

THE KNOWLEDGE HOUSE



# AFGHANISTAN COUNTRY REPORT

THE STATE OF THE  
HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM 2026

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Produced by ALNAP since 2010, the *SOHS* report is a periodic, independent study of the scale and shape of global humanitarian action and performance over time.

Afghanistan has featured in all editions of the *SOHS*, which have captured the evolving dynamics of the humanitarian situation and response within one of the world's most complex crises. Protracted conflict, access barriers, funding volatility and significant gender-related restrictions make Afghanistan an ideal context to examine how the humanitarian system operates, adapts and performs under highly constrained conditions and the challenges in delivering assistance.

The sixth edition – **SOHS 2026** – covers January 2022 to December 2025. In-country research captured the diverse perspectives of people affected by crisis and a broad range of humanitarian stakeholders involved in crisis response to understand the performance of, and the dynamics shaping, humanitarian action in Afghanistan during that time.

Findings from this research have informed the policy and thematic questions of the global *SOHS 2026* and they serve as the foundation of this country report. The research shows that the humanitarian response in Afghanistan over 2022–2025 was shaped by gender in humanitarian action, international sanctions, humanitarian principles and operational compromises made by organisations, cuts made in 2025 to humanitarian funding, systemic barriers to humanitarian operations, and localisation. This country report examines how these factors influenced the effectiveness, inclusiveness and overall functioning of the humanitarian response.



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## 1.1. Background and context

Afghanistan faces a prolonged crisis shaped by decades of conflict, displacements, political instability and recurrent natural disasters. The situation deteriorated significantly following the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, which triggered economic contraction, institutional disruption and tighter social restrictions for women and girls (ACAPS, 2023).

According to Humanitarian Needs and Response Plans for Afghanistan, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance to survive increased from 9.4 million in 2020 (OCHA, 2019) to 22.9 million in 2025 (OCHA, 2025), out of a population of 36.4 million people (NSIA, 2025). This reflects the worsening humanitarian situation in the country. Food insecurity and hunger remain widespread, with nearly one-third of the population (12.5 million people) experiencing crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity during March to April 2025 (IPC, 2025).

Large-scale returnee inflows from Pakistan and Iran have strained an already overstretched humanitarian response. More than 2.9 million Afghans have been forced to return from Pakistan and Iran since October 2023 (UNHCR, 2025) – equating to a 10% increase in the country's population over two years.

Meanwhile, natural disasters have compounded the humanitarian situation. Severe droughts have depleted water sources and devastated agricultural production, impacting the livelihoods of more than 70% of the population who rely on farming and livestock (OCHA, 2024). Flash floods and landslides in 2024 affected more than 11 provinces in the north, west and east of Afghanistan, where over 310 people died and thousands were displaced (UN, 2024). Similarly, the earthquakes of October 2023 and September 2025 damaged infrastructure and homes and resulted in a high number of casualties and displacements (UNHCR, 2024).

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan has also been worsened by the contraction of the economy by almost one-third as compared to before August 2021. This has been driven by the withdrawal of development funding, the freezing of foreign assets and the isolation of the banking sector (World Bank, 2024). The financial system remains constrained by sanctions-related restrictions, limited access to international transactions, deposit withdrawal ceilings and reduced liquidity. With few endogenous sources of growth, the economy depends on external assistance. This has led to diminished livelihood opportunities and to nearly half the population being affected by widespread unemployment, declined purchasing power, household debt, deepened poverty and dependency on humanitarian aid (ibid.).

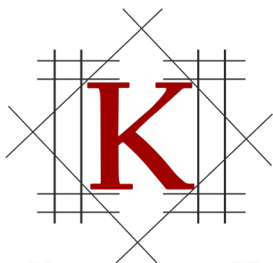
Within this context, humanitarian operations have also been struggling to adapt to the policy changes introduced by current authorities in Afghanistan since 2021 about women's participation in employment, education, mobility, and public life. These contextual changes have challenged the ability of organisations to plan and deliver gender-responsive and inclusive assistance.

As a result in 2023, 22% of organisations fully suspended operations, 55% are only partially operational and just 23% remain fully functional (Humanitarian Access Working Group, 2023).

Beyond challenges in gender-responsive and inclusive assistance, the overall operating environment has continued to evolve in response to the policies and administrative procedures for aid organisations. While adherence to these policies and administrative procedures are mandatory for all aid organisations, it

challenged aid organisations ability to effective and timely humanitarian response. A significant development here was the introduction of the 'Procedure for Coordinating and Regulating the Activities of Domestic and International Non-Governmental Organisations' – referred to as the 2022 NGO Procedure. This framework identified priority areas for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) engagement, including: (1) health; (2) humanitarian assistance for martyrs, people with disabilities, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); (3) agriculture, irrigation and livestock; (4) disaster management; and (5) education (including higher education). Human rights, peacebuilding and conflict resolution were not included, reducing their scope for programming and engagement.

Principled and needs-based aid delivery requires delicate navigation within the current Afghan humanitarian context. Humanitarian organisations report needing to continuously engage and coordinate with current authorities regarding selection of target locations and populations, and their implementation arrangements (Bowden et al., 2023), raising questions about impartiality and the integrity of humanitarian response. NGOs are required to navigate varying practices among provincial and district-level officials, particularly regarding accessing villages they target for assistance.



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