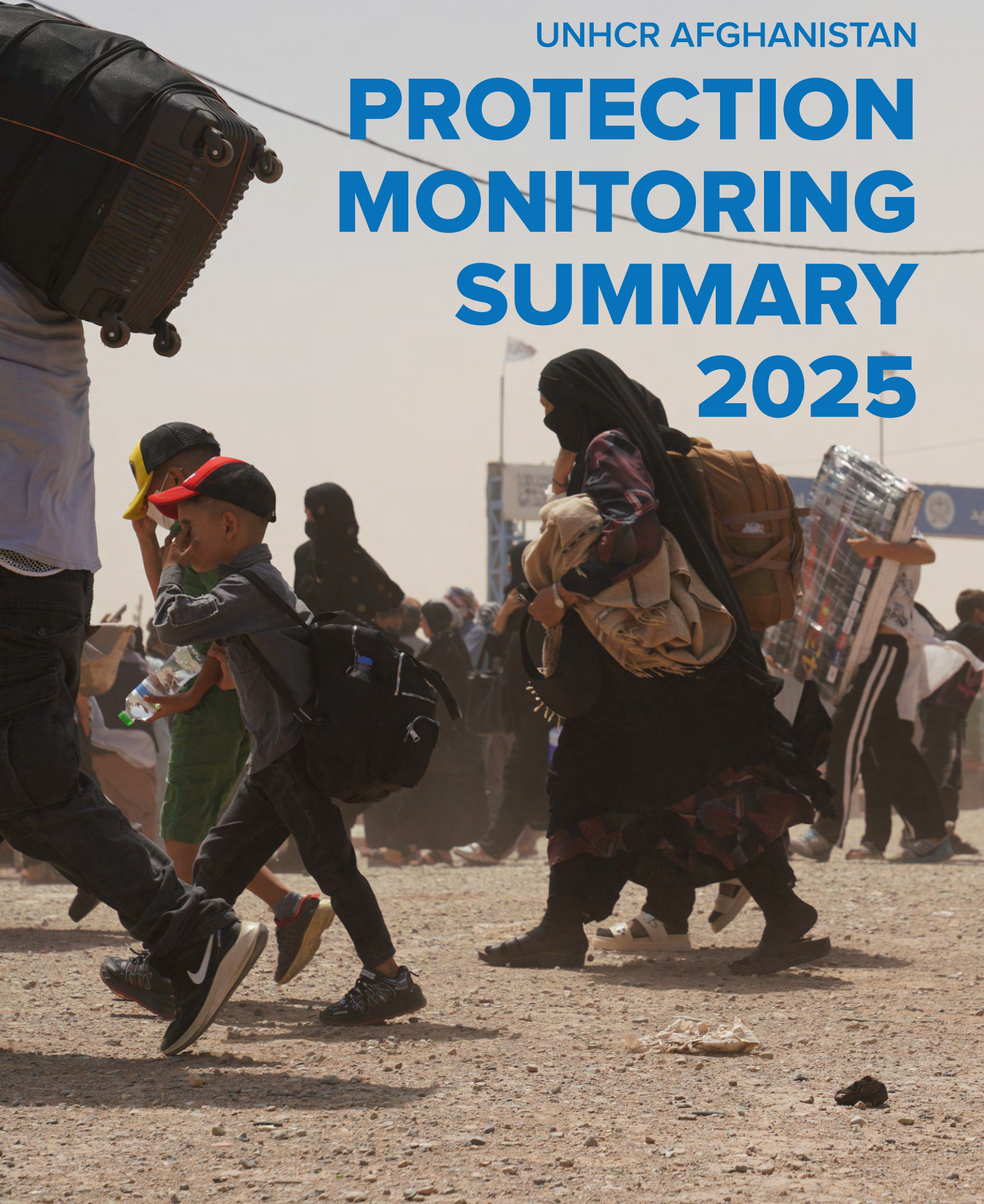




UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR AFGHANISTAN

PROTECTION MONITORING SUMMARY 2025



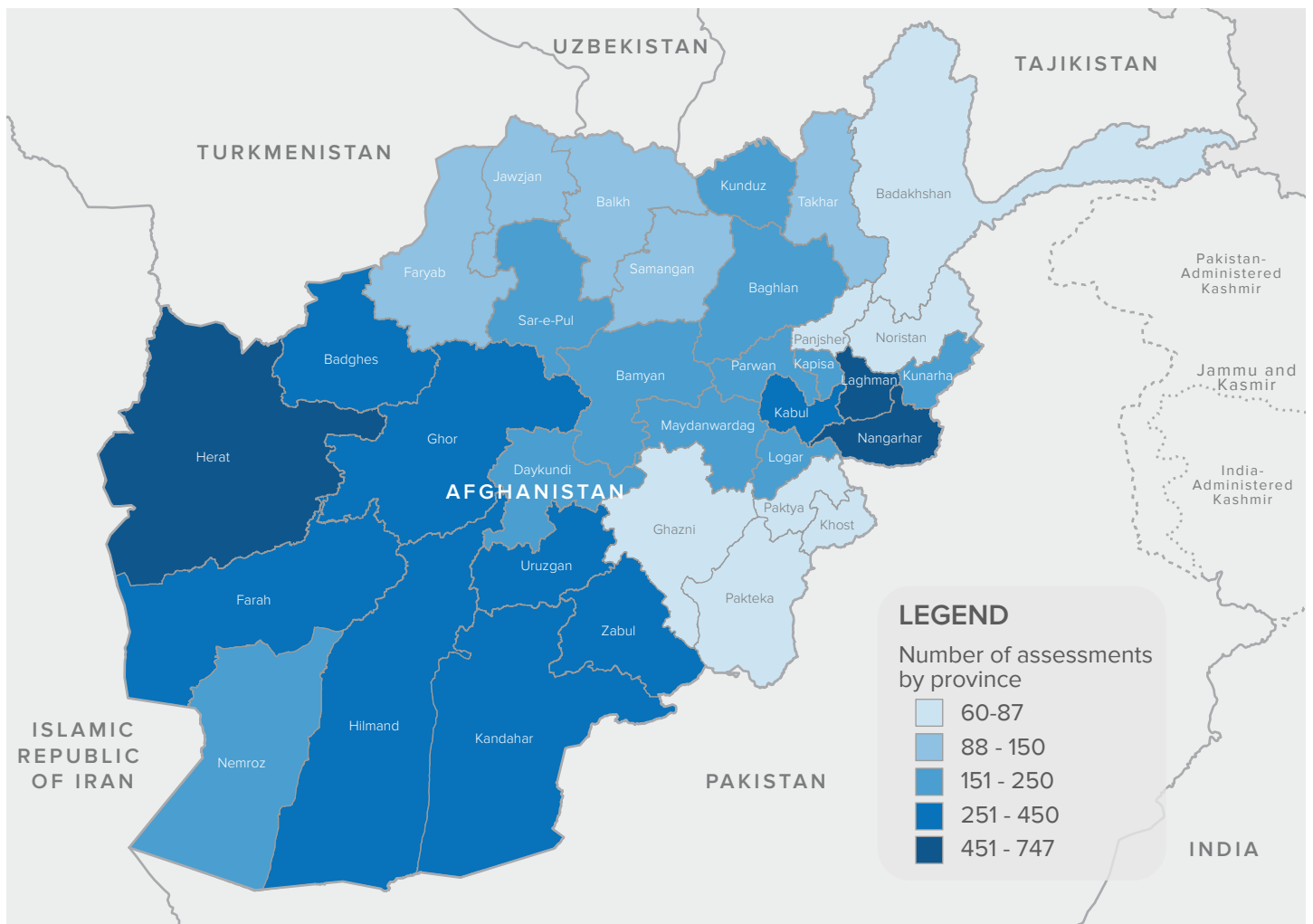
INTRODUCTION

In Afghanistan’s complex protection context, characterized by continued returns, ongoing displacement, economic hardship, and sustained protection risks, Community-Based Protection Monitoring (CBPM) plays a central role in informing protection analysis and response. CBPM enables UNHCR and partners to systematically collect community reported information on protection risks, vulnerabilities, and coping mechanisms affecting returnees, internally displaced persons, and host communities. By generating regular, area specific evidence, CBPM supports the identification of priority protection concerns, facilitates the monitoring of protection trends over time, and informs UNHCR programming, coordination, and advocacy efforts.

The analysis presented in this report is based on data collected through UNHCR’s CBPM tools, including household-level surveys, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions

(FGDs). These tools are designed to generate evidence based information on the protection needs and risks faced by returnee, displaced, and host communities, and to inform UNHCR programming, strategic decision-making, and advocacy, while also feeding into the [Afghanistan Protection Cluster’s analysis](#) and information products. Survey locations are selected based on the concentration of returnees and displaced populations. The CBPM covers UNHCR’s population groups of concern, including returnees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), IDP returnees, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as members of host communities.

This report presents the full annual results and analysis of the 2025 CBPM exercise, providing a comprehensive overview of protection trends and a comparative assessment of findings across all four quarters, covering the period from January to December.



Cover photo: Thousands of Afghans cross back into their homeland through the Islam Qala border in Herat province, following a sharp rise in returns from Iran.
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8,038 assessments conducted
57,858 persons interviewed



34 provinces covered,
across **179** districts



48% of interviewed households are headed by women. Out of the overall respondents, **49%** are women



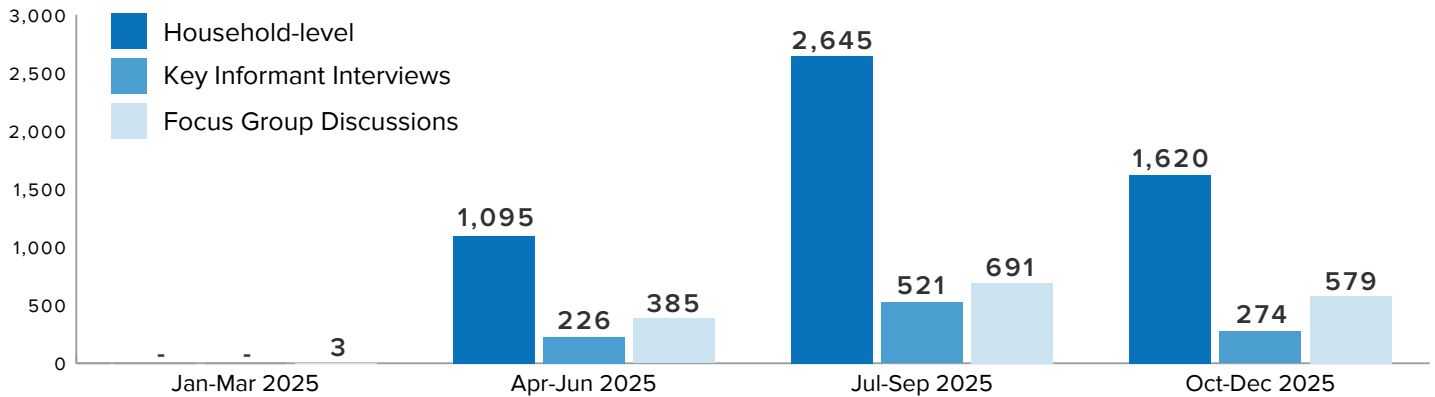
5% of households interviewed have disabilities

KEY FINDINGS

- **Women and girls remain the most affected**, facing major barriers to accessing health, education, legal services, and assistance due to systemic discrimination, socio-cultural norms, and movement restrictions, as reported by **34% of households**.
- **Civil documentation gaps are evident**, with **61% of households** reporting at least one family member without essential documents, disproportionately affecting women, returnees, and IDPs.
- **Households face high vulnerability levels**, with **56% of those surveyed** reporting one or more vulnerabilities such as households headed by an elderly person or a woman, chronic illness, disability, caregiving responsibilities, and inability to work.
- **Food remained the top priority need** expressed by the vast majority of respondents, while the findings also show limited access to healthcare, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, shelter, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and education.
- **Harmful coping mechanisms were widely used by families**, including relying on unstable precarious jobs (33%), borrowing money (25%), skipping or reducing meals (10%), and selling assets to afford basic items (5%). These strategies heighten protection risks, especially **child labour, early or forced marriage, and negative coping mechanisms among women and girls**.
- **Socio economic vulnerability and displacement remain closely linked**, with returnee and displaced communities disproportionately facing challenges accessing livelihood opportunities and economic shocks driving ongoing protection concerns.
- **Limited awareness of complaints and reporting mechanisms** were reported by 79% of interviewees, particularly among women and girls, hindering safe reporting of misconduct or barriers to assistance.
- **Communities called for urgent support** to increase access to livelihoods opportunities, food and cash assistance, civil documentation, housing, and basic services including health, education, and WASH.

OVERVIEW OF THE DATA COLLECTED

Number of CBPM Assessments



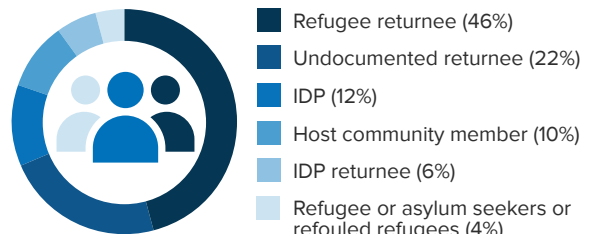
The majority (70%) of households interviewed were returnees, reflecting UNHCR’s concern for the protection risks faced by these communities upon return. The majority of respondents were women and children. Female-headed households represented 48% of surveyed households. UNHCR made strong efforts to ensure the participation of female staff and capture the voices of women and girls despite severe restrictions.

A total of 5,360 household monitoring visits were carried out across 34 provinces (156 districts), covering approximately 39,067 individuals. Total of 87% of interviews were conducted in person, and 13% were conducted by phone. The use of remote modalities was necessary due to continued restrictions on the movement of women and girls, as well as of Afghan female humanitarian staff. Female-headed households made up 48% of all household interviews. Among all heads of household, those aged 35–44 years represented 35%. Meanwhile, households headed by individuals aged 45–54 years accounted for 24%, and those headed by individuals aged 25–34 years composed approximately 24% of households surveyed.

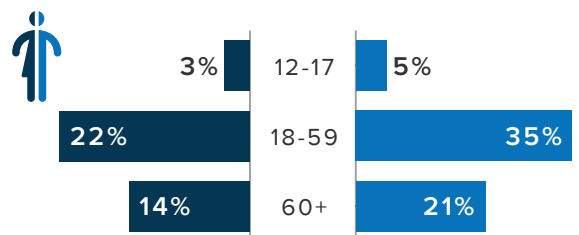
Rural areas represented 65% of all households surveyed, compared with 18% in urban areas. This underscores UNHCR’s sustained commitment to identifying protection risks and assistance gaps in remote and hard-to-reach locations, including in Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs).

Assessments also included 1,021 key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted across 34 provinces and 151 districts. **47% of key informants were women**, mainly due to limited mobility and access constraints. The largest share of key informants came from host communities (57%), followed by returnees (23%).

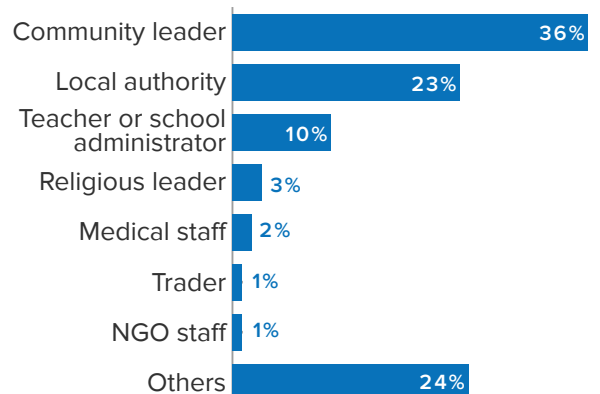
Population type



Age & gender



Key informants



Most KIs were conducted in rural areas, which comprised **67% of respondents, whereas 15% were from urban settings**. The majority of key informants were aged 35–44 years (31%), followed closely by those aged 45–55 years (30%).

Key informants were purposively selected based on their direct engagement with communities and their knowledge of local governance, services, and protection issues, ensuring the collection of relevant and context-specific qualitative insights. To complement the quantitative household and key informant data with qualitative information, UNHCR’s partners conducted a total of 1,657 focus group discussions in 32 provinces (157 districts), engaging approximately 17,770 men, women, boys, and girls of different age groups and vulnerabilities. 42% of participants were returnees, followed by host community members (23%) and IDPs (20%).

Despite efforts to employ remote modalities, female participation remained lower than male participation, with men aged 18 and above accounting for an average of 30% of participants, compared to 20% for women aged 18+. This disparity reflects access and participation constraints for women, including limitations on mobility, availability, and engagement in mixed or remote consultation modalities.

To mitigate this imbalance, UNHCR increased the proportion of women engaged through household surveys and key informant interviews.



Families at the Torkham border, newly arrived from Pakistan, prepare for the next step of their journey. With uncertain futures ahead, they are ready to begin rebuilding their lives in Afghanistan. © UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

IDENTIFIED VULNERABILITIES



56% of respondents have vulnerabilities (affecting 63% of female headed households)



38% of returnees & **70%** of IDP returnees experienced stress



5% of heads of households with disabilities

Mental health challenges remain widespread, affecting **38% of returnees and 70% of IDP returnees**. Overall, 39% of heads of households reported experiencing stress, while stress levels among other family members were even higher at 47%. These findings underscore the ongoing need for strengthened MHPSS support at the household level.

Lack of income (18%) and **lack of livelihood opportunities** (15%) were the main sources of stress reported, alongside **food insecurity, employment restrictions, severe economic hardship, and limited access to essential services**, especially **denied access to education for women and girls**.

Behavioural changes observed in households were consistent throughout the year and included family members appearing sad and stressed, loss of appetite, withdrawal, and violent or aggressive behaviour.

CBPM monitors observed that a high proportion of **women, girls, children, persons with disabilities**, and **individuals with specific legal or protection needs** were in vulnerable situations across the reporting period. Overall, **79%** of these groups were identified as being vulnerable due to their inability to access essential services such as those for women and girls, children, cash assistance, legal assistance, and MHPSS.

In addition, **36% of households consistently reported that their members were unable to access existing basic services**, such as livelihoods, food assistance, healthcare, shelter, and water, across all quarters. **Female-headed**

households, elderly-headed households, and persons with physical disabilities were disproportionately affected.

Participants reported that these risks persist mainly due to **governance gaps, chronic poverty, weak infrastructure, gaps in access to humanitarian assistance, and lack of civil documentation**. These underlying issues showed little change over the reporting period.

To address these issues, communities highlighted the need to prioritize the recovery of livelihoods, health services, infrastructure rehabilitation, WASH improvements, and education support. They emphasized that strengthening these core areas would help improve access to essential services, increase opportunities, and reduce overall vulnerability.

The main reasons behind the gaps – as reported by households – included high costs, unavailability of services, lack of transportation or inability to pay for transportation, and movement restrictions imposed on women, such as the absence of a mahram (male guardian for women).

Awareness of services also remained limited: over the reporting period, **73% of households reported** that they would not know where to access services for women and girls in case someone in their community experienced violence. Similarly, **66% reported not knowing where to access legal assistance**, and **63%** indicated that they would not know where to access safety and security services.

These findings highlight that vulnerability is multidimensional, affecting access to both specialized and basic services and disproportionately impacting women, girls, and other vulnerable groups. The persistent barriers underscore the need for targeted protection interventions, improved information dissemination, and efforts to address cultural, financial, and mobility-related obstacles.

SAFETY & FREEDOM



44% of female respondents faced movement restrictions



23% of children engaged in income-generating activities

Restrictions on freedom of movement for women and girls were consistently reported throughout the year. Around **44% of households indicated that women and girls** in their communities experience limitations in their ability to move freely. **The main reasons** for movement limitations included **mahram requirements, socio-cultural barriers, discrimination, harassment, bullying, fear of personal safety, and lack of civil documentation.**

Assessments indicate that **women and girls continue to suffer protection risks**, including **family violence, gender-based violence, early or forced marriage, and restrictions on participation in public life.** Women and girls reported avoiding markets, social gathering spaces, parks, education facilities, and routes used for collecting water or firewood due to safety and harassment concerns.

After women and girls, **persons with disabilities and elderly individuals were the most likely to report movement restrictions.** Key barriers included insecurity, safety concerns, cultural norms, poor infrastructure, transport challenges, government restrictions, and economic constraints, with the overall impact on mobility increasing over time as people get older.

Child engagement in income-generating activities remained a significant protection concern throughout 2025. Overall, **23%** of households reported that their children were involved in income-generating or labour-related tasks during the year. Boys were primarily engaged in agricultural work and collecting firewood, while girls were mostly involved in cooking, fetching water, and cleaning. Of particular concern, **20%** of households reported that **children performed income-generating or labour-related activities during school hours**, directly affecting their school attendance and limiting their access to education.

Communities provided recommendations for ensuring children's safety, emphasizing five priorities: improving access to education, strengthening parenting and child rights awareness, expanding child protection services, enhancing healthcare access, and increasing child-friendly and recreational spaces.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE & CIVIL DOCUMENTATION



61% reported lack of civil documentation



53% reported barriers accessing legal services



86% of households relied on community elders to resolve land disputes

Lack of civil documentation remained one of the most critical protection challenges throughout 2025. Over the year, 61% of households reported having at least one member in need of civil documentation, with women and girls disproportionately affected. **Returnees and IDPs consistently reported higher rates** of missing documentation compared to host communities. The most commonly missing documents included Tazkira (in both paper and electronic format) and birth certificates.

Key barriers to accessing documentation reported by respondents included high costs, lengthy and complex procedures, socio-cultural barriers, inability to travel to places of origin, and lack of information on procedures.

Challenges related to housing, land and property (HLP) were reported throughout the year, including disputes over access and land use, rent disagreements, harassment by landlords, ownership or boundary conflicts, and threats of eviction – with over 12% of households reporting such challenges. Most households reported relying on informal dispute resolution mechanisms. About 86% relied on community elders to resolve such disputes, while the remaining households sought support from public offices, village land committees, or faith leaders.

53% of respondents reported that they and their family members were **unable to access legal services**, including civil documentation and assistance with HLP rights and disputes. Lack of documentation continued to restrict access to basic services, humanitarian assistance, education, and freedom of movement.

Regarding solutions, respondents emphasized the need for financial support and fees to be waived (19%), as well as for clearer processes and more accessible service points, while highlighting the continued importance of awareness-raising. Respondents also highlighted the need to simplify procedures, decentralize services and expand mobile outreach.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS & PREVENTION OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE



79% of respondents were unaware of feedback mechanisms



66% reported not knowing any system to report misconduct, exploitation, or abuse by aid workers

Limited awareness of feedback and complaints mechanisms was consistently reported. Some **79%** of respondents indicated **they were not aware of any mechanism to raise concerns or complaints related to services or humanitarian staff behaviour**. Among those who had received information, **22% mentioned** community members as the main source of information, followed by social workers.

External interference when accessing assistance was reported by 16% of households, including involvement by community leaders, discrimination, interference by de facto authorities, and lack of female staff. Knowledge about expected behavior of aid workers and available reporting mechanisms remained limited. Meanwhile, **62% of households** reported that people in their community did not know what behavior could be expected from aid workers, **while 66% indicated the absence of a system to report misconduct, exploitation, or abuse**. This indicates the need to

strengthen awareness-raising on feedback mechanisms and community-level accountability as well as training for aid workers.

As key reasons for not reporting incidents, respondents indicated lack of knowledge of where to report, absence of reporting systems, fear of consequences, social stigma, and limited awareness about exploitation and abuse. Women and girls faced more challenges due to cultural barriers and movement restrictions.

Despite these challenges, households consistently identified **hotlines (24%) as the preferred reporting channel, followed by community committees (23%), complaint boxes (21%), and focal points from UN or NGO staff (15%)**. This highlights the importance of accessible, confidential, and culturally sensitive reporting mechanisms.

Overall, the data suggest limited awareness of aid worker accountability and reporting channels, compounded by interference and sociocultural barriers, which particularly affect women, girls, and other vulnerable groups. Addressing these gaps is critical to ensuring safe, equitable, and effective access to humanitarian assistance. Persistent barriers underscore the need for targeted protection interventions, improved information dissemination, and efforts to address cultural, financial, and mobility-related obstacles.

ACCESS TO SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE PROVIDED



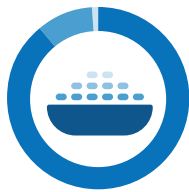
89% of households identified food as top priority need

Food assistance was identified as the most urgent need, with 89% of households reporting this as a need they have faced in the last three months. Women and girls were mainly identified as the most affected groups in terms of unmet needs.

Households also reported challenges accessing health services, MHPSS, safe drinking water, education, and shelter. Key barriers to accessing services included unavailability of services, high costs (including transportation), lack of information, lack of documentation, and movement restrictions.

Irrespective of the gender of the head of household, all respondents highlighted that among those facing access challenges, **women and girls were by far the most affected by limited access to key services** including health, legal, education, civil documentation, food, and MHPSS.

Female-headed households in need of food assistance




- Yes (89%)
- No (10%)
- Prefer not to say (1%)

All categories of respondents such as returnees, IDPs, and host community members were particularly affected by overcrowded shelters. Other shelter-related concerns include damaged housing, lack of protective walls and doors, and limited privacy. These challenges were reported particularly among returnees and IDPs. **Returnees are the most at risk of eviction within the next few months**, with 23% of surveyed returnees identifying this as a key risk. These findings highlight the need for shelter rehabilitation support, and targeted winterization interventions to strengthen household resilience and ensure protection of the most vulnerable groups.


Livelihoods and employment were also identified as urgent needs, especially among KIs and participants in focus group discussions.

To address these challenges, participants recommended expanding food and cash assistance, improving transportation options, and strengthening access to education. Additional suggestions included enhancing civil documentation support, increasing access to electricity and renewable energy, and improving WASH, health, and shelter services.

SOURCE OF INCOME AND COPING STRATEGIES



83% of households engaged in informal labour as their main source of income



62% of households cannot afford daily expenses

62% of households surveyed could not afford daily life expenses such as food, rent, and other basic critical needs.

83% of households relied on informal income-generating activities, such as casual or seasonal labor, as their main source of livelihood. In addition, 80% of households reported having accrued debt.

The lack of economic opportunities, entrenched poverty, repeated and protracted displacement, and a shrinking protection space have been **eroding people’s resilience** and point to the critical need for livelihood and economic empowerment interventions.

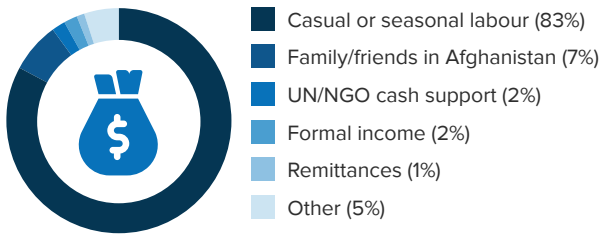
Due to financial constraints and high poverty, **many families resorted to harmful coping mechanisms**, with severe implications for women and children. Most households borrow money to meet basic expenses, with even higher prevalence among refugees and returnees who have been forced to return. Other coping mechanisms included skipping meals or reducing meal sizes, dependency on relatives and friends’ support, and selling assets (including livestock, jewelry, furniture, etc.).

Respondents reported that, when families lose their income, **they primarily cope through borrowing and taking on debt as the most common strategy**. Many households also rely on assistance from relatives, community members or NGOs, while others resort to selling household assets. Engagement in casual or informal labour, child labour or begging, was noted as other coping mechanisms.

Some families report having attempted to move in search of livelihoods, but fewer respondents reported this option as the year went on.

The findings highlight the **urgent need to support vulnerable families through integrated comprehensive** interventions which tackle multiple and overlapping gaps and risks, including child protection, livelihoods, and community engagement.

Sources of income



CAUSES OF DISPLACEMENT & INTENTIONS FOR RETURN AND REINTEGRATION



45% of returnees interviewed returned within last year

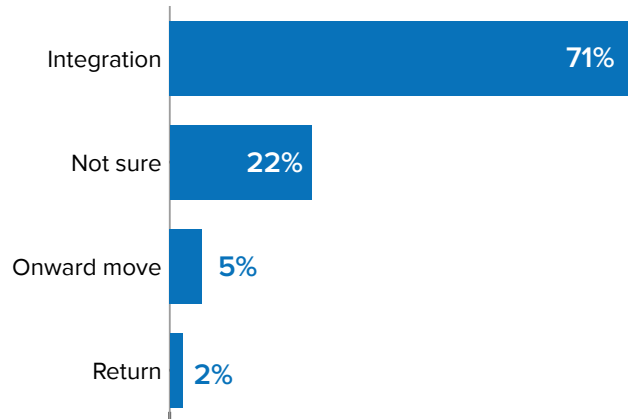
3% of IDPs intend to return to district of origin

The main reasons for displacement of IDPs and returnees in the last three years were natural disasters, security concerns¹, and communal tensions.

Only a small proportion of displaced households expressed the intention to return to places of origin. The main reasons cited include a lack of humanitarian assistance, services, or infrastructure. Meanwhile, 71% of IDPs and returnees preferred to remain in their current location, primarily due to family considerations, presence of relatives, economic opportunities, and children’s education.

As per the upcoming graph (22%) of displaced households expressed uncertainty about whether to return to their places of origin, integrate into their local communities, or move onward. This is mainly due to overall security concerns, economic hardship, children’s education, natural disasters, and lack of humanitarian assistance.

Intended plans among IDPs



The findings indicate that returnees’ successful reintegration hinges on five core needs: **adequate housing and shelter, livelihood and employment opportunities, civil documentation and legal support, access to healthcare, and access to education.**

The findings also reveal that 38% of households observed significant changes in local climate and weather patterns, including heat waves, drought, flooding, and shifts in rainfall patterns.

The majority (over 80%) of respondents reported lack of services available in their communities as affected by climate change. Women and girls were identified as the most affected groups, given their increased exposure to water scarcity, financial hardship, and reduced mobility.

Respondents suggested five key measures for addressing risks related to climate change: awareness and community training, improved infrastructure and drainage systems, strengthened roads, bridges, and culverts, effective early warning systems, and evacuation planning with accessible safe shelters.

¹ Security concerns reported by interviewed individuals were primarily linked to inter-community conflicts

KEY COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Across assessments, the following **recommendations** from communities emerge as priority interventions to address their needs and meet the current gaps:

- Livelihoods and employment support
- Civil documentation
- Health and WASH services
- Shelter and housing
- Cash and food assistance,
- Education
- Specific support to displaced and returnee communities

Together, the findings reflect recurrent and cross-cutting needs raised by communities and highlight a shared call for strengthened economic opportunities, improved and equitable access to basic services, enabling legal identity, and reliable assistance to support community stability and resilience. Sustained assistance to displaced, returned, and vulnerable populations also emerges as a key need to support reintegration and avoid endless cycles of displacement.



Legal Counsellor, guiding families on obtaining vital civil documents like Tazkira (National ID card). Herat province.
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