UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Afghanistan Earthquake Emergency Six-Month Impact Report

OCTOBER 2023 - APRIL 2024

UNHCR's response to the Afghanistan earthquakes

KEY FIGURES

Affected population

275,000 people directly affected*

9 districts affected

10,002 households destroyed; **38,000** households damaged

Sakhidad Ataye. 72, is a farmer whose home was damaged by the Herat earthquake. Thanks to your support, he received a tent and essential relief supplies from UNHCR through one of our partners, Ansari Rehabilitation for Afghanistan (ARAA). © UNHCR/Caroline Gluck

* OCHA figures

UNHCR's response

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and partners have been able to provide life-saving aid to nearly 60,000 earthquake-affected people in 77 villages across eight districts.

More than **180,000 emergency relief items** distributed across Herat City and eight districts

5,156 people received psychosocial support and information on where to seek support

8,516 families assisted with life-saving relief items and multi-purpose cash assistance

23,183 people received information on UNHCR's assistance and services

The over **180,000 emergency relief items** UNHCR and partners distributed to **77 villages** in Herat City and eight districts included the following:

Bars of laundry soap
37,899

Blankets
24,577

Pairs of underpants
21,132

Solar lamps
14,211

Bars of toilet soap
19,257

Jerry cans
14,742

Sanitary napkins
14,088

Buckets
14,029

Gas cookers
7,371

Kitchen sets
7,199

Family tents
5,604

Plastic tarpaulins
3,562

Heaters
3,061

The earthquakes flattened Sia Aab village in the Zinda Jan district of Herat Province. UNHCR swiftly mobilized to provide critical aid assistance, as well as vital protection services to the affected communities. © UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production.

Humanitarian context

On 7 October 2023, a 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck 40 kilometres west of Herat City in Herat Province, western Afghanistan. Several powerful aftershocks followed. On 11 October, another powerful earthquake of the same strength as the first one hit Herat Province, followed by two aftershocks.

More than 275,000 people in nine districts were directly affected by the earthquakes and aftershocks. The devastation was widespread, with **48,000 households destroyed or damaged**. Around 21,300 public buildings also sustained damage, including health facilities and schools. As a result, **more than 37,000 families* were forced to live in makeshift tents and open spaces**, leaving them vulnerable to harsh weather, health concerns and safety hazards.

The earthquake struck communities which were already extremely vulnerable and had lived with decades of conflict, poverty and food insecurity. Many families had already been internally displaced by previous conflict and natural disasters. **Before the earthquake, Afghanistan was already home to around 3.2 million internally displaced people, over 52,000 refugees and some 13,500 Afghan refugee returnees**.

* OCHA figures

UNHCR's response

UNHCR has been present in Afghanistan for over 35 years and works closely with national and international partners to **provide life-saving support to displaced people and their host communities**. Due to this strong field presence, UNHCR was immediately able to contribute to the earthquake response led and coordinated by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Core Relief Items and Shelter

Core relief items

When the earthquakes struck, **UNHCR teams were immediately able to distribute emergency relief items** from existing stockpiles via its Field Office in Herat and further items were trucked in over the following days and weeks.

From the onset of the crisis, **core relief items were delivered to 77 villages** in Herat City and eight districts (Zindajan, Guzara, Gulran, Koshk Rabat Sangi, Injil, Karukh, Kohsan and Ghoriyan). Emergency items included hygiene supplies (laundry soap, toilet soap, sanitary napkins and underpants), items for cooking and water collection (kitchen sets, gas cookers, and jerrycans), and items to support wellbeing and safety during the night (blankets, heaters, solar lamps and family tents).

Shelter

More than 48,000 homes were either damaged or destroyed by the earthquakes, putting tens of thousands of people in immediate need of shelter.

The earthquakes happened as the harsh winter approached, making the need for warm shelter even more urgent. UNHCR distributed **5,604 family tents** to provide people displaced with temporary shelter. **More than 7,500 families also benefitted from the distribution of heaters and solar lamps** to keep shelters warm and lit at night.

Cash assistance

Cash support remains one of the best and most dignified ways to directly assist displaced populations while also benefiting local communities. Cash assistance allows families to use the money where it is most needed and reduces the likelihood that vulnerable people would have to resort to negative coping strategies such as delaying rent payments, pulling children from school or child marriage. Money spent also stimulates the local economy and boosts job creation.

Since the onset of the earthquake, UNHCR has provided 876 families with **multi-purpose cash assistance** in Zindajan and Ghoriyan districts.

Mother of eight, Humaira, received a tent and emergency items in a distribution supported by UNHCR and its partner ARAA in Rubat Perzada village, Injil district, Afghanistan. © UNHCR/Caroline Gluck.

On the day of the first quake, 32-year-old Humaira, had returned home with her newborn son after giving birth at a local clinic in the early hours of the morning. She was preparing a snack when the first 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck. She clutched her baby and sat in the corridor, dazed and weak from her difficult labour and delivery, until her other children and husband found her and the baby covered in dust from roof damage.

The earthquake severely damaged her home, which forced the family to shelter outdoors with nothing more than a flimsy plastic sheet and blankets. Her family is one of the households who received a tent and emergency items from UNHCR and ARAA.

"With this new tent, it will be better. We'll have more space and be more comfortable. We'll be much warmer," said Humaira.

Protection

UNHCR staff immediately began **protection assessments** to identify needs and connect affected people to necessary services. UNHCR's protection activities included **psychosocial assistance, child protection services, and the dissemination of timely information** to people affected by the earthquake.

Psychosocial support, community awareness and information sharing

Some **5,156 individuals accessed psychosocial support** through awareness-raising and counselling sessions so far in Herat City, Gulran, Koshk Rabat Sangi and Zindajan districts.

Community awareness and individual counselling sessions offer an avenue for displaced people to know and understand their rights and available services, and establish a trusted communication channel through which affected people can seek further support.

UNHCR and partners train Community Outreach Volunteers (COVs) on how to provide valuable information to, and respond to questions from, their communities. Areas of training include raising awareness of available humanitarian services and feedback and complaints mechanisms, fraud prevention efforts and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Since 7 October 2023, **COVs have provided 23,183 people with such critical information through 550 awareness-raising sessions** in areas hit by the earthquakes. COVs also identified 254 people with specific needs, who could then be referred by UNHCR to appropriate support services.

Through **UNHCR's Complaints and Feedback Mechanism (CFM)**, 651 cases were lodged by earthquake-affected families (50 per cent via telephone hotline, 41 per cent via COVs and 9 via other means). A total of 559 cases have been closed (the majority requesting assistance including shelter, food and cash) and 92 are pending assessment and assistance.

Protection of women, children and vulnerable people

Natural disasters leave people (especially women, children, people with disabilities and older people) not only vulnerable to the elements, but to other protection risks such as opportunistic violence, exploitation and abuse. In times of crisis, people may be separated from their usual support networks and services as well as their usual source of income and shelter.

Community information and awareness-raising are a critical way to ensure that people know and understand their rights and the protection services available to them. Since October 2023, a total of 3,433 community members (2,226 men and 1,207 women) have received information on **children's rights** and available support in villages across Zindajan district. UNHCR and partners also held awareness-raising sessions with 2,894 people on the **protection needs of women** in Injil, Koshk Rabat Sangi, Zindajan and Karukh districts.

UNHCR also immediately undertook **protection assessments** to identify people in need of urgent support. As a result, **332 child protection cases have been identified** – with children either experiencing or at risk of child labour, early marriage, and mental health challenges – and are now receiving appropriate support through partners.

Three child-friendly spaces established in Zindajan district continue to provide a safe space for children to play and receive support. Through UNHCR and partners, **3,357 children (1,732 boys and 1,805 girls) have so far participated in different activities** in these spaces, including craft sessions and art therapy, information sessions on their right to bodily autonomy and bodily privacy, and education on hygiene and cleanliness.

Ongoing needs

UNHCR is continuing **community outreach and protection assessments** to identify the ongoing needs of people affected by the earthquake. Recent UNHCR focus groups held in Injil, Zindajan and Koshk Rabat Sangi showed that communities were in need of permanent shelter reconstruction. 172 households reported that they were still living in tents, showing the urgent **need for long-term shelter solutions**.

Despite the contributions of donors and ongoing efforts of UNHCR and partners, the provision of life-saving assistance and essential services is still limited. In addition to the need for more resources to build longer term shelters, **more funding is urgently needed to provide health facilities, safe drinking water, and sanitation facilities such as latrines as well as food assistance**.

It is critical that support mechanisms are put in place so that earthquake affected people can have more stability in the long term. These include **delivering cash assistance, setting up income-generating activities and providing psychosocial support** to help people recover from their physical and mental injuries.

Overall, Afghanistan remains one of the world's most complex humanitarian crises, with more than half the population (over 23.7 million people) estimated to need humanitarian aid. Conflict, economic instability, and natural disasters - made worse by climate change - all contribute to the extremely volatile social, political and economic environment in the country.

UNHCR remains committed to staying and delivering for people forced to flee in Afghanistan, and we rely on continued donor support to help us to do so.

UNHCR, with partner ARAA, distribute emergency relief items to 150 families residing in the village of Said Abad Guzara District, Herat Province. © UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production.

Donor acknowledgement

UNHCR extends its thanks to public and private donors who donated to the Afghanistan earthquake emergency, as well as those who provided flexible funding to support general emergency preparedness and response in 2023 and 2024. Your support has been invaluable in helping protect millions of people forced to flee by new and protracted crises.

The following donors contributed $100,000 or above to the Afghanistan earthquake emergency response as well as the Afghanistan operation in 2023 and 2024:

Argentina for UNHCR | Australia for UNHCR | Austria | Canada | Denmark | España con ACNUR | European Union | Finland | France | Germany | Iceland | Ireland | Japan | Japan for UNHCR | Kingdom of Saudi Arabia | Kuwait | Luxembourg | Muslim Aid USA | Norway | Philippines | Private donors in Bahrain | Private donors in China | Private donors in France | Private donors in Italy | Private donors in Japan | Private donors in Luxembourg | Private donors in Qatar | Private donors in the Republic of Korea | Private donors in the Netherlands | Republic of Korea | Spain | Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan | Sweden for UNHCR | Switzerland | Switzerland for UNHCR | United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund | United States of America | UK for UNHCR | UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe | USA for UNHCR | ZeShan Foundation | Central Emergency Response Fund | Country-based pooled funds

Flexible funding: a lifeline in emergencies

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

Without flexible funding, our capacity to prepare for any new emergency would be seriously affected, our capacity to prepare for any new emergency would be seriously affected. Without flexible funding, the initial phase of our emergency response, which involves distributing thousands of emergency supplies, providing shelter, and offering protection assistance to families in need, would struggle to get off the ground.

As our emergency response develops, flexible funding helps us provide longer-term support to displaced people and their host communities. When emergencies fade from the spotlight, flexible funding enables us to help those who are suffering the most.

We could not do our work without such invaluable support, and we count on donors' continued solidarity solidarity to assist people affected by emergencies in 2024 and beyond.

Cover page: UNHCR staff engage with earthquake affected communities in Sia Aab village in the Zinda Jan district of Herat Province, fostering open communication about their current living conditions and protection needs. © UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

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