services, economic opportunities and resilient livelihoods, and social cohesion, gender equality, human rights, and rule of law.

In 2025, resource mobilization for the STFA remained modest but strategically important for enabling joint UN programming. The Fund received contributions of US\$24.75 million in 2025. Despite the relatively small financial envelope, the Fund continues to play a catalytic role in supporting multi-agency initiatives that might otherwise struggle to secure coordinated financing.

Since its establishment, STFA has mobilized over US\$276 million in total contributions, with approximately US\$254 million allocated to joint programmes, reflecting strong early donor engagement following the 2021 crisis.

However, the pace of contributions has slowed significantly in recent years, resulting in the Fund focusing its resource mobilization efforts on a narrower set of priorities that align with available pooled funding resources.

Sweden, Germany and Norway remain key partners supporting collective UN approaches under the Fund, while new contributions, including a €4.4 million contribution from Italy in 2025, demonstrate continued donor commitment to sustaining pooled financing mechanisms in Afghanistan.

Despite resource constraints, the STFA has continued to deliver tangible results through joint programming. As of 2025, STFA-supported initiatives have reached approximately 8.1 million people across Afghanistan, including 4.1 million women and girls, through integrated programmes spanning livelihoods, social protection, disaster resilience, and community infrastructure.

Within 2025 programming alone, activities supported under STFA joint programmes contributed to :

- » **1,152,739 people (845,915 women and girls) receiving support in essential services**, including health, education, and WASH interventions.
- » **Over 344,187 individuals (130,555 women and girls) benefiting from disaster resilience and climate-adaptation initiatives.**
- » **More than 13,089 individuals (6,192 women) accessing livelihood support**, including vocational training and economic recovery initiatives.
- » **Approximately 27,016 people (23,104 women) receiving targeted social support interventions**, particularly in vulnerable and displacement-affected communities.

These results were achieved despite operational challenges linked to a highly constrained environment, including restrictions affecting women's participation, administrative delays, and evolving regulatory requirements. UN agencies adapted implementation approaches through community-based modalities, gender-sensitive programming, and context-specific engagement with local stakeholders to maintain delivery.

A distinctive feature of the STFA is its joint UN implementation model, designed to strengthen coordination and collective accountability across participating UN organizations. Independent third-



By working together and avoiding duplication, the STFA-funded Durable Solutions Joint Project reflects the UN's commitment to deliver as one, placing people's needs at the centre of Afghanistan's recovery. © UN/STFA

party monitoring (TPM) has been central to ensuring transparency and performance verification.

Between 2024 and 2025, the TPM mechanism validated programme implementation across more than 3,262 sites and over 10,458 beneficiaries, using a combination of field observation, beneficiary consultations, and document reviews to verify outputs and assess programme relevance and quality.

The findings confirmed that the STFA has functioned as an effective platform for translating UN strategic priorities into operational programming under challenging conditions, while maintaining strong safeguards for accountability, monitoring, and gender-sensitive data collection.

In 2025, the STFA continued to evolve through a process of strategic reflection and stock-taking exercises involving UN agencies and donor partners. These discussions

emphasised the Fund's distinctive value in enabling joint UN programming, risk-sharing, and locally driven solutions, particularly in areas facing large-scale returnee movements and increasing socio-economic pressures.

At the same time, stakeholders recognized that the Fund's long-term sustainability depends on renewed donor commitments. Without additional contributions, the Fund's available reserves may be significantly constrained, potentially limiting the scope of future joint initiatives.

Despite these challenges, the STFA remains a critical financing instrument within Afghanistan's aid architecture. By promoting pooled funding, coordinated programming, and community-based delivery, the Fund continues to support the United Nations' collective efforts to sustain essential services, strengthen livelihoods, and promote social cohesion in one of the world's most complex operational environments.

## 2.3. Results of the UN Working More and Better Together: UN Coherence, Effectiveness, and Efficiency

### HUMANITARIAN-BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

Throughout 2025, the United Nations continued to strengthen coordination between the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and the Basic Human Needs (BHN) pillar under the United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (UNSFA), ensuring a gradual and coherent transition from life-saving humanitarian assistance toward more sustainable service delivery and resilience programming. This integrated approach reflects the United Nations' commitment to operationalizing the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, allowing humanitarian interventions to progressively connect with longer-term recovery, livelihood support, and service stabilization efforts.

Afghanistan's humanitarian needs remained extremely high in 2025, with 22.9 million people identified as requiring humanitarian assistance. The Humanitarian Response Plan aimed to reach 16.8 million people, ultimately achieving an overall reach of 17.1 million people, including 4 million people benefiting from inter-sectoral assistance delivered through coordinated humanitarian interventions.

Despite these achievements, the humanitarian response continued to face severe funding constraints. The 2025 HRP required US\$2.42 billion, but received only US\$912.9 million, representing 38 per cent of the required funding. Several critical sectors experienced particularly significant funding gaps, including food security and agriculture (13 per cent funded), water and sanitation (18 per cent), emergency shelter and non-food items (16 per cent), and humanitarian coordination mechanisms (19 per cent). These funding shortfalls underscored the growing need to complement humanitarian response with longer-term investments through development-oriented programming under the UNSFA.

In parallel, the United Nations expanded efforts to strengthen the delivery of Basic Human Needs programming under the UNSFA, which aims to sustain essential services and support resilience beyond immediate humanitarian relief. For 2025, UN programming under the UNSFA mobilized US\$1.77 billion out of US\$2.85 billion required, representing approximately 62 per cent funding availability across all

UNSFA outcomes. Within this framework, Outcome 1 - Sustained Essential Services received the largest share of funding, reaching 73 per cent of required resources, reflecting continued prioritization of health, education, water and sanitation, social protection, and protection services.

This financing landscape illustrates the evolving balance between humanitarian and development-oriented programming in Afghanistan. While humanitarian assistance remains essential to address acute needs, the UNSFA's BHN framework provides a platform to sustain essential services, strengthen community resilience, and support livelihoods in ways that reduce long-term humanitarian dependency. The combined funding envelope across humanitarian and BHN programming in 2025 reached US\$2.69 billion, demonstrating continued international engagement in supporting the Afghan people despite a highly constrained operating environment.

Operationally, the transition from humanitarian response to BHN programming has been facilitated through strengthened coordination mechanisms between humanitarian and BHN coordination mechanisms within the framework of a broader aid coordination architecture reform undertaken by partners in Afghanistan (see Box II below). This coordination enables humanitarian interventions to be progressively linked with longer-term programmes supporting service delivery, employment, and economic recovery under the UNSFA. By aligning humanitarian delivery with UNSFA outcomes, the United Nations has been able to maintain critical services while simultaneously supporting communities' resilience and recovery pathways.

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*"The United Nations expanded efforts to strengthen the delivery of Basic Human Needs programming under the UNSFA, which aims to sustain essential services and support resilience beyond immediate humanitarian relief."*

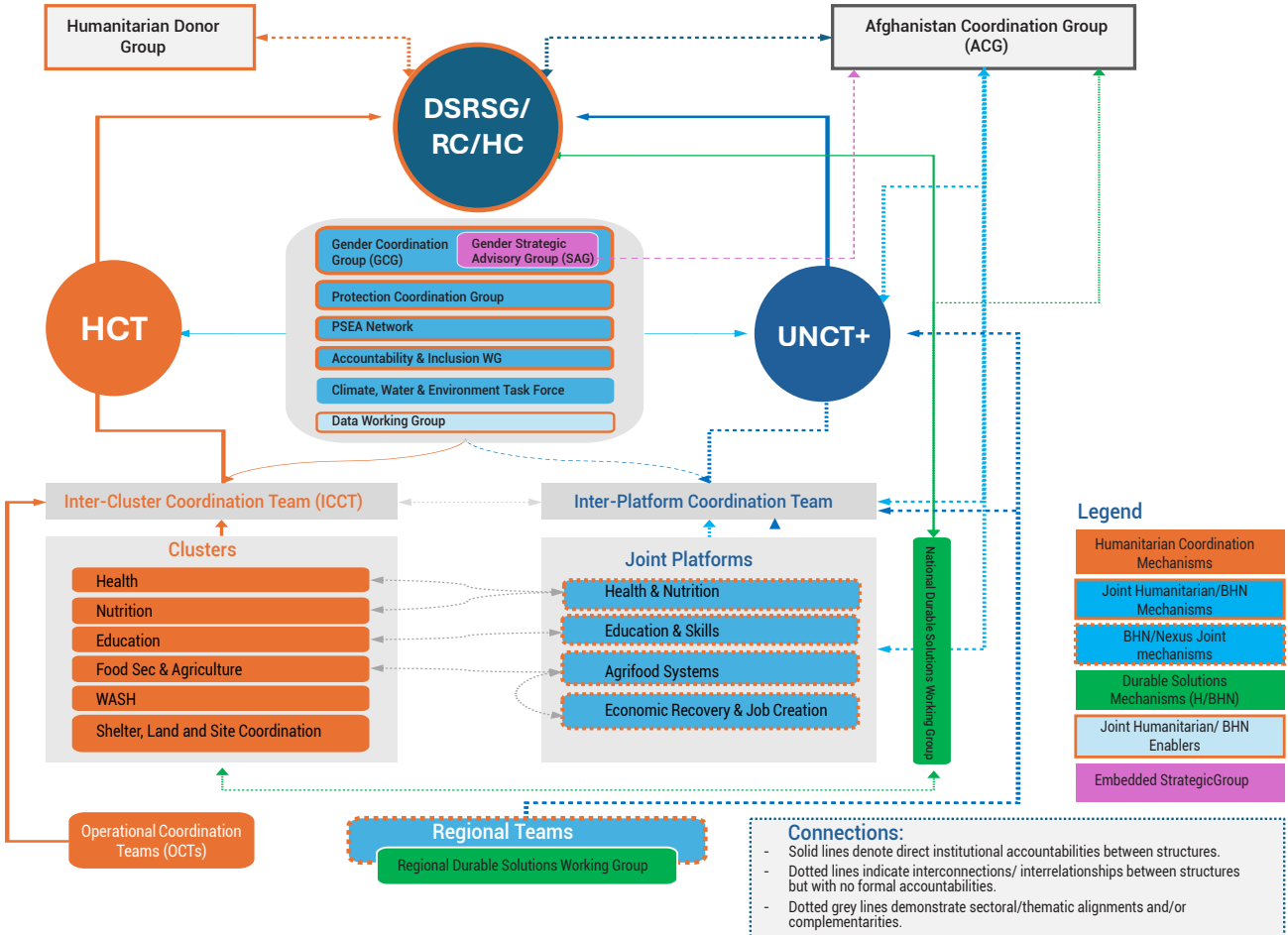
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## Afghanistan Aid Coordination Architecture Review

Towards strengthening cross-pillar coherence in Afghanistan, and in the spirit of the Humanitarian Reset, whilst also managing the dramatic impact of the funding crisis affecting both humanitarian and BHN assistance, international and national partners have undertaken a comprehensive review of the entire aid coordination architecture to increase efficiency, accountability, and impact, while strengthening whole-of-response collaboration across humanitarian and BHN partners and structures.

A review of humanitarian architecture was conducted throughout 2025, commencing with a Peer-to-Peer review, with systematic steps undertaken to streamline coordination. A complementary review of BHN coordination arrangements followed suit.

Consequently, more inclusive, streamlined, and integrated architecture has started to take shape, with various cross-cutting thematic coordination groups - including Gender, Protection, PSEAH, Accountability and Disability Inclusion, Data Working Group, and Climate, Water, and the Environment - now bringing together humanitarian and BHN actors. Inclusive sectoral cross-pillar collaboration will also be enabled through newly established Joint Platforms, with strong interlinkages with corresponding humanitarian clusters, on key common priorities related to health and nutrition, education and skills, agrifood systems, and economic recovery and job creation. The establishment of Regional Teams, comprising both humanitarian and BHN partners, will further aid in the application of area-based coordination approaches at the sub-national level.



## GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) remained a central cross-cutting priority for the UNCT in Afghanistan in 2025, despite an increasingly restrictive operating environment affecting women's rights, participation, and access to public life. The UNCT continued to implement system-wide gender accountability mechanisms and coordination platforms to ensure that gender equality considerations are integrated across programming, operations, and policy dialogue under the UNSFA.

In line with the priorities of the UNCT Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Capacity Development Plan, gender-mainstreaming Training-of-Trainers for 52 personnel across more than 15 UN entities was rolled out through two training sessions targeting primarily BHN programmes gender focal points, members of the Gender Theme Group and M&E working group. For a wider reach to implementing partners, training materials were also translated into Dari and Pashto. As part of the implementation of the UNCT Gender Parity Strategy, the Human Resources Working Group conducted a peer exchange learning session. The inter-agency learning focused on tailored outreach and retention strategies to advance gender parity, with a particular emphasis on increasing the recruitment and support of national female staff including structured mentoring programs, the creation of safe and supportive work environments, and regular feedback mechanisms involving national colleagues, engaging men as allies in promoting gender equality and fostering an inclusive workplace culture as well as of ongoing inter-agency collaboration and consistent monitoring to sustain progress.

The first UNCT report since the 2021 Taliban takeover was submitted to CEDAW, highlighting the real, immediate and swift rollback of Afghan women and girls' hard-won gains on their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

The UNCT maintained its commitment to gender mainstreaming through the implementation of the UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard, the United Nations' accountability framework for mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment into country-level processes, institutional arrangements, and results. The 2025 progress assessment demonstrated continued advancement across several dimensions of gender integration, with the UNCT achieving improved

progress ratings that met or exceeded minimum requirements across six performance indicators, including Common Country Analysis, leadership for gender equality, gender coordination mechanisms, gender mainstreaming capacities, monitoring and evaluation and GEWE results reporting.

Despite these efforts, the operating context for gender equality continued to deteriorate. Restrictions affecting Afghan women and girls, including bans on secondary and tertiary education and limitations on women's participation in public life, continued to significantly affect development outcomes and humanitarian access.

Since 7 September 2025 the de facto authorities-initiated country-wide restrictions on UN female personnel in accessing UN compounds. In response, the UNCT adopted alternative operational arrangements for 736 national female staff, including remote working modalities and institutional support measures with agencies maintaining 100 per cent salary retention and contract continuity, while providing ICT equipment and connectivity to enable continued engagement in programme delivery and coordination functions. These measures ensured that women remained actively engaged in UN operations despite restrictions on physical access to workplaces. In addition, the RC has established and been directing the Crisis Management Team coordinate the response to the Afghan women staff and contractor crises due to the DFA ban from working on UN compounds, and the emerging resistance to women working in the field thereby ensuring coherent system-wide mitigation measures.

The persistent gender crisis in Afghanistan has shown the need for coordinated approach and response, gathering gender actors, developing strategic and operational level guidance, as well as technical, local and high-level advocacy support to ensure principled programming as well normative accountability. To that end, and in line with the wider efforts to streamline the Afghanistan Aid architecture, and ensure coherence, effectiveness and efficiency, Gender Coordination Group (GCG) was established to allow space and participation for a range of actors: United Nations, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs), National Non-Governmental Organizations (NNGOs), Women-Led Organisations (WLOs) and donors. The group was established as a two-tier coordination mechanism

comprising of the Gender-Strategic Advisory Group (G-SAG) and of the Operational Gender Coordination Group (O-GCG) to capitalize on the effectiveness of existing operational humanitarian coordination architecture and strategic level guidance on the BHN side, ensuring strengthened collective impact through streamlined architecture and stronger comprehensive focus to ensure that gender equality and women's and girls' rights are systematically elevated to strategic levels.

UNCT coordination and accountability for gender equality were further strengthened through the Gender Theme Group (GTG) and related UN inter-agency mechanisms. The GTG continued to provide technical guidance to the UNCT on gender mainstreaming, policy advocacy, and institutional accountability frameworks. In 2025, the GTG updated its terms of reference and workplan to align with evolving system-wide priorities, including support for joint advocacy initiatives, strengthened gender analysis across UN policy documents, and improved monitoring of gender equality commitments under the UNCT-SWAP framework. The revised Gender Theme Group Terms of Reference (reflecting the priorities under the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan and coordination with the newly established Gender Coordination Group), updated workplan, and priority performance indicators for the UNCT-SWAP for 2026 were subsequently endorsed by the UNCT, confirming continued commitment to strengthening gender mainstreaming across the UN system in Afghanistan.

Despite the challenging context, these coordinated efforts demonstrate the UNCT's commitment to maintaining gender equality as a core principle of UN engagement and shared commitments in Afghanistan. By strengthening internal accountability mechanisms, supporting women's participation in UN operations, and integrating gender analysis into strategic planning processes, the United Nations continues to promote gender-responsive programming and advocate for the rights and empowerment of Afghan women and girls.

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESILIENCE

Afghanistan remains among the world's most vulnerable countries to climate change and the least ready to cope with its impacts, despite contributing minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions. Increasing frequency and severity of droughts, floods,

and extreme weather events continue to undermine basic services and livelihoods, exacerbate food insecurity, and deepen vulnerability across rural and urban communities. Climate stress compounds existing economic and social fragilities, particularly in a context characterized by high dependence on climate-vulnerable agricultural livelihoods, high unemployment, limited public investment capacity, and fragile service delivery systems.

Afghanistan experienced its fourth consecutive year of meteorological drought in 2025, with severe impacts on water scarcity and declining groundwater tables. The prolonged drought has increasingly affected water availability for basic services and agriculture, with onward impacts on health and nutrition outcomes, food security, rural livelihoods, and mobility. In many provinces, water scarcity has emerged as a major driver of livelihood loss and resource competition, contributing to local tensions and increasing risks of displacement and urban migration. IOM's ACVA round two found that in quarter one 2025, 79 percent of new internal displacement was driven by environmental pressures, 396,000 Afghans migrated due to climate-related impacts on their livelihoods – 43 percent abroad, and over three-quarters (78%) of IDP returnees returned due to environmental factors, reflecting a complex landscape at the intersection of environment and mobility as climate pressures deepen. Reports from UN field offices also highlight concerns around forced immobility, particularly for vulnerable populations, including women, children, and the elderly, whereby declining economic outcomes and resource constraints limit mobility options as intensifying environmental pressures degrade water access and livelihoods. Communities increasingly exhibit negative coping strategies that undermine long-term resilience and exacerbate vulnerabilities.

At the same time, rapid-onset climate shocks, including floods and extreme weather events, continue to damage infrastructure, homes, and productive assets. These impacts disproportionately affect vulnerable populations such as smallholder farmers, returnees, and internally displaced communities who have limited capacity to recover from repeated shocks.

Recognizing these risks, the UNCT continued to prioritize climate resilience as a cross-cutting component of the UNSFA. In 2025, UN agencies implemented climate-sensitive programming across multiple sectors,

including water resource management, climate-resilient agriculture, renewable energy, and disaster-resilient infrastructure. These interventions aim not only to address immediate environmental challenges but also to strengthen the adaptive capacity of communities and institutions.

Water management in particular continues to be a central pillar of climate resilience efforts. Through coordinated initiatives under the UN-WB-led Afghanistan Water Platform (AWAP) and related partnerships, UN agencies supported the rehabilitation of water supply systems, the construction of irrigation infrastructure, and community-based watershed management. These efforts are critical as groundwater depletion and insufficient water infrastructure, management, and governance continue to threaten livelihoods and long-term water security across the country.

Environmental restoration and ecosystem protection initiatives were also expanded in collaboration with local authorities and community partners. Activities included reforestation campaigns, promotion of climate-resilient vegetation, and community awareness initiatives on sustainable natural resource management. Such initiatives aim to restore degraded ecosystems while supporting local adaptation to climate variability.

In parallel, the UN continued to strengthen analytical and policy engagement on the climate–peace–security nexus. Climate impacts in Afghanistan increasingly intersect with issues of economic fragility, maladaptive coping, resource competition, local governance, and the overarching political environment in Afghanistan. Identified ongoing climate security risks include tensions over changing local resources, challenges to transboundary water cooperation, and tensions related to the increasing intersection of climate factors and mobility. Climate change has, however also offered an entry point for multistakeholder dialogue between the international community and the DFA, and between diverse Afghan stakeholders as an area of common cause. Various regional and national dialogues highlighted the importance of integrating climate considerations into development programming, aid coordination, and conflict-sensitive approaches to natural resource management, while showcasing the opportunity that climate dialogues offer to integrate issues of inclusion, participatory approaches, and gender. During such engagements, the DFA have also expressed intention to uphold Afghanistan's

commitments under Multilateral Environmental Agreements and work jointly towards resilience efforts.

### Challenges and Priorities for 2026

- » **Aid coordination:** Despite these efforts, in 2025 the UN identified critical gaps in implementing a coordinated and coherent approach to climate resilience within the UNSFA, with no common definition for climate resilience programming nor a monitoring and results reporting mechanism. The UN-WB-led Afghanistan Water Platform was free-floating and de-linked from strategic mechanisms. In response to these challenges, the UN advocated for a more coherent integration of climate, water and environmental issues into the aid coordination architecture, programme development and results reporting, to implement improvements through a Climate, Water and Environment Task Force (CWE-TF) under the new aid coordination architecture in 2026 and the updated UNSFA.
- » **Climate finance:** Climate finance from global vertical financing mechanisms remains heavily constrained, with financing from the Adaptation Fund and Green Climate Fund still suspended for the fifth year following the 2021 political changes. Despite consistent outreach to the funds and donor partners by the UN, little progress has been made despite clear efforts to show that principled implementation of climate adaptation activities is operationally feasible. The UN will continue its advocacy efforts in 2026 for the resumption of climate finance to Afghanistan.
- » **Technical engagement with the DFA:** Considering the centrality of national policies and plans to building climate resilience, as well as the DFA's own ongoing efforts on climate and environmental initiatives, the UN will continue to advance technical engagement with the DFA aimed at improving the resilience of the Afghan population. Technical capacity gaps have emerged as a key hurdle, and the UN will advocate for the need for greater technical assistance and capacity building on climate and environment-related issues.

Strengthening climate resilience remains critical to safeguarding livelihoods and reducing vulnerability in Afghanistan. Sustained investment in water systems,

climate-resilient agriculture, renewable energy, community-based natural resource management, disaster response and multi-hazard early warning systems will be essential to support the Afghan people in adapting to a rapidly changing climate while reducing the risks of environmental degradation, displacement, and instability. Afghanistan has also been hit by several severe earthquakes, causing casualties and massive destruction of housing stock, community infrastructures and leading to displacements.

## DURABLE SOLUTIONS TO DISPLACEMENT

In 2025, Afghanistan confronted one of the largest and fastest-growing returnee-related displacement crises in decades. Approximately 2.88 million Afghans returned from Iran and Pakistan, driven by tightened migration enforcement policies and deportations. This influx placed unprecedented pressure on already fragile communities and service systems, particularly in border provinces and major urban centres. With three in ten returnee families headed by women, highlighting acute protection and assistance challenges.

The scale and speed of these returns intensified the urgency of implementing durable solutions that move beyond emergency assistance toward sustainable reintegration, livelihoods, and social cohesion.

Through the National Durable Solutions Working Group (N-DSWG), partners implemented a whole-of-community approach, reaching displacement-affected populations across 33 of 34 provinces and 272 districts. In total, 7.8 million individuals benefited from durable solutions-related assistance between January and July 2025, with a total estimated value of USD 124.9 million. Among beneficiaries are 922,800 returnees, 475,300 internally displaced people (IDPs), and 1.7 million vulnerable host community members.

In addition, 4.7 million people were reached through community-wide interventions, reflecting the growing recognition that sustainable reintegration requires investments in entire communities rather than targeting returnees alone.

A significant achievement in 2025 was the systematic tracking of progress against the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Durable Solutions Framework, addressing multiple dimensions of (re-)integration. Between January and July 2025, partners reported the following verified results:

- » **Adequate Standard of Living:** The largest investment, totaling an estimated value of **USD 80.5 million**, reached **6.8 million beneficiaries** with support to accessing education, health, shelter and housing support, water, sanitation, and food security, underscoring the scale of unmet needs in Areas of Return (AoR).
- » **Access to Livelihoods and Employment:** Support reached **574,000 individuals** through interventions valued at **USD 28.5 million**, including vocational training, agricultural inputs, employment, small enterprise support, and cash-for-work programmes.
- » **Housing, Land and Property (HLP) rights:** Assistance related to legal counselling, tenure support, and dispute resolution reached **58,400 beneficiaries (USD 2.4 million)**.
- » **Long-term safety and security:** Protection services and stabilization measures benefited **113,800 individuals (USD 7.6 million)**.
- » **Participation in public affairs:** Community-level governance and social cohesion activities engaged 173,000 people (USD 2.4 million).
- » **Family reunification:** Support mechanisms reached 33,300 individuals (**USD 0.9 million**) through tracing and reunification mechanisms.

This operational progress was underpinned by several key strategic frameworks and tools developed and endorsed in 2025. The 2025-2027 Solutions Strategy and Road Map for Displacement in Afghanistan was finalized to guide a whole-of-community, area-based response. To ensure evidence-based prioritization, partners developed the Composite Vulnerability Index (CVI), a data-driven tool to rank districts by compounded pressures such as returnee density, food insecurity, and drought severity. Furthermore, in a significant step for localization and inclusive leadership, NGO members were elected as co-chairs of the Regional Durable Solutions Working Groups (R-DSWGs), ensuring frontline perspectives directly shape the response.

Despite these significant gains, progress remains uneven across indicators. Access to justice and legal remedies remained particularly limited, highlighting persistent institutional and legal barriers to durable reintegration.

Durable solutions programming contributed directly to

the **three priorities of the UN Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (UNSAFE)**.

#### Priority 1: Sustained Essential Services

- » **2.1 million beneficiaries**
- » **USD 48.8 million** invested

#### Priority 2: Economic Opportunities and Livelihoods

- » **78,200 beneficiaries**
- » **USD 15 million** invested

#### Priority 3: Social Cohesion and Inclusion

- » **163,700 beneficiaries**
- » **USD 4.2 million** invested

These interventions helped mitigate tensions between returnees and host communities while strengthening resilience in areas experiencing large inflows of returning populations.

Despite significant humanitarian and development efforts, the scale of return movements continued to outpace available resources and institutional capacity.

Post-return monitoring surveys reinforced the fragility of the situation, revealing:

- » **Food security** among returnee households **dropped to 35%**
- » **88% of households remained in debt**
- » The **access to adequate housing** was among priority needs stated by returnees and displaced people, also due to the massive impact of housing/shelter on other sectoral outcomes, including protection, health, livelihoods (for women) or food security;
- » **Water and sanitation access deteriorated significantly**
- » 67% of returnees reported **high levels of stress**
- » **Only 16% were aware of formal complaint mechanisms** for protection concerns.

These findings highlight that short-term assistance alone cannot address structural reintegration barriers, particularly those related to livelihoods, housing, and legal documentation.

### Challenges and Priorities for 2026

Looking ahead, the scale of return movements continues to outpace available resources, revealing

persistent barriers to sustainable reintegration:

- » **Operational Access:** With three in ten returnee families headed by women, restrictions on female aid workers directly prevent these vulnerable households from accessing essential assistance required to rebuild their lives.
  - » **Precarious Reintegration Conditions:** Returnee settlements are often established in areas with overstretched resources, limiting equitable access to quality services and creating vulnerabilities to exploitation, trafficking in persons, and smuggling of migrants. Others, specifically those where DfA allocated land through land allocation schemes (LAS) are facing the challenge that they are in remote areas, unconnected to livelihood opportunities, services (health, education, administrative or others) and lack investments in WASH or electricity. Those remote “locations” are also not fostering “integration” of newly arrivals, and due to inadequate living standards or availability of service risk to be unsustainable.
  - » **Critical Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) Issues:** Secondary occupation, unclear ownership documents, and unresolved land conflicts remain major barriers that preclude successful reintegration.
  - » **Pressure on Urban Centers and Services:** Unplanned movement to urban areas leads to an increasing number of people living in informal, unplanned and underserved settlements and straining essential services, resources, and housing markets while people forced to settle there (due to lack of alternatives or means) are often also being disconnected from urban job markets and are at risk of climate change impacts.
- To address these challenges, the UN and its partners will prioritize the following in 2026:
- » **Improving Operational Access:** Strengthening the presence and engagement of national female aid workers to facilitate inclusive service delivery for women and girls and to generate the data required for evidence-based reintegration planning.
  - » **Strengthening Area-Based (Re-)Integration Programming to Deliver Quality Essential**

**Services:** Expanding access to shelter/housing options and essential services in priority areas of return through area-based delivery, benefiting both returnees and host communities to strengthen social cohesion.

- » **Investing in Economic Opportunities and Resilient Communities:** Prioritizing inclusive economic recovery through investments in livelihoods, skills development, and disaster-resilient community infrastructure to promote self-reliance and durable reintegration.
- » **Strengthening HLP Rights:** Helping people advance and secure HLP rights (at community and household level), settle disputes, and claim land rights to foster lasting solutions and investment
- » **Unlocking Returnees' Economic Potential:** Leveraging the diverse skills, transnational networks, and remittances of returnees—especially women and youth—to expand micro and small enterprises and stimulate local markets.
- » **Fostering Multi-Sectoral Coordination:** Utilizing the growing space for dialogue between ministries and stakeholders to advance integrated, cross-sectoral sustainable solutions for returnees and local populations.

**Using Nexus Approach** to link humanitarian assistance with **economic recovery and job creation.**

- » **Ensuring durable solutions frameworks integrate** climate resilience, gender equality, and social cohesion considerations.

Given the continuing return flows and the protracted nature of displacement in Afghanistan, durable solutions will remain central to the humanitarian-development nexus and to the UN's long-term stabilization and resilience agenda.

## **PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, ABUSE, AND HARASSMENT (PSEAH)**

In 2025, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Afghanistan collectively strengthened its efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) against affected populations and sexual harassment (SH) within the aid workforce. SEA refers to the misuse of power by aid workers to exploit or

abuse people receiving assistance, while SH refers to inappropriate sexual behaviour, abuse of authority, or harassment within the workplace. In a context marked by high vulnerability, restrictions on women's participation, and large-scale aid delivery, the UNCT reaffirmed that safeguarding is a core leadership responsibility and an essential part of accountability to both communities and personnel.

Building on this shared commitment, the UNCT addressed SEA and SH through a nexus approach, bringing together humanitarian, development, and mission actors under one coordinated system. Throughout 2025, the UNCT exercised its collective accountability to support the RC/HC, as the most senior United Nations official in-country, in ensuring leadership oversight, transparency, and adherence to zero tolerance for misconduct. This was reinforced through regular and dedicated PSEAH discussions and presentations at the UNCT level, both on a quarterly basis and through ad hoc sessions, ensuring continued leadership attention, shared understanding of risks, and alignment on system-wide priorities. This included reinforcing system-wide obligations on reporting, ensuring victim-centred responses, and embedding safeguarding across operations, partnerships, and programme delivery.

This collective leadership was translated into a strengthened inter-agency coordination architecture through the national PSEAH Network, co-chaired by UNFPA and IMC together with the Inter-Agency PSEAH Coordinator. Over the past two years, the Network has evolved from a UN task force into a nexus platform bringing together humanitarian, basic human needs, and mission actors under one structure. In 2025, this platform expanded significantly, now comprising 522 member entities, including 357 national NGOs, 62 international NGOs, 65 women-led organisations, 16 civil society organisations, 17 UN entities, and ACBAR as the NGO forum, alongside donor engagement.

This broad and diverse membership reflects a deliberate shift towards localization and inclusion. In particular, the strong participation of women-led organisations has been critical in ensuring that safeguarding efforts remain grounded in the realities of affected communities and responsive to gender-specific risks. Across these entities, 1,044 PSEA focal points are now in place nationwide, with gender parity achieved for the first time (50% female) in Q3 in 2025, marking

an important milestone in strengthening inclusive and representative safeguarding structures.

As the Network expanded, the UNCT ensured that it functioned as a unified system rather than a collection of actors. All members now operate under harmonised SOPs and referral pathways, enabling more consistent and predictable support to victims and witnesses across Afghanistan. Regional sub-working groups (in West, South, and Eastern regions) further anchor this approach at the field level, supported by joint task teams working on missions, community engagement, risk analysis, and investigation support under a fully funded inter-agency workplan endorsed by UNCT and HCT members.

With this structure in place, the UNCT was able to shift from fragmented approaches to evidence-based, collective action. A key milestone in 2025 was the development and continuation of the inter-agency Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Risk Overview (SEARO), with Afghanistan selected as one of only two global pilots. Through this joint effort, all partners now have access to SEA risk data across all 34 provinces, enabling a shared understanding of where risks are highest and where interventions are most needed, and strengthening prioritisation across the system.

This improved understanding of risk was matched by strengthened access to services. The UNCT ensured that all partners are now connected to protection referral pathways, supported by standardized SOPs and a dedicated inter-agency helpline (Awaaz). This has enabled more timely and consistent referrals to medical, psychosocial, legal, and protection services, including specialised support for child survivors, reinforcing the UNCT's commitment to victim-centred assistance.

At the same time, the UNCT recognised that prevention requires sustained engagement with both communities and personnel in complex and constrained environments. Context-specific PSEAH communication materials were therefore developed and rolled out across all partners under an Islamic safeguarding framework, ensuring that messages are accessible, culturally relevant, and consistently used across locations.

In parallel, the UNCT strengthened its focus on sexual harassment (SH) within the aid workforce, recognising that safeguarding also requires a safe and respectful

working environment. This has been particularly critical in light of increased restrictions affecting female national staff, many of whom are now working from home or in more isolated conditions, with reduced access to support systems and increased exposure to risk. The UNCT acknowledged these emerging vulnerabilities and, through the PSEAH Network, prioritized regular safe meetups for national female staff, alongside field missions across all regions to engage directly with personnel in locations where isolation is most pronounced.

These missions enabled direct consultations with national and international staff, including dedicated engagement with female personnel in safe settings and local languages. They provided critical opportunities to understand operational challenges, identify safeguarding risks, reinforce reporting mechanisms, and rebuild trust in contexts where staff may otherwise feel unable to raise concerns. This direct engagement has been essential in addressing both SEA risks affecting communities and SH risks affecting personnel, particularly in field environments where pressures are high and oversight is limited.

Prevention and response efforts were further reinforced through coordinated UNCT action on training, awareness-raising, and field engagement, including capacity-building for PSEA focal points and training on survivor-centred approaches. At the same time, the UNCT promoted increased transparency through strengthened reporting, with higher numbers of SEA and SH reports reflecting improved awareness and confidence in reporting mechanisms, while also highlighting the need for continued focus on safe, confidential, and consistent case handling.

Despite ongoing challenges, including uneven partner capacity and operational constraints, the UNCT's collective and coordinated approach has led to measurable progress. Afghanistan's ranking under the IASC framework improved in 2025, with notable gains in protection indicators, reflecting strengthened systems, improved coordination, and expanded access to services. This progress demonstrates the impact of sustained UNCT leadership and a shared commitment to accountability across all partners. Key achievements in 2025 include:

- » A fully operational nexus safeguarding system, integrating humanitarian, development, and

- mission actors under shared UNCT leadership
- » Strengthened collective accountability to the RC/HC, reinforced through regular and ad hoc UNCT-level PSEAH discussions and presentations
  - » Expansion of the PSEAH Network to 522 entities, with strong participation of national NGOs and 65 women-led organisations
  - » Establishment of 1,044 PSEA focal points nationwide, achieving gender parity (50% female)
  - » 100% access to SEA risk data across all 34 provinces through the SEARO risk index and dashboard
  - » Harmonised SOPs and referral pathways implemented across all partners
  - » Universal access to survivor support services, including GBV and child protection pathways and a dedicated helpline (Awaaz)
  - » Rollout of contextualised PSEAH communication materials across all partners
  - » Strengthened UNCT-wide response to sexual harassment (SH), including targeted support to isolated national female staff
  - » Field engagement across all regions, strengthening trust, identifying risks, and reducing staff isolation
  - » Implementation of a fully funded inter-agency PSEA workplan with contributions from UNCT and HCT members.
  - » Measurable improvement in Afghanistan's global SEA risk ranking, reflecting strengthened protection systems.

## UN COMMON RISK MANAGEMENT APPROACH

Afghanistan remains one of the most complex operating environments for the United Nations system. Decades of conflict, political instability, economic collapse, humanitarian crises, climate-related shocks, and widespread protection concerns have created a setting where risks are multidimensional, interlinked, and constantly evolving. Following the political transition in August 2021, the operating space for the UN and its partners narrowed significantly, while humanitarian needs reached unprecedented levels. In this context, the United Nations Common Risk Management Approach (CRMA) in Afghanistan has

emerged as a critical framework to enable continued engagement while safeguarding UN personnel, assets, reputation, and principles. The CRMA provides a common methodology, governance, and monitoring architecture across the UN Country Team (UNCT) to enable consistent risk identification and mitigation actions, while upholding UN values, international norms, and the duty of care.

In 2025, the UN system in Afghanistan continued strengthening its Common Risk Management Approach (CRMA), which was designed to move beyond fragmented, agency-specific risk assessments toward a shared understanding of risks and coordinated mitigation measures across the UN system. In Afghanistan, where risks are both acute and systemic, the CRMA plays a central role in balancing the imperative to deliver assistance with the obligation to adhere to UN values, international norms, and the duty of care.

The Common Risk Management Approach (CRMA) in Afghanistan is anchored in a dedicated inter-agency coordination mechanism—the Risk Management Team (RMT)—established under the UN Country Team (UNCT). The RMT supports the UN's Common Risk Assessment by coordinating risk identification, monitoring mitigation measures, and consolidating risk reporting. Serving as the central inter-agency platform, the RMT enables a shared understanding of risks affecting UN operations and promotes coherent, risk-informed decision-making across humanitarian and development-related interventions. The RMT, supported by the Risk Management Coordination Section (RMCS) as the secretariat, in its role, convenes meetings, facilitating collaboration between agencies, and providing analytical insights to shape discussions on risks and necessary actions. Ultimately, the RMCS aims to promote a unified approach throughout the UN system through effective coordination and comprehensive analytical support

A major milestone in 2025 was the update of the UN Common Risk Assessment, which identifies 12 common risks across three categories: strategic, fiduciary, and operational risks that were affecting UN operations in Afghanistan. These include risks related to security incidents affecting programme delivery, economic instability, human rights restrictions, limited public sector capacity, and aid diversion or fraud. The assessment provided the UNCT with a consolidated

view of risk levels, enabling more systematic monitoring and more coherent implementation of mitigation measures.

Despite these persistent structural risks, the UN system advanced a coordinated risk-mitigation agenda, implementing 103 mitigation actions across 13 designated mitigation-action owners. These included the DSRSG/RC/HC Office, the Programme Management Team (PMT), the Operations Management Team (OMT), and various thematic coordination groups, demonstrating strengthened inter-agency collaboration and a collective commitment to risk-informed decision-making.

These mitigation actions strengthened the UN's overall risk posture by improving collective risk awareness and promoting more coordinated action across agencies. They also reinforced accountability and safeguards in how programmes are designed and delivered. Together, these efforts supported a more coherent and anticipatory approach to managing risks across the UN presence in Afghanistan.

In 2025, the Risk Management Team supported improvements in partner and contractor by promoting consistent due-diligence and compliance practices across the UN system through the Contractor Information Management System (CIMS).

Looking ahead to 2026, priorities include intensifying mitigation for persistently high risks (security incidents, economic instability, human rights restrictions, fiduciary exposure), addressing rising coordination risks (divergent donor conditionalities and UN system misalignment), and enhancing early-warning triggers, joint assurance planning, and surge analytics to support adaptive, risk-informed operations.

### RISK TRENDS AFFECTING UN OPERATIONS

These contextual factors underscore the importance of maintaining robust fiduciary safeguards and coordinating risk monitoring across the UN system.

However, structural risks related to security, economic instability, and operational constraints remain high, requiring continued attention and strengthened mitigation actions in 2026.

The 2025 risk-monitoring cycle identified several persistent and emerging trends that continue to shape UN operational environments:

- » Security and access constraints remained a major challenge across multiple regions, frequently disrupting programme delivery and limiting the ability of UN personnel and partners to reach affected populations.
- » Economic volatility and cross-border disruptions contributed to rising operational costs and increased vulnerabilities within supply chains, affecting the timely procurement and distribution of essential goods.
- » A predominantly cash-based economy and a fragile banking sector necessitated ongoing reliance on complex and high-risk financial transfer modalities to support programme implementation.
- » Restrictions on women's participation in the workforce created significant operational, programmatic, and reputational risks, particularly for humanitarian response and service-delivery activities that depend on gender-balanced staffing and community engagement.

These contextual dynamics reinforce the need for robust fiduciary safeguards, enhanced assurance mechanisms, and strengthened UN common risks monitoring. While notable progress was made in 2025, structural risks linked to security, economic instability, and operational constraints remain high, demanding sustained attention and further mitigation measures throughout 2026.

### BUSINESS OPERATIONS STRATEGY 2.0

The United Nations in Afghanistan has made significant progress toward achieving the annual objectives set out in the Business Operations Strategy (BOS). The 2025 review shows substantial economies of scale resulting from shared common premises, fuel services, transport and travel arrangements, ICT, and logistic services. These collaborative efforts have strengthened value for money across the UN system in Afghanistan.

The review confirms total efficiency gains of US\$ 10.8 million for 2025. Of this amount, administrative services, including common premises, fuel, transport, travel, and security, contributed US\$ 9.7 million. Information and communications technology services accounted for US\$ 0.6 million, while logistics services generated US\$ 0.5 million in efficiency gains.

## 2.4 Evaluations and Lessons Learned

In 2025, the UNCT deepened its focus on evaluative thinking and adaptive management to sustain delivery under the UNSFA amid compounding shocks: declining international assistance, large-scale population returns, recurrent cross-border disruptions, and tightening constraints affecting women's participation and access to services.

These dynamics reinforced the need to systematically capture what is working, what is not, and how to recalibrate programming and coordination approaches in real time.

Evaluation and learning priorities in 2025 increasingly centered on three questions: (i) whether assistance remained strategically coherent across humanitarian-Basic Human Needs (BHN) and resilience pathways; (ii) whether delivery modalities were fit for context given reliance on community-level, decentralized and partner-based implementation; and (iii) whether results were equitable and sustainable under persistent constraints, including restrictions affecting women and girls.

Several system-wide learning processes informed UNCT decision-making. First, the progressive operationalization of the BHN transition highlighted the importance of sequencing: when funding declines and needs rise simultaneously, sector strategies must prioritize protecting core service continuity while safeguarding minimum investments in resilience to prevent repeated humanitarian backsliding. Second, the scale of return movements in 2025 underscored that durable (re-)integration outcomes depend on area-

based, whole-of-community approaches, with services and livelihoods scaled in parallel to mitigate tensions and prevent secondary displacement. Third, the eastern Afghanistan earthquake response reinforced that humanitarian response planning is most effective when linked early to resilient recovery frameworks and pre-agreed coordination arrangements, enabling faster transition from immediate relief to recovery and community stabilization, while strengthening the awareness of people and increasing long-term resilience of people through building back better approaches and skill development in earthquake resilient construction methods.

Across portfolios, partners highlighted common implementation lessons. Data quality and comparability remained uneven across sectors and locations, constraining aggregation and interpretation of results at the UNSFA outcome level. This strengthened the case for tighter joint reporting protocols and more consistent use of shared monitoring tools. The year also reinforced that protecting operational space for female staff and women-led access channels is not only a principled obligation but a practical determinant of programme quality, especially in health, protection, and community services.

Looking forward, 2025 learning emphasized the value of embedding structured reflection into UNCT processes, linking common analysis, risk management, and results reporting, so that the system can adjust faster to shocks while maintaining coherence, accountability, and delivery at scale.



The UN delegation meets farmers in Helmand to hear insights on the FAO riverbank project and work of the UN in their area. © UN/Abdul Rahman Zaeem

## 2.5. Financial Overview and Resource Mobilisation

In 2025, UNSFA mobilized US\$1.77 billion out of a required US\$2.85 billion, reaching 62 per cent funding coverage, an improvement compared to the previous year but still leaving a significant funding gap of approximately US\$1.1 billion.

This funding environment shaped the scale, distribution, and prioritization of UN support across sectors, with resources concentrated primarily on sustaining essential services and mitigating immediate humanitarian risks.

Outcome-level funding patterns reveal strong prioritization of essential services. Outcome 1 (Sustained Essential Services) received the largest share of resources, reaching approximately 73 per cent funding coverage, reflecting donor prioritization of health, nutrition, education, and basic services to prevent further deterioration in human development indicators. By contrast, Outcome 2 (Economic Opportunities and Resilient Livelihoods) remained significantly underfunded at around 30 per cent, constraining the ability to scale livelihood recovery, agricultural support, and private sector initiatives necessary for longer-term economic stabilization. Similarly, Outcome 3 (Social Cohesion, Inclusion, Gender Equality, Human Rights, and Rule of Law) achieved only about 32 per cent funding coverage, limiting the expansion of community-based protection, gender equality initiatives, and rights-based programming.

At the sectoral level, funding disparities were particularly pronounced. Health and nutrition remained relatively well-supported, with US\$849 million available against a requirement of US\$1.01 billion, reflecting sustained donor commitment to life-saving services. Education funding was comparatively strong, achieving 96 per cent coverage, while water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) remained severely underfunded, receiving only US\$41 million against a requirement of US\$248.8 million, leaving an 83 per cent funding gap. Similarly, private sector development and rural development sectors have experienced significant funding shortfalls, with gaps exceeding 60-70 per cent, limiting the scale of economic recovery interventions.

Agency-level funding patterns also illustrate uneven resource flows. Large operational agencies such as

UNICEF and WFP achieved relatively high funding levels (81 per cent and 91 per cent respectively), enabling them to maintain large-scale delivery of essential services and food assistance. In contrast, agencies focused on livelihoods, labour markets, or structural transformation, such as FAO, ILO, UN-Habitat and IOM, faced substantially lower funding coverage, reflecting donor caution toward longer-term development investments in the current context or in urban areas, while acknowledging that, e.g. specifically climate change impacts but also the massive returnee crisis will foster (unplanned) urbanisation.

Overall, the 2025 funding profile reflects a clear strategic trade-off: prioritization of immediate service delivery and humanitarian stabilization over longer-term economic recovery and institutional development. While this allocation helped prevent further deterioration in access to basic services, persistent underinvestment in livelihoods, social cohesion, and resilience programming risks prolonging structural vulnerability. Addressing these imbalances will be critical in future programming cycles to ensure that humanitarian assistance is complemented by sustained investments in recovery, economic opportunity, and community resilience.



**USD 1.77  
billion**

**mobilized under  
UNSFA in 2025**

**Table 1: BHN – UNSFA Funding in 2025 (USD)**

Row Labels	Funding Required	Funding Available	Expenditure in 2025
<b>Outcome 1</b>	<b>2,148,522,164</b>	<b>1,562,540,182</b>	<b>1,243,787,344</b>
Education	371,977,648	357,871,390	256,319,038
Health & Nutrition	1,010,767,280	849,030,884	724,405,738
Protection	183,389,582	116,461,510	87,280,943
Social Protection	333,582,776	197,874,580	146,505,212
Water, Sanitation & Hygiene	248,804,879	41,301,818	29,276,413
<b>Outcome 2</b>	<b>616,457,272</b>	<b>184,016,178</b>	<b>150,226,660</b>
Economic Stabilization	2,100,000	1,357,435	1,329,682
Private Sector Development	152,332,059	57,401,198	52,144,268
Rural Development, Agriculture, and Natural Resource Management	462,025,213	125,257,545	96,752,710
<b>Outcome 3</b>	<b>81,434,115</b>	<b>26,009,061</b>	<b>22,241,446</b>
Human rights and Women's rights/Gender Equality	27,220,887	15,936,501	14,838,971
Rule of Law	960,000	-	-
Social Cohesion, Inclusion, and Reconciliation	53,253,228	10,072,561	7,402,475
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>2,846,413,551</b>	<b>1,772,565,421</b>	<b>1,416,255,449</b>

**Table 2: Funding by Agency (UNSFA) 2025 (USD)**

Agencies	Funding Required	Funding Available	2025 Expenditure
FAO	369,878,019	57,959,871	57,770,793
ILO	22,050,000	2,410,000	1,617,000
IOM	157,100,000	47,700,000	34,900,000
OHCHR	70,000	41,650	41,650
UNCTAD	4,209,898	2,836,986	2,518,370
UNDP	160,887,129	95,173,183	91,264,688
UNESCO	34,811,842	19,523,511	14,999,648
UNFPA	155,000,000	80,750,985	64,928,671
UN-Habitat	45,000,000	6,133,524	4,818,562
UNHCR	117,675,428	57,409,104	54,877,367
UNICEF	1,185,599,020	957,583,908	788,348,792
UNIDO	1,500,000	906,957	906,957
UNITAR	572,350	72,350	72,350
UNMAS	21,878,008	500,000	500,000
UNODC	21,434,400	17,481,913	10,754,172
UNOPS	89,296,900	65,054,495	64,412,250
UNWOMEN	59,495,149	51,184,654	41,950,336
WFP	232,737,622	212,078,704	91,572,308
WHO	167,217,786	97,763,626	90,001,536
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>2,846,413,551</b>	<b>1,772,565,421</b>	<b>1,416,255,449</b>

# Chapter III

## Looking ahead: UNCT Strategic Priorities for 2026

Looking ahead to 2026, the UNCT in Afghanistan will continue to operate in an environment characterized by persistent humanitarian needs, economic fragility, and constrained institutional capacity. More than half of the population continues to require humanitarian assistance, while poverty, food insecurity, and unemployment remain widespread.

In this context, the UNCT's strategic focus for 2026 will build on the foundations established under the United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (UNSFA) while strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus to ensure that assistance remains both life-saving where necessary and resilience-building where possible.

### 1- Sustaining Essential Services and Basic Human Needs

A central priority for 2026 will remain the protection and continuity of essential services, particularly in health, including maternal and reproductive health, nutrition, education, housing/shelter, water and sanitation, and social protection. The UNCT will continue supporting the delivery of minimum quality services to vulnerable populations, especially women, girls, children, internally displaced persons, and returnees. This includes maintaining support to health facilities, strengthening community-based health systems, expanding access to safe drinking water, and sustaining community-based and non-formal education opportunities. Ensuring continuity of these services is critical in a context where domestic financing capacity remains limited and external assistance continues to play a central role in sustaining public service delivery.

### 2- Expanding Livelihoods and Economic Opportunities

Recognizing that humanitarian assistance alone cannot address structural vulnerabilities, the UNCT will increase its focus on livelihoods, employment, and economic resilience in 2026 through systemic market-based approach, supporting private sector growth and job creation. This will include support to agricultural productivity, climate-resilient food systems, small and medium enterprises, and local market development. Particular attention will be given to youth employment and women-led economic activities within existing operational constraints. Strengthening economic opportunities is essential to reduce aid dependency, support household resilience, and address the drivers of poverty and displacement.

### 3- Promoting Gender Equality and Protection of Women and Girls

Advancing gender equality and safeguarding the rights and well-being of women and girls will remain a cross-cutting priority for the UNCT in 2026. In a context where restrictions on women's participation in education, employment, and public life continue to present significant challenges, the UN will strengthen efforts to ensure that women and girls can safely access essential services, livelihood opportunities, and community support mechanisms. Programming will continue to integrate gender-responsive approaches across all sectors, including health, education, livelihoods, and protection, with particular attention to women-headed households and other vulnerable groups. The UNCT will also expand engagement with women-led civil society organizations and community networks to inform programming and ensure that

interventions reflect the needs and priorities of women and girls. At the institutional level, the UN will continue strengthening gender accountability mechanisms, including the Gender Theme Group and UNCT-SWAP commitments, while enhancing capacity development, gender-sensitive analysis, and monitoring to ensure that no one is left behind.

#### **4. Advancing Durable Solutions and Community Resilience**

With continued large-scale returns from neighbouring countries and ongoing internal displacement, the UNCT will prioritize durable solutions for returnees and internally displaced people. This will involve supporting reintegration through access to services, housing, livelihoods, and community infrastructure in areas of return. Integrated and area-based approaches will be expanded to ensure that host communities and returnee populations benefit simultaneously, reducing tensions and strengthening social cohesion. Climate resilience will also remain a cross-cutting priority, with investments in water management, disaster risk reduction, and climate adaptation.

#### **5. Strengthening Coordination and Strategic Engagement**

In 2026, the UNCT will continue strengthening coordination mechanisms with humanitarian actors, development partners, and international financial institutions to maximize impact and avoid fragmentation. Strategic engagement with de facto authorities will remain essential to facilitate principled humanitarian access, sustain basic service delivery, and enable implementation of UN programmes. Platforms such as the High-Level Coordination Forum and technical working groups will continue to support dialogue on key priorities, including food systems, private sector development, and counter-narcotics.

#### **6. Enhancing Accountability, Risk Management, and Safeguarding**

Given the complex operating environment, the UNCT will further strengthen risk management, oversight, and accountability systems. This includes enhanced financial risk monitoring, anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CFT) safeguards and strengthened prevention of sexual exploitation and

abuse (PSEA) mechanisms. Ensuring transparency, safeguarding beneficiaries and personnel, and maintaining donor confidence will remain essential to sustaining international support.

#### **7. Preparing for the Next Strategic Cycle**

Finally, 2026 will be a critical year for forward planning. The UNCT will undertake the evaluation of the current UNSFA and initiate analytical and consultation processes for the next Cooperation Framework. This will include updated country analysis, strengthened data systems, and consultations with stakeholders, including communities, civil society, development partners, and relevant authorities, to ensure that the next strategic cycle responds effectively to Afghanistan's evolving needs.

Through these priorities, the UNCT will continue to support the Afghan people by sustaining essential services, strengthening resilience, and laying the foundations for longer-term recovery and stability.

# Annexes

## Annex 1

### UNSFPA Output Indicator Performance January – December 2025

**Output 1.1: Health and nutrition systems have improved and resilient capacities and resources to deliver accessible, affordable, gender- and age-responsive, shock-responsive, and culturally acceptable essential healthcare and nutrition services that prioritize the most vulnerable.**

Indicator	2025 Target	2025 Results	% achieved	Status
1.1.1. Number of people accessing healthcare services with UN support.	32,070,206	34,267,756 M:14,797,233 F:19,468,119	107%	Exceeding target
1.1.2 Number of health facilities (i) constructed, rehabilitated, equipped and (ii) facilities functional with UN support.	3,319	3,325	100%	Target achieved
1.1.3 Number of newborns delivered in a health facility by a skilled birth attendant with UN support.	1,235,000	958,209	78%	Approaching target
1.1.4. Number of children under one year reached with Penta-3 vaccine with UN support.	3,476,556	3,416,969 M:1,745,976 F:1,670,993	98%	Approaching target
1.1.5 Number of people reached through awareness raising on promotion of health-related good practices and prevention of diseases with UN support.	23,442,896	25,989,719 M:12,618,044 F:13,371,675	111%	Exceeding target
1.1.6 Number of health workers trained on the provision of medical services with UN support.	39,414	24,043 M:12,356 F:11,667	61%	Approaching target

**Output 1.2: Formal and non-formal public, private, and community-based education systems are better able to sustain and increase access to inclusive, safe, and quality education opportunities for girls, boys, youth, and adults – especially girls and young women – across all levels of education.**

Indicator	2025 Target	2025 Results	% achieved	Status
1.2.1 Number of people enrolled in/accessing education services and training with UN support (disaggregated by informal education and non-formal education).	531,529	559,640 M: 203,438 F: 356,216	105%	Exceeding target
1.2.2. Number of children accessing/enrolled in public education with UN support.	2,900,000	4,611,786 M:2,675,666 F:1,936,120	159%	Exceeding target
1.2.3. Number of primary and secondary formal and informal education facilities (i) constructed, (ii) rehabilitated, (iii) provided with alternative (clean and renewable) energy and/or (iv) equipped with gender-appropriate infrastructure with UN support.	849	427	50%	Missing target
1.2.4. Number of teachers trained with UN support, including on inclusive, gender sensitive and innovative pedagogies, digital technologies, remote and blended teaching and learning.	38,576	65,594 M:44,472 F:21,122	170%	Exceeding target
1.2.5. Number of education sector policy, planning and financing frameworks and tools developed and reviewed with UN support.	3	4	133%	Exceeding target

**Output 1.3: Stakeholders at national and subnational level are better able to manage and provide access to equitable, gender responsive, sustainable, climate resilient, and safe drinking water, improved sanitation, and positive hygiene practices in rural and poor urban communities.**

Indicator	2025 Target	202 Results	% achieved	Status
1.3.1. Number of people reached with at least basic water that is safe and available with UN support.	868,566	840,826 M: 428,518 F: 412,308	97%	Approaching target
1.3.2. Number of people who gained access to at least basic sanitation services with UN support.	1,408,925	621,655 M: 318,447 F: 303,208	44%	Missing target
1.3.3. Number of people having access to basic hygiene services with UN support.	1,380,000	709,444 M: 360,187 F: 349,257	51%	Missing target
1.3.4 Number of institutions (Schools, Health Facilities, Safe spaces) provided with improved WASH Facilities with UN support.	356	69	19%	Missing target

**Output 1.4: Inclusive, equitable, shock responsive national safety net systems are established and operational providing support to and strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable and marginalized people in Afghanistan.**

Indicator	2025 Target	202 Results	% achieved	Status
1.4.1 Number of people benefiting from short-term employment and improved livelihoods through cash/voucher/in-kind/cash+ safety nets-based interventions with UN support.	2,552,939	3,240,414 M: 2,893,944 F: 346,470	127%	Exceeding target
1.4.2. Number of households reached with social cash assistance with UN support.	425,477	403,981 M: 193,027 F: 210,954	95%	Approaching target

**Output 1.5: Relevant providers and stakeholders have strengthened capacities to increase access to and improve the provision of preventive, mitigating, and responsive protection services – including on child protection, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and explosive hazards – to the most vulnerable at family and community levels.**

Indicator	2025 Target	202 Results	% achieved	Status
1.5.1. Number of people reached by the awareness raising on protection services (mental health, GBV/psychosocial support, child protection, legal support) with UN support.	4,232,314	2,193,505 M: 709,993 F: 1,483,500	52%	Missing target
1.5.2. Number of women, men, girls and boys, receiving explosive ordnance risk education with UN support.	935,400	647,540 M: 364,575 F: 282,965	69%	Approaching target
1.5.3 Number of people receiving psychosocial support, child protection, Gender Based Violence (GBV) & sexual exploitation, and abuse response services with UN Support (disaggregated by age, sex, and location).	992,151	1,237,944 M: 267,324 F: 970,620	125%	Exceeding target
1.5.4 Number of organizations, including UN facilities, able to deliver and/or monitor the quality of protection services, resources, and goods for women, men, girls and boys with UN support.	266	260	98%	Approaching target

<b>Output 2.1: Economic and financial institutions and stakeholders have improved capacities to contribute to economic stabilization and pro-poor, private-sector-led economic recovery.</b>				
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>2025 Target</b>	<b>2025 Results</b>	<b>% achieved</b>	<b>Status</b>
2.1.1(a) Number of loans disbursed to the Afghan private sector, including MSMEs, industries, producers and individual entrepreneurs) by financial institutions and informal financial structures supported by the UN.	6,027	10,432 M: 6,285 F: 4,147	173%	Exceeding target
2.1.1(b) Value of loans disbursed to the Afghan private sector, (including MSMEs, industries, producers and individual entrepreneurs) by financial institutions and informal financial structures supported by the UN.	US \$ 20,001,328	US \$ 20,102,731 M: 12,600,000 F: 7,532,731	101%	Exceeding target
2.1.2. Number of newly developed Islamic financing products, including blended finance, available to MSMEs, big businesses and traders, with particular focus on women-led MSMEs, with UN support.	2	2	100%	Target achieved
2.1.3 Number of technical assistance and/or capacity development initiatives provided to financial institutions, and employers' and workers' organizations with UN support	9	7	78%	Approaching target
2.1.4(a) Number of local companies and vendors involved in humanitarian response and delivery of basic needs as a result of UN assistance efforts (Direct procurement by UN AFPs)	N/A	2013	N/A	NA
2.1.4(b): Value of goods and services provided by local companies and vendors for use in humanitarian response and delivery of basic needs as a result of UN assistance efforts (Direct procurement by UN AFPs)	N/A	US \$616.8M	N/A	NA
<b>Output 2.2: Private sector enterprises, particularly MSMEs, have improved access to finance, asset support and business development services, and increased business opportunities that stimulate growth and decent job creation.</b>				
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>2025 Target</b>	<b>2025 Results</b>	<b>% achieved</b>	<b>Status</b>
2.2.1 Number of MSMEs (formal and informal) including startups that received (i) financial support, (ii) technical assistance/capacity development, (iii) assets, and (iv) enhanced access to markets with UN support	42,715	29,855 Men led: 11,079 Women led: 18,616	70%	Approaching target
2.2.2. Number of long-term jobs created for decent employment and/or income generation including (i) creation of new jobs, and (ii) retention of the existing ones in formal organizations with UN support.	46,019	44,809 M: 20,546 F: 24,263	97%	Approaching target
2.2.3. Number of business associations and chambers, formal and informal, particularly women's business associations that have been strengthened with UN support.	109	125 Men led: 64 Female led: 61	115%	Exceeding target
<b>Output 2.3: Rural communities can better and sustainably manage natural resources, increase agricultural productivity and value addition, manage and reduce disaster risks, and enhance biodiversity, contributing to increased resilience, food security and nutrition, decent work, and sustainable livelihoods for all Afghans.</b>				
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>2025 Target</b>	<b>2025 Results</b>	<b>% achieved</b>	<b>Status</b>
2.3.1(a) Number of farmers and livestock owners that have received production inputs, services and/or technological packages and training to enhance agricultural, livestock or fishery production, processing and marketing with UN support.	4,590,009	610,221 M: 308,016 F: 302,205	13%	Missing target

2.3.1(b): Number of rural producers' organizations and actors in the agriculture processing value chain that have received production inputs, services and/or technological packages and training to enhance agricultural, livestock or fishery production, processing and marketing with UN support.	19,968	2,270 M: 1,528 F: 686	11%	Missing target
2.3.2(a): Number of water resources ,irrigation structures, bridges, storage facilities and other community and urban infrastructure that have been rehabilitated and/or established in the agriculture / irrigation and livelihood sectors with UN support (by type)	3,858	2,821	65%	Approaching target
2.3.2(b): Length (km) of water resources , irrigation structures, roads, bridges, and other community and urban infrastructure that have been rehabilitated and/or established in the agriculture / irrigation and livelihood sectors with UN support (by type)	372	767.45	206%	Exceeding target
2.3.3: Hectares of rangeland and forest that have been rehabilitated with UN support.	2,136,547	25,196	1%	Missing target
2.3.4. Number of assessments, surveys, knowledge products and studies that have been produced by the UN or with UN support to strengthen capacities of evidence-based programming for food and nutrition security, agriculture, decent work, and livelihoods.	54	54	100%	Target achieved
2.3.5 Number of durable dwelling/housing facilities newly constructed or rehabilitated for IDP/ Returnees with UN support	6,548	4,632	71%	Approaching target
2.3.6(a) Hectares of land newly brought under cultivation as a result of agricultural land rehabilitated, restored or bought under licit cultivation, with UN support	455,571	102,784	23%	Missing target
2.3.6(b) Number of people reached as a result of agricultural land rehabilitated, restored or bought under licit cultivation with UN support	13,637,463	2,640,025 M: 1,351,890 F: 1,288,135	19%	Missing target

**Output 3.1: Formal and informal governance mechanisms, community-based institutions, and decision-making platforms are more inclusive, responsive, accountable, and better able to contribute to social cohesion and reconciliation.**

Indicator	2025 Target	2025 Results	% achieved	Status
3.1.1 to Number of people whose capacities have been improved through training in participatory and inclusive community planning, governance, operational management, and decision making to promote social cohesion and reconciliation with UN support.	6,804	4,427 M: 2,372 F: 1,826	62%	Approaching target
3.1.2 Number of CSOs and community-based structures (CDCs/CRGs and GAs) that contribute to social cohesion and reconciliation with UN support.	3,354	2,942	88%	Approaching target
3.1.3 Number of people reached through formal and informal community-based structures on social cohesion and reconciliation activities with UN support (disaggregated by mass media and others).	4,403,600	5,532,924 M: 2,768,302 F: 2,764,622	126%	Exceeding target

**Output 3.2: Justice institutions, including customary and traditional community systems, are better able to provide accessible, effective, equitable, inclusive, transparent, and timely services, and these services are increasingly provided in line with international norms and standards, benefiting all communities, especially vulnerable groups such as women, children, and minorities.**

Indicator	2025 Target	2025 Results	% achieved	Status
3.2.1. Number of people who received legal aid and advice with UN support.	38,227	34,424 M: 19,997 F: 14,427	90%	Approaching target
3.2.2. Number of people who are aware of their rights on access to justice through legal awareness programmes by NGOs with UN support.	3,000	No results as interventions are no longer there	0%	Missing target
3.2.3. Number of local institutions and groups supported by the UN to promote positive, inclusive traditional justice and/or community-based practices for improved quality services.	6	1	17%	Missing target

**Output 3.3: Communities, civil society organizations, vulnerable groups, women, and other relevant stakeholders are more aware of and better able to promote and protect their human rights, aligned with international norms and standards, and mitigate threats to their safety and wellbeing.**

Indicator	2025 Target	2025 Results	% achieved	Status
3.3.1. Number of organizations (national NGOs, CSOs and media outlets) who received (i) financial and/or (ii) capacity building support from the UN to advance human rights, gender equality, non-discrimination of women, and media resilience.	629	429 Men led: 22 Women led: 407	68%	Approaching target
3.3.2. Number of people reached through advocacy, awareness raising, and behavior change programming on human rights, social norms, non-discrimination, and media with UN support (NB: Including via media campaigns).	4,336,825	4,380,642 M: 2,114,764 F: 2,265,878	101%	Exceeding target
3.3.3. Number of reports, data sets, tools, manuals, media contents produced by the UN on human rights, gender equality/women's rights, social norms, non-discrimination, etc.	727	1,556	214%	Exceeding target
3.3.4. Number of (i) journalists and media activists employed in different media positions with direct UN financial support and (ii) Journalists trained in media related skills, norms and standards with UN support.	900	1,641 M: 1,069 F: 572	182%	Exceeding target

## Annex 2

# List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

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<b>ACG</b>	Afghanistan Coordination Group
<b>AML/CFT</b>	Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism
<b>BHN</b>	Basic Human Needs
<b>BOS</b>	Business Operations Strategy
<b>CCA</b>	Common Country Analysis
<b>CIMS</b>	Contractor Information Management System
<b>CPD</b>	Country Programme Document
<b>DFA</b>	De Facto Authorities
<b>DSRSG/RC/HC</b>	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General / Resident Coordinator / Humanitarian Coordinator
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>HDP Nexus</b>	Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus
<b>HLCF</b>	High-Level Coordination Forum
<b>HRP</b>	Humanitarian Response Plan
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally Displaced Persons
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IPC</b>	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>MSMEs</b>	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>OMT</b>	Operations Management Team
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>PMT</b>	Programme Management Team
<b>PSWG</b>	Private Sector Working Group
<b>PSEA</b>	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
<b>PSEAH</b>	Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
<b>RC</b>	Resident Coordinator
<b>RCO</b>	Resident Coordinator's Office
<b>RMT</b>	Risk Management Team
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SFSA</b>	Seasonal Food Security Assessment
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNAMA</b>	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UN-Habitat</b>	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNMAS</b>	United Nations Mine Action Service
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>UNSFA</b>	United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme



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**Cover photo:**  
Learners in a community-based literacy programme in Nuristan Province.

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