



**UNHCR AFGHANISTAN**

A group of women at the Youth and Women Community Centre in Bamyan, Afghanistan. © UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media

## Women and Girls Factsheet

**17,152**

Received in-kind assistance

**7,788**

Provided with shelter assistance

**56,713**

Provided access to clean energy

**53,764**

Provided access to improved water and sanitation

**288,590**

Have access to improved health infrastructure and equipment

**11,752**

Supported with VolRep assistance

**11,165**

Received seasonal assistance

### Background

Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the country's 21.4 million women and girls have faced a systematic erosion of their fundamental human rights, including social, economic, and political. Edicts imposed by the de facto authorities (DfA) in 2022 and 2023 barred women from public office, employment with NGOs and UN Agencies, as well as education beyond the sixth grade, and have challenged humanitarian operations in Afghanistan. In 2024, the DfA further expanded these edicts, relating to female participation, dress code, restrictions on women working at humanitarian delivery sites, and imposed salary reductions for female government employees. In August 2024, the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) promulgated the Morality Laws, which codify and expand existing discriminatory policies, such as mandatory dress codes and the requirement for women to have a male guardian (*mahram*), while also giving broad discretionary powers to inspectors from the PVPV to enforce these laws.

Within this environment, women and girls of Afghanistan face pressing humanitarian and protection needs, urgently requiring the sustained support of the international community.

### Principled Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance

UNHCR remains committed to 'Stay and Deliver' principled humanitarian and basic needs' response, prioritizing women and girls' access to, and inclusion in, aid delivery. UNHCR has closely aligned itself with the One UN Approach and has worked closely with the UNCT at country level and the IASC in developing common strategies and a robust common response and advocacy for the inclusion of women in humanitarian staffing structures for effective humanitarian aid delivery by women for women and girls.

While temporary and localised exemptions have been provided by the DfA allowing women to return to work for humanitarian response purposes in some instances, these agreements remain precarious, and enforcement trends are erratic with variations across regions. To ensure that UNHCR can adapt within this dynamic context, the Agency continues to advocate for the inclusion of women to safeguard the uninterrupted delivery of services conducted in a principled way, by women for women and girls.

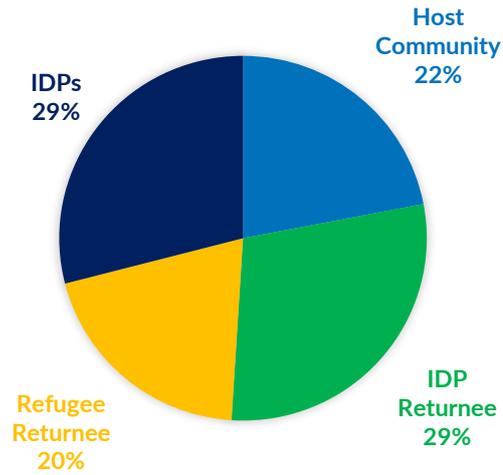
### Overview of UNHCR's Efforts in Reaching Women and Girls

Of the 23.7 million people projected to be in need in Afghanistan in 2024, 77% are women and children, requiring urgent protection and humanitarian assistance. To address their needs and ensure principled aid delivery, UNHCR has made it a strategic priority to ensure the inclusion of women and girls of all age groups in assessments, assistance and service delivery. Vulnerable women and girls, including women-headed households and women at risk are among the key groups prioritized for UNHCR assistance, with 54% of UNHCR's direct assistance in 2024 reaching women and girls across 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

## Population Categories in Community-Based Protection Monitoring

2,400

Persons with Specific Needs received cash assistance



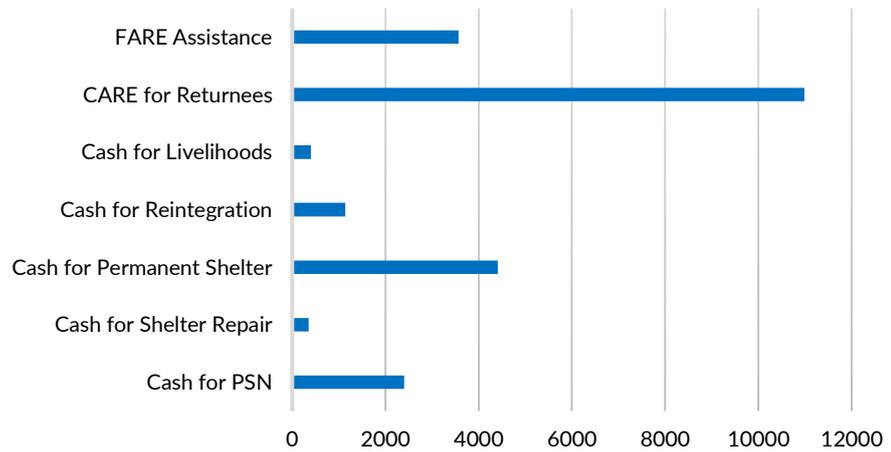
56,581

Received mental health and psychosocial counseling services

10,989

Returnees received CARE grants

## Cash Assistance Provided to Women in 2024



A woman is learning carpet weaving skills at a community centre supported by UNHCR and local partner APBHO in PD13 Kabul, as part of a six-month carpet training programme designed to equip them with skills that can open up new income earning opportunities. ©UNHCR/Mushtaq Munawarzada

## Protection of Women

In 2024, UNHCR and its implementing partners facilitated dialogues with thousands of community leaders, including women and men, aiming to engage them as active partners in preventing and responding to violence in their communities and facilitating referrals to services. Women and girls across Afghanistan also received support through counselling sessions to respond to the acute mental health and psychosocial support needs of women and girls. UNHCR has reached thousands of individuals through information-sharing activities, empowering the community with knowledge and skills about overcoming the negative impact of violence and harmful practices on individuals, families, and communities. Most importantly, these sessions aimed to inform women and girls about available support, encouraging them to seek help and facilitating their safe access to multi-sectoral response services.



Children in an earthquake-resilient house in Barmal district of Paktika province.  
© UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media

## Women Community Centres

UNHCR's women community centres provide a safe space for women and girls to engage in well-being and capacity-building activities including livelihoods, receive information on available services and topics of concern to the community, and seek support through direct interventions by UNHCR partners and referrals. While these activities are crucial and have in many cases helped individual women, it must be underscored that in the current context, there are almost no avenues in Afghanistan for a woman to seek legal redress in cases of gender discrimination or violence.

## Community Engagement

As part of its strategic objective to enhance its accountability to affected people and strengthen its engagement and communication with communities, UNHCR launched a country-wide pilot project establishing a network of community outreach volunteers, of whom nearly 50% female. Placing communities at the centre of the response and empowering them to become agents of their own protection has significantly improved UNHCR's outreach to the most vulnerable population groups, establishing effective two-way communication and ensuring access to information and services for communities in remote areas and to inform UNHCR programming.

## Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services

UNHCR provides Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) to women and girls through non-focused specialized services, community and family support, and psychoeducation services. In 2024, over 47,000 women have benefited from MHPSS services across Afghanistan.

## Livelihoods

Building self-reliance, through diversified livelihood and economic inclusion interventions, remains an important pillar of UNHCR Afghanistan's strategic priorities. Underpinning this focus is the understanding that self-reliance and economic inclusion reduce dependency on humanitarian aid thereby increasing and enhancing the dignity of the persons we serve.

UNHCR prioritizes women in its livelihood and economic inclusion interventions and adopts an area-based approach covering all population types. This inclusive approach is critical to fostering co-existence and social cohesion, and ultimately, sustainable reintegration. These livelihood interventions supporting women include Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), establishment and growth of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), cash-for-work, and access to finance to expand MSMEs.

## Human Impact

### Visually impaired women find hope in eastern Afghanistan

With tailored support, women who are blind are gaining the education, skills, and confidence to build a brighter, more independent future.

Inside a small, makeshift classroom in a village in Nangahar Province in eastern Afghanistan, a group of blind young women are gathered for a lesson in communications. Socially isolated and frequently physically and psychologically abused, women who are visually impaired in Afghanistan spend most of their lives behind closed doors, denied the opportunity to go to school, learn life skills, or start a family. But in this classroom – and others like it set up by UNHCR and its partner WADAN in two neighbouring provinces – the women come together, socialize, listen to each other's experiences and learn new skills to help them navigate the world and thrive in it, gaining self-confidence and independence.



A group of blind women gathering inside a classroom in Nangahar, Afghanistan. © UNHCR/Faramarz Barzin

"I have faced a lot of challenges being blind," said 22-year-old Arezo, who lives in the provincial capital Jalalabad and attends the Visually Impaired Women Support Programme in Samarkhel. "While others with sight could attend school, I was left behind." Now, at last, she is catching up. Arezo is one of 90 visually impaired students who enrolled in the programme in late 2022 and has since learned to read Braille and do basic maths, use a guide cane to walk around safely and carry out domestic chores such as cooking and washing, which enables them to contribute to family life. The programme's success means it is this month being expanded to reach a further 200 women, with the hope that additional funding might make it accessible to men, girls and boys in the future.

#### Practical skills, psychological support

Beyond practical day-to-day skills, the training programme also includes psychosocial counselling and sessions on gender-based violence to equip the women to manage in a society in which visually impaired women are frequently met with stigma and hostility. Some of the women, such as Arezo, are also learning communication skills, hoping it might lead to previously unattainable job opportunities. For Arezo, it has meant the rare chance to continue learning and to improve her reading and writing skills. "We have been learning essential skills for effective interaction, including how to communicate with others, report information accurately, and even deliver impactful seminars," she said.

Arezo is a passionate student motivated by her faith and desire to help other people who are blind and visually impaired. She has written a portion of the Koran in Braille, using the patterns of raised dots on a page to represent characters, making the religious text accessible to those who are blind. "It was one of my biggest dreams to write books," Arezo said. Of Afghanistan's 43 million population, more than 400,000 are blind, according to the World Health Organization. A further 1.5 million are visually impaired, with 60 per cent of blindness cases caused by cataracts, a condition that can be resolved with simple eye surgery if medical facilities are available. **'I can imagine a better future'**. For Arezo and her fellow participants, the programme has opened up new horizons.

Helai lost her sight after a traumatic encounter with militants when she was just 14, and for years struggled with the feelings of isolation and inadequacy that followed. "I faced a lot of problems because previously I could see," recalled Helai, now 20. "I couldn't go to school anymore and lost all the hope that I had in my heart. My mental health got worse." The opportunity to get out of the house and to meet and learn with other visually impaired women has transformed Helai's outlook on life. "I used to sit at home and couldn't go anywhere. But now I can do my own tasks and go anywhere without a guide," she said. "Coming here made me hopeful again." Another young woman who is blind, Amina, 20, lives in Jalalabad with her parents and nine siblings, five of whom are also visually impaired. Before joining the UNHCR/WADAN initiative, her dream of becoming a teacher for women who are blind seemed impossible, but the skills she has learned mean it may one day be realized. "Before, I felt a sense of inferiority compared to sighted individuals, as I could not read and write. While others who were sighted could go to school and study, we were still at home and had negative thoughts all the time," Amina said. "Now I know Braille and hope to become a Braille instructor for others. I can imagine a better future," she said. "I have become very hopeful. I see my life in a better way."