

THE KNOWLEDGE HOUSE



AFGHANISTAN COUNTRY REPORT

THE STATE OF THE
HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM 2026



UN support vehicles are pictured at the earthquake relief supplies transfer center in Kunar province, Afghanistan.
[Xinhua/Shutterstock](#).

ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY

The in-country research involved 26 KIs and 6 FGDs, conducted in the country. The Knowledge House United Kingdom (TKH-UK) conducted this in-country research between August and November 2025, deploying a nine-member team comprising a Lead Researcher, Field Manager, Field Coordinator and six Field Researchers (three female and three male).

The research explored key Afghanistan-specific policy thematic areas, including gender in humanitarian action; the impact of and compliance with sanctions; humanitarian principles and operational compromises; the impact of funding cuts and operational trade-offs; systemic barriers to humanitarian operations; and localisation.

Research sites/provinces

The provinces selected for data collection were purposefully chosen to ensure broad and diverse representation across different humanitarian contexts, types of responding organisations, gender, and the socioeconomic groups of people affected by conflict. These provinces serve as key regional hubs, each hosting a significant number of humanitarian actors and affected populations.

The selection reflected the need to capture multiple types of humanitarian responses, allowing for in-depth understanding of how assistance was planned, coordinated and delivered. The diverse operational environments and stakeholder engagement in these locations has enabled comparative analysis and it has ensured the research reflects an array of experiences within Afghanistan's humanitarian landscape.

Sample/respondents

In order to explore perceptions and views about the performance of the humanitarian system, the in-country research employed purposeful sampling to select participants for 26 KIs and 6 FGDs. Individuals were selected intentionally based on specific criteria relevant to this research.

KIIs

KIIs were conducted with a broad range of stakeholders and aid providers operating in the three target provinces, ensuring diverse representation of actors involved in the response at both national and sub-national/provincial levels. A representative sample was drawn from 12 UN agencies, 82 international NGOs, and 149 national and local NGOs operational across 34 provinces (OCHA, 2025). In addition, representatives from key ministries⁵ and one national authority⁶ were included who played critical roles in the delivery and coordination of humanitarian services.

Key informants were identified through a consultative process involving key aid agencies and their local partners. The selection process was guided by the following specific criteria:

UN agencies, and national and international NGOs

- Direct involvement in planning, management and coordination of humanitarian aid: Individuals who are officially engaged in planning, execution/management and coordination of humanitarian assistance in responding to the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.
- Minimum two-year experience: Meeting the above criteria, key informants are required to have served in their current capacity for at least two years, ensuring they possess adequate experience and contextual understanding. This criterion is particularly relevant considering the fact that *SOHS 2026* will assess performance over the period of January 2022 to December 2025.

Current authorities and civil society

- Direct involvement in beneficiary identification: Individuals who are formally (such as community leaders) or officially engaged in identifying the most vulnerable geographies, communities and households and responding to their humanitarian needs.
- Minimum one-year experience: Meeting the above criteria, key informants are required to have served in their current capacity for at least one year, ensuring they possess adequate experience and contextual understanding.

This structured selection process ensured that key informants had the expertise and firsthand knowledge required to provide valuable insights into the operation of the humanitarian system in the target areas.

FGDs

Six FGDs (three male and three female) were conducted with people affected by crisis within the community, ensuring a balance across age groups, gender and

5 MoEc, Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), and Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD).

6 Afghanistan Natural Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA)

ethnicity.

Participants for FGDs were identified using a purposeful sampling approach, ensuring meaningful representation of males and females. The selection criteria for FGD participants aligned with conventional beneficiary selection criteria and definitions of the most vulnerable and affected households. Anyone meeting these criteria was considered eligible to participate in the FGDs. The specific requirements for participation (see [Table 1](#)) were implemented to ensure a comprehensive range of perspectives and experiences and to avoid any skewed discussions.

Table 1: FGD participation criteria

	Criteria
FGD respondents	● Meets the most vulnerable household definition derived from World Food Programme (WFP) targeting and vulnerability criteria⁷ ● Has benefited from humanitarian aid ● Currently settled within the target area (not a guest or visitor from another province or a family in transition) ● Is the head of the household (who represents the family to benefit from the project) ● Is the wife of the head of the household (in case of female) ● Available to participate in FGDs ● Is not from the same family whose member has already attended an FGD

FGD participants from the community were identified in coordination with local community leaders, based on these predefined selection criteria. Male FGDs were held within the community, typically in accessible public spaces such as mosques. Female FGDs were conducted in locations culturally appropriate and convenient for participants – such as the homes of Community Health Workers.

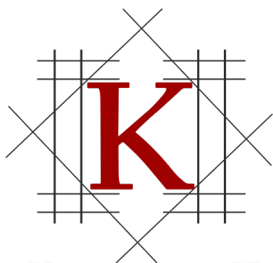
7 1. Women- or child-headed household without adult male; 2. Households with dependency ratio of 9 or more; 3. Households with no adult male of working age or adult working women; 4. Person with disability as headed household; 5. Households with no (or little) assets or income; 6. Households that live with other households or have other family members living with them; 7. Households living in temporary accommodation such as tents or temporary shelters; 8. Households relying only on borrowing, begging or zakat (Islamic charitable contributions); 9. Households relying on casual labour by one family member; 10. Households without any source of livelihood or income generating activities; 11. Households with one or more members having disability or chronic illness, excluding head of the household; 12. Households recommended for assistance by agencies specialising in protection.

Table A 1: Research matrix

Main policy question	Research question	Sub-questions and considerations
What is the shape and size of the system and its actors?	What does the humanitarian system comprise of in Afghanistan?	Who are the main contributors? In which sector are they contributing? How is their contribution making a difference?
	What is the relative contribution of international humanitarian action?	
Gender and humanitarian aid	How are humanitarian actors reaching women and girls effectively and adequately?	How are humanitarian actors reaching women and girls with appropriate and timely assistance? How are humanitarian actors navigating the restrictive gender norms and policies imposed by the authorities? What adaptations are made by organisations to maintain gender-responsive programming?
	What are the main challenges faced by female aid workers?	What operational challenges do female aid workers face [mobility, staffing limitations, safety and others]? How do these constraints affect the quality, equity and coverage of humanitarian services?
Sanctions, their impact and compliance	How are international sanctions impacting the operations of humanitarian actors in Afghanistan?	What are the main implications of the sanctions? How do compliance and vetting measures affect national and international humanitarian aid providers?
	How do sanctions affect the humanitarian–development–peace nexus in the context?	What are the impacts on development assistance and how do sanctions affect the humanitarian–development–peace nexus in the context?

Main policy question	Research question	Sub-questions and considerations
Humanitarian principles and operational compromises	How are humanitarian organisations navigating the application of core humanitarian principles?	How are humanitarian organisations navigating the application of neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity while operating under the authorities?
	What are the complexities of negotiating access, and the ethical and operational dilemmas of engaging with the authorities?	What are the major complexities of negotiating access? Why is it complex? How easy or difficult it is to negotiate access? What makes it easy and what makes it difficult?
	How are these dynamics influencing decision-making, programme design and the perceived legitimacy and effectiveness of humanitarian actors on the ground?	How do actors take these dynamics into account while designing a project? What consultations are undertaken and why?
Impact of funding cuts and operational trade-offs	What are the effects of significant funding reductions on humanitarian operations in Afghanistan?	What were the effects of significant funding reductions in 2021–2022? And what are the effects of USAID funding cuts in 2025 on humanitarian operations in Afghanistan?
	How are organisations adapting to shrinking budgets?	What compromises and trade-offs are being made in programme coverage, staffing and service quality, and in prioritisation decisions driven by limited resources?
	What are the longer-term implications of these cuts in a highly aid-dependent context?	What are the longer-term implications of these cuts on risks to local capacities and the resilience of affected communities?

Main policy question	Research question	Sub-questions and considerations
Systematic barriers to humanitarian operation	What are the structural and administrative obstacles hindering effective aid delivery in Afghanistan?	What delays are encountered when kicking off a project? How does the project registration process function with the MoEc? How are MoUs signed with the line ministries?
	How do authorities requirements vary across different projects and geographies?	How do inconsistent local-level enforcement and ad-hoc directives affect timely response, operational flexibility and the ability of humanitarian actors to deliver impartial, needs-based assistance?
Localisation	How is the landscape of national and local NGOs and civil society organisations evolving in Afghanistan?	How have responsibilities transitioned to local actors? How is the presence of women-led organisations declining? What are the implications of risk transfer on their operational safety, funding access and institutional capacity?
	How is localisation influencing humanitarian access, programming quality and accountability?	How is localisation influencing humanitarian access, programming quality and accountability? How are national and local NGOs adapting and navigating a restrictive and high-risk environment?



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