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AFGHANISTAN COUNTRY REPORT

THE STATE OF THE
HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Afghanistan has remained one of the most complex and constrained humanitarian operating environments globally. This country report, developed as part of [The State of the Humanitarian System 2026](#) research process, examines how humanitarian action in Afghanistan evolved during the study period – January 2022 and December 2025. This research was conducted between August and November 2025, using key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) to explore the factors shaping the effectiveness, inclusiveness and overall functioning of humanitarian response. The study focused on six major themes: gender in humanitarian action; adaptive measures to reach women and girls; the impact of international sanctions; humanitarian principles and operational compromises; the implications of the 2025 funding cuts; procedural challenges; and localisation.

Findings

Women and girls experienced the crisis differently and often more severely, and the humanitarian system was constrained to respond to their needs. Restrictions concerning women's mobility, employment, education and participation in public life affected both access to assistance and the delivery of gender-responsive services. While projects focusing on women's livelihood-related activities benefited from a degree of flexibility, interventions addressing gender, protection (including gender-based violence), and rights-based advocacy often went through additional review processes during official project registration.

Women's needs were often mediated through male gatekeepers, which meant that women without strong social connections were less likely to benefit from humanitarian aid. With aid organisations often relying on community leaders for targeting, eligibility was also shaped by men's prevailing perceptions, not women's lived experiences, particularly those in need of protection services. Humanitarian organisations also adopted a range of context-specific measures to continue reaching women and girls, such as recruiting Mahrams alongside female aid workers. These adaptations, however, increased operational costs and, in some cases, reduced opportunities for direct engagement with women and contributed to a narrower focus for gender-responsive programming. Over time, many organisations prioritised immediate humanitarian and basic needs support, while broader gender and protection-related activities became more limited in scope.

International sanctions created wider operational constraints across the humanitarian system. Organisations faced increased vetting, compliance and

documentation requirements, in some cases, of recipients of humanitarian aid. National NGOs, especially smaller and women-led organisations, were disproportionately affected because they often lacked the administrative systems needed to meet overlapping donor requirements.

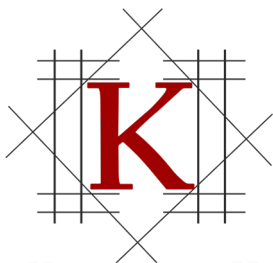
The humanitarian principles, particularly independence, impartiality and neutrality by humanitarian organisation were often challenged within the Afghanistan's humanitarian operating environment. For aid organisations to maintain access and remain operational, engagement with relevant authorities was often necessary. Sustaining field presence sometimes required practical adjustments like changing target districts that could, in some cases, make it more difficult to fully uphold strict interpretations of principled humanitarian action.

The 2025 funding cuts had immediate and destabilising consequences. Livelihoods, women's vocational training, nutrition, community health and protection programmes were among the most affected, with food distributions and cash support stopping in some areas.

Stringent administrative approvals and procedures required prior to project implementation undermined the timeliness and effectiveness of humanitarian response. With the exception of immediate emergency interventions, projects were required to pass through multiple layers of approvals whose timelines varied, depending on the nature of the programme.

Localisation emerged as both a necessity and an incomplete reform. National aid organisations played an increasingly central role because of their local knowledge, flexibility and ability to navigate community and authorities at various levels. However, localisation was largely operational rather than strategic. National organisations delivered more assistance but had limited influence over funding decisions, coordination structures or negotiations with authorities. They also carried significant operational risk while remaining dependent on international agencies and United Nations (UN) agencies for funding, dispute resolution and high-level engagement.

Overall, the report shows that humanitarian action in Afghanistan between 2022 and 2025 was shaped by a convergence of political, financial, gender-related and procedural challenges within the Afghan humanitarian environment. Humanitarian actors adapted in order to remain present and continue delivering assistance, but these adaptations often involved difficult trade-offs. Women and girls were disproportionately affected by crisis and were not reached with gender-responsive aid. National organisations became increasingly important to delivery, yet they continued to operate under unequal partnerships with international aid organisations.



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