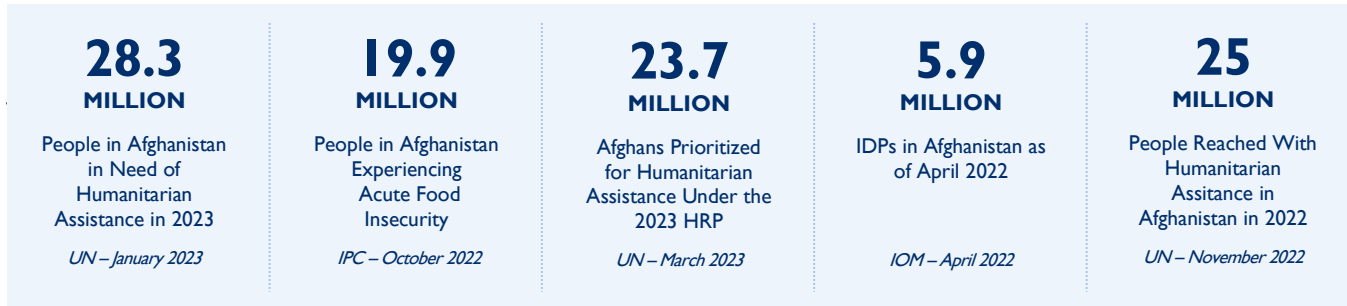


# Afghanistan – Complex Emergency

MAY 10, 2023

## SITUATION AT A GLANCE



- The UN condemned the April 4 Taliban MoFA verbal directive restricting female national staff's ability to work for UN agencies, while reaffirming its intention to remain in Afghanistan and continue providing humanitarian assistance to populations in need.
- A magnitude 6.5 earthquake struck northeastern Afghanistan on March 21, resulting in at least five deaths and injury to nearly 80 people, according to humanitarian actors.
- ISIS-K attacks resulted in at least 11 deaths across Afghanistan in March and continue to threaten humanitarian actors and operations, relief actors report.



<sup>1</sup> FY 2023 funding for the Afghanistan Complex Emergency will be included in future products when committed/obligated. For information on the U.S. Government's funding toward the response in FY 2022, refer to Afghanistan Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #9 released on September 23, 2022, available on the USAID website at <https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/where-we-work>.

## KEY DEVELOPMENTS

### **UN Condemns Taliban Restrictions Targeting Female Staff, Commits to Continuing Operations**

On April 4, the Taliban Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) issued a verbal directive restricting Afghan female staff's ability to work for UN agencies in the country. This directive follows the December 2022 Taliban Ministry of Economy edict prohibiting Afghan women from working for non-governmental organizations (NGOs), increasing relief actors' concern for the safety and security of female national staff. On April 27, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the Taliban MoFA's verbal directive and demanding that Taliban representatives reverse all policies restricting Afghan women, allowing for the full, equal, and safe participation of women and girls in Afghanistan. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) also condemned the directive, noting that the decision violates the rights of Afghan women and undermines the UN's work in the country.

UN agencies, international NGOs (INGOs), and national NGOs operating in Afghanistan continue to provide principled assistance while highlighting the significant operational and programmatic challenges that the Taliban directives present to delivering aid at scale and recognizing the necessity to continue providing life-saving humanitarian assistance throughout the country despite the challenges. Following the April 4 directive, UN Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, and UNAMA have repeatedly underscored UN agencies' commitment to remain in Afghanistan and continue delivering humanitarian assistance to populations in need, while assessing how to effectively adapt and deliver critical assistance in a principled manner. In addition, multiple international donors expressed their support for the UN's decision to continue life-saving operations in Afghanistan and reaffirmed their intentions to continue providing funding to reach vulnerable populations.

As of early May, UN agencies and humanitarian actors continue to advocate for the repeal of the Taliban directives and negotiate with Taliban representatives to secure operational exemptions to the directives at the local, provincial, and national level. Additionally, U.S. Government (USG) partners and other humanitarian organizations are adapting programming to mitigate the directives' negative effects on female staff members and beneficiaries to continue providing critical assistance with the meaningful inclusion of women. USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA) and the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (State/PRM) continue to closely monitor the evolving situation and provide support to affected partners.

### **Taliban Restrictions on Afghan Female Humanitarian Staff Generate Additional Protection Risks**

The Taliban directives restricting Afghan female staff violate the rights of Afghan women and girls, reduce humanitarian operational space, and generate additional protection risks for women and girls in the country, according to a March report from the Protection Cluster, the coordinating body for humanitarian protection activities, comprising UN agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders. Female staff are essential to delivering critical assistance to vulnerable populations, including children, older people, and women, many of whom male staff are unable to reach due to prevailing restrictions and the sensitive nature of some forms of assistance, such as health services. The directives undermine humanitarian actors' ability to reach the estimated 11.6 million women and girls in Afghanistan in need of humanitarian assistance in 2023. In addition, female-headed households—who comprise an estimated 10 percent of the country's population—face heightened risks of losing access to critical humanitarian and protection services. The Protection Cluster highlights that the bans serve to exacerbate existing risks faced by

women and girls in the country, including denial of resources, opportunities, and services; unlawful restriction to freedom of movement; psychological and emotional abuse; access impediments to legal rights and services; and early and forced marriage. The Protection Cluster calls for Taliban representatives to repeal the directives and allow women to work across all sectors and operations, particularly to identify and address the specific risks and vulnerabilities faced by women, girls, and children. Moreover, UN agencies and humanitarian organizations should increase monitoring activities and adapt programming to avoid compromising humanitarian principles while delivering assistance, the Protection Cluster reports. USAID/BHA and State/PRM continue to collaborate closely with partners to ensure comprehensive monitoring and adaptive programming to continue reaching vulnerable communities and groups throughout the country.

### **Earthquake and Floods Affect Thousands of People Across Afghanistan**

A magnitude 6.5 earthquake struck northeastern Afghanistan on March 21, resulting in at least five deaths and injury to nearly 80 people, according to humanitarian partners and the U.S. Geological Survey. The earthquake affected more than 7,000 people and damaged an estimated 650 houses across Badakhshan, Kunar, Kunduz, Laghman, Panjshir, Parwan, Samangan, and Takhar provinces, humanitarian actors report. In response to the earthquake, USAID/BHA partners conducted multi-sector needs assessments and mobilized response operations to reach affected populations.

Heavy rains and subsequent flash flooding, coinciding with the start of the spring season, have affected more than 4,500 individuals in Balkh, Herat, Kunduz, Laghman, Nangarhar, Nimroz, and Zabul provinces since late March, the UN reports. Flash floods in Balkh during March affected at least 15 villages and destroyed nearly 1,500 acres of agricultural land, according to USAID/BHA partner the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). Additionally, heavy flooding in Kandahar Province's Zari District blocked and damaged the main road between Herat and Kandahar provinces in late March, restricting movement in the area, relief actors report. Afghanistan remains highly prone to natural hazards, such as earthquakes, floods, and landslides, which exacerbate the country's already high levels of humanitarian need. USAID/BHA and State/PRM partners continue to monitor conditions throughout the country and reach affected communities with multi-sector humanitarian assistance.

### **ISIS-K Attacks Result in At Least 11 Deaths During March, Increase Security Risks for Relief Actors**

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria-Khorasan (ISIS-K) actors detonated a person-borne improvised explosive device near the Taliban MoFA building in Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul on March 27, resulting in the deaths of six people and injury to at least 12 others, according to international media. This incident follows two suspected ISIS-K attacks in Balkh during March that resulted in the deaths of five people, including the Taliban Governor of Balkh, and a separate ISIS-K attack targeting the Taliban MoFA building on January 11 which resulted in approximately 60 civilian casualties, international media report. While recent ISIS-K attacks have not directly targeted humanitarian organizations operating in the country, the attacks constitute a persistent security threat for relief actors in Afghanistan. USG partners continue to monitor security conditions across the country and implement heightened security protocols to mitigate the risk of future attacks.

## KEY FIGURES



**12.8 Million**

People reached with USAID/BHA and other donor-supported WFP food and nutrition assistance in March 2023



**9**

Number of USG implementing partners conducting protection interventions



**524,000**

People reached with USAID/BHA and other donor-supported WHO health services in March 2023

## U.S. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

### FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

The USG supports the delivery of life-saving emergency food assistance across Afghanistan, providing vulnerable populations with locally, regionally, and internationally procured in-kind food assistance; cash transfers for food; and food vouchers. With USAID/BHA support, the UN World Food Program (WFP) continues to provide food assistance and nutrition services to support populations in need in 2023. Additionally, USAID/BHA partner the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and INGO partners are providing seeds and livestock feed in at-risk areas to bolster the coping capacity of vulnerable households. USAID/BHA supports UNICEF and other partners to deliver life-saving nutrition services and treatment to children and pregnant and lactating women throughout the country. USAID/BHA also supports coordination and information management among food security actors and assessments in Afghanistan to strengthen humanitarian response efforts.

### PROTECTION

USG partners—such as State/PRM partner the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)—provide protection assistance to refugees and returnees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and other vulnerable populations in Afghanistan. Additionally, USG INGO and UN partners support mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) programs, including individual counseling, activities to support the development of coping skills, and safe healing and learning spaces for children. USG partners also implement child protection activities and family services, provide legal assistance to returning refugees to access documentation, and integrate MHPSS and other protection measures into education, health, and nutrition programming.

### HEALTH

The USG supports UN and INGO partners to implement life-saving health activities across Afghanistan to improve community health awareness, bolster outpatient consultation efforts, and complement other donor efforts to provide affordable primary and secondary health care to underserved populations. USG partners aim to increase equitable access to and utilization of health services among IDPs, host communities, and other conflict- and shock-affected populations. USG assistance supports clinics and mobile health teams to deliver emergency and primary health care services, conduct trainings for local community health workers and health care professionals, provide essential medicines, and support vaccination campaigns. Additionally, USG funding supports the UN World Health Organization (WHO) to coordinate emergency health response activities, maintain the continuation of essential health services, and ensure the continued supply of critical health and medical commodities in Afghanistan.



6

Number of USG implementing partners supporting shelter programming

## SHELTER AND SETTLEMENTS

Shelter needs among populations in Afghanistan remain significant, in part due to natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, landslides, and harsh winter weather. USG partners provide emergency shelter for displaced and otherwise vulnerable people, as well as shelter repair kits, transitional shelter, and multipurpose cash assistance to support the housing needs of affected populations. In addition, USG partners pre-position shelter materials each year for distribution ahead of the harsh winter months and support the heating costs for vulnerable households.



5

Number of USG implementing partners supporting livelihoods programming

## LIVELIHOODS AND EDUCATION

With USG funding, partners deliver livelihoods programming and skills training to support refugee reintegration and boost opportunities for vulnerable host community populations through activities such as courses to increase literacy, business knowledge, and skills development. State/PRM partners support returning refugees, IDPs, and host communities in Afghanistan by providing access to skills training and adult literacy courses, in addition to access to education for Afghan refugees and host community children in Pakistan. Partners also work to ensure IDP and returning refugee children have access to learning spaces and accelerated learning programs to help children prepare for enrollment in formal schools, as well as support initiatives to improve infrastructure in schools within host communities.

## CONTEXT IN BRIEF

- The Taliban seized Kabul on August 15, 2021, following the successive capture of several provincial capitals and territory in early August 2021. Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, economic and political instability has resulted in the deterioration of basic service provision across the country, increased staple foods and fuel prices, and reduced household purchasing power, affecting many Afghan households' ability to meet their basic needs.
- The cumulative effects of conflict, internal displacement, coronavirus disease (COVID-19), drought and other natural disasters, and economic collapse have drastically increased levels of humanitarian need throughout Afghanistan. The UN predicts that 28.3 million people will require humanitarian assistance in 2023, a 16 percent increase compared to the 24.4 million people in need identified in 2022, with the severity of needs deepening across all sectors.
- In late August 2021, the USG activated a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) based in the region outside of Afghanistan to lead the USG response to humanitarian needs generated by the crisis in Afghanistan and a Washington, D.C.-based Response Management Team (RMT) to support the DART.
- On October 7, 2022, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires, a.i., Karen Decker redeclared a disaster for FY 2023 due to the continued impact of the ongoing complex emergency.

## PUBLIC DONATION INFORMATION

- The most effective way people can assist relief efforts is by making cash contributions to humanitarian organizations that are conducting relief operations. A list of humanitarian organizations that are accepting cash donations for disaster responses around the world can be found at [interaction.org](https://www.interaction.org).
- USAID encourages cash donations because they allow aid professionals to procure the exact items needed, often in the affected region; reduce the burden on scarce resources, such as transportation routes, staff time, and warehouse space; can be transferred very quickly and without transportation costs; support the economy of the disaster-stricken region; and ensure culturally, dietarily, and environmentally appropriate assistance.
- More information can be found at:
  - USAID Center for International Disaster Information: [cidi.org](https://www.cidi.org)
  - Information on relief activities of the humanitarian community can be found at [reliefweb.int](https://www.reliefweb.int).

USAID/BHA bulletins appear on the USAID website at [usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/where-we-work](https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/where-we-work)