AFGHANISTAN QUARTERLY PROTECTION MONITORING SUMMARY

APRIL TO JUNE 2026



Focus Group Discussion facilitated by a UNHCR partner staff as part of community-based protection monitoring, Dobandi Arabha , Chardara , Kunduz Province.

2,564 assessments conducted and **18,039** persons reached

Coverage: 74 districts in **23 provinces**

55% of households interviewed are headed by women

Proportion of household heads **with disabilities: 20%**

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan's complex protection context is characterized by continued large-scale returns mainly from Pakistan and Iran, ongoing displacement, economic hardship, and sustained protection risks, especially for women and girls and other vulnerable groups. 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.

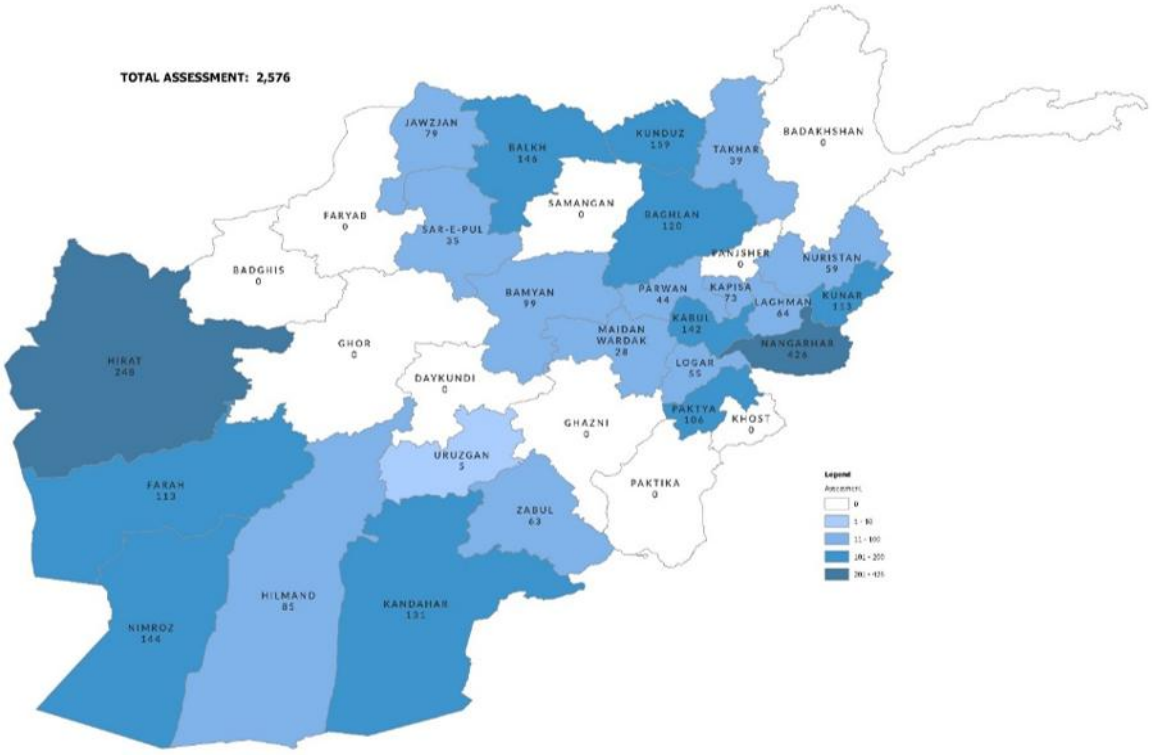
The analysis presented in this report is based on data collected through UNHCR's CBPM tools in the second quarter of 2026, including household-level surveys, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). During the reporting period, revised CBPM tools and methodologies were rolled out to improve the collection, analysis, and reporting of community-based protection information. 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 analysis and information products of the Afghanistan Protection Cluster. Survey locations are selected based on the concentration of returnees and displaced populations. The CBPM covers UNHCR population groups of concern, including returnees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), IDP returnees, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as members of host communities.

Key Highlights

- **Women and girls** continue **to face significant challenges in accessing basic services and assistance**, reflecting systemic discrimination, movement restrictions, and limited availability of specialized protection services. CBPM data also indicates widespread GBV risks, including restrictions on freedom of movement, family violence, denial of access to information and justice, and harmful practices.
- **Among the households surveyed, 53%** reported that at least one **family member does not have civil documentation** such as a national ID card. The lack of documentation continues to restrict access to basic services, humanitarian and government assistance, education, legal support and freedom of movement.
- In addition, **73% of female-headed households** were identified as having at least one vulnerability, including persons with life-threatening health conditions, persons without civil documentation, child caregivers, older persons at risk and persons unable to work. Moreover, high levels of stress were reported among returnees and IDPs, mainly linked to lack of livelihood opportunities, food insecurity, restrictions on employment, denial of access to education and limited access to services.

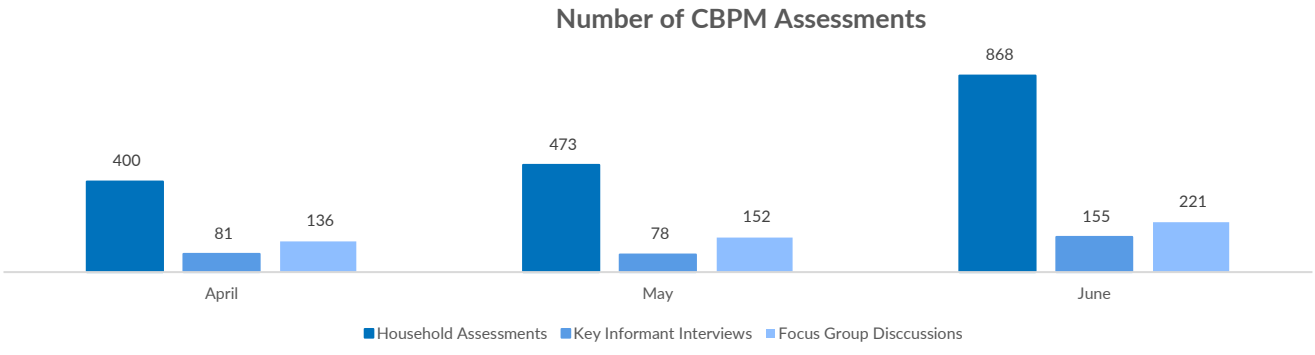
- Healthcare, livelihood support, food assistance, water services and electricity were among the main unmet needs reported by households unable to access services.

Geographical coverage of CBPM Assessments



- Many families also reported resorting to harmful coping mechanisms, such as borrowing money, skipping meals or reducing meal sizes, selling assets, relying on support from friends and family, and sending children to work. These coping mechanisms are driven by poverty, debt and limited livelihood opportunities, and increase protection risks, including child labour, school dropout, forced marriage and child marriage. The findings highlight the strong linkages between socio-economic vulnerability, displacement status and protection risks, requiring integrated programming responses across different sectors.

OVERVIEW OF THE DATA COLLECTED



Household Assessments

- During the second quarter of 2026, a total of **1,741 household monitoring visits** were carried out across **15 provinces (27 districts),** covering approximately **12,666 individuals**. A total of **92%** of **interviews** were conducted **in person**, and **8%** 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 on Afghan female humanitarian staff who face increasing difficulties in carrying out their duties.
- **Female-headed households** made up **55%** of all household interviews.
- Among all heads of household, those aged **35–59** years represented **73%.** Meanwhile, households headed by individuals aged **18–34** years accounted for **20%,** and those headed by individuals aged **60+** years accounted for approximately **6%** of households surveyed.
- **62%** of **households interviewed were returnees,** reflecting concerns and protection risks faced by this demographic group. Most respondents were women and children. Notwithstanding the prevailing restrictions, CBPM teams made dedicated efforts to ensure that the voices of women and girls were reflected in the assessment findings.

Case Story (Female-Headed Household)

A 40-year-old returnee woman recently returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan with her children after spending many years in exile. As the primary caregiver and head of the household, she is responsible for supporting her family. Her husband has severe physical disabilities due to years of strenuous labour and is no longer able to work.

Prior to return, the woman supported the family through agricultural and daily wage labour. Since returning to Afghanistan, limited livelihood opportunities, combined with her husband's disability and the family's economic situation, have made it difficult to meet basic needs. The household struggles to cover essential expenses, including rent, food, and other daily necessities.

The family's return journey was particularly challenging, involving forced return, limited access to food and water during transit, and difficulties rebuilding their lives after return. The household remains highly vulnerable due to economic hardship, dependency burden, and limited livelihood opportunities.

- **Rural areas** represented **58%** of all households surveyed, compared with **16% in urban locations**. 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).

Key Informant Interviews

- Key informants were purposively selected based on their direct engagement with communities and their familiarity with local dynamics, service provision and protection issues, ensuring the collection of reliable and context-specific qualitative insights.[1]
- **Assessments** reached **314 key informant interviews (KIIs)** across **21 provinces and 50** districts. **40%** of key informants **were women**. It is difficult to increase the proportion of female KIIs, mainly due to limited mobility and access constraints. The largest share of key informants came from **host communities (61%),** followed by IDP **returnees** and **IDPs (13%).**
- Most KIIs were conducted in rural areas, which comprised 61% of respondents, whereas 15% were from urban settings. Most key informants were aged 35–59 years (77%), followed closely by those aged 18–34 years (19%).

Focus Group Discussions

- To complement the quantitative household and key informant data with qualitative information, UNHCR's partners conducted **509 focus group** discussions in **23 provinces (74 districts),** engaging approximately **5,056 men, women, boys, and girls** of different age groups and vulnerabilities**.**

[1] "Other" includes key informants not covered by the listed categories, such as religious leaders, social workers, pharmacists, local government officials, humanitarian workers and representatives of community-based organizations.

- **Returnees** represented the largest share of **focus group discussion participants** (46%), followed by **IDPs and IDP returnees**, each accounting for **19%.**
- Despite efforts to use remote consultation modalities, women's participation remained lower than men's, with men representing 70% of participants compared to **30% women**. This gap reflects continued access and participation constraints for women, including restrictions on mobility, limited availability and challenges engaging in mixed or remote consultation formats. To mitigate this imbalance, UNHCR increased the proportion of women engaged through household surveys and key informant interviews.

IDENTIFIED VULNERABILITIES

62% of households **reported vulnerabilities** (**73%** by female-headed households)

Over 65% of returnees and IDPs experienced stress affecting their day-to-day life

- While 71% of female-headed households were identified as having at least one vulnerability, the proportion among male-headed households was 89%, indicating that male-headed households were more likely to report vulnerabilities. The most frequently reported vulnerability categories included child caregiving responsibilities **(22%),** persons with life-threatening health conditions **(7%),** persons without civil documentation **(6%)** and older persons at risk or unable to work **(3%).**
- **67% of returnees** and **64% of IDPs** indicated that they or their family members experienced feelings of stress which affected their day-to-day life, pointing to a high prevalence of mental health issues among displacement-affected communities'. **The main stressors** identified were lack of livelihood opportunities/loss of income (22%), food insecurity (20%), restrictions on employment (13%), denied access to education (12%), and unavailability or lack of access to basic services (10%).
- **To cope** with intensely stressful situations, respondents mostly reported **seeking support from family members (39%) and close friends (39%),** followed by **medical doctors (5%), local community leaders or religious figures (2%),** and specialized mental health and psychosocial support **(MHPSS) counsellors (2%).** This indicates that informal support networks remain the main coping mechanism for affected households, particularly where access to specialized services is limited.
- **CBPM monitors observed that 82**% of women, children, persons with disabilities, or individuals with specific legal or protection needs were unable to access specific protection services such as legal, protection case management, MHPSS, and civil documentation mainly due to unaffordability of services, long distance and lack of identify documents, lack of Mahram and difficult access to persons with disabilities and lack of female staff
- In addition, **77% of households** reported that **they did not know where to access services** for **women** and **girls** in case someone in their community experienced violence. The responses were consistent across male- and female-headed households, highlighting the lack of available services to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV) as well as the limited awareness among community members about where to seek support.

SAFETY & FREEDOM

36% of households reported movement restrictions for **women**

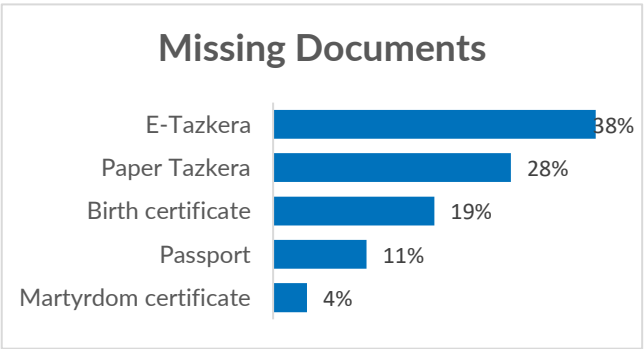
- **A total of 36% of surveyed households** reported that there are **places in the community that women and girls cannot access,** highlighting significant restrictions on their freedom of movement and participation in public life.
- **The main reported barrier to freedom of movement** is the absence of a Mahram, a male guardian or chaperone without whom women cannot move freely outside the home. The absence of a mahram was reported by 37% of respondents. A further 28% of respondents highlighted family-related barriers to movement, and 10% reported discrimination. In **addition, 37% of households** reported that there are areas in the community that women and girls avoid because they do not feel safe. The main reasons cited include mahram requirements for women and girls (32%), family-imposed or socio-cultural norms (18%), not feeling safe going outside alone (16%), and fear of harassment (10%).
- Households also reported various protection risks within their communities, particularly affecting women and girls. For girls, the main protection concerns identified were denial of access to information and substance abuse, both reported at (10%), followed by forced labour (8%), family violence (7%), denial of access to justice (6%), and early and forced marriage (5%).
- For women, the main protection risks reported were restrictions on freedom of movement (18%), family violence (14%), denial of access to information (10%), armed conflict (8%), and denial of access to justice (6%).
- **These findings indicate persistent protection risks within the community**, with women and girls facing distinct but overlapping vulnerabilities related to restricted movement, violence, harmful practices, limited access to information and justice, and broader safety concerns. They also point to widespread gender-based violence risks, which may remain underreported due to stigma and the normalization of harmful practices, including economic, psychological and physical violence.

CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

53% reported lack of **civil documentation**

68% reported barriers in **accessing legal services**

- **53% of all households** surveyed had members who did not have key civil documentation such as national ID cards (called "Tazkeras") or birth certificates**.** Women and girls are by far the most affected by this gap, with 33% women and 32% girls among the reported cases. Returnees displayed significantly higher rates of civil documentation gaps, with over **50%** of respondents reporting family members without civil documentation, even rising to **64% for IDP returnees.** By contrast, 46% of host community families reported this gap.



- The main missing documents were electronic and paper Tazkeras (reported by 38% and 28% of households, respectively). **Women and girls accounted for 23 percent and 21 percent** of reported cases, respectively, compared **with 10 percent** for men **and 23 percent for boys.** The main reasons reported were that **documents had never been obtained** (41%), **fees were unaffordable** (30%),

procedures were long and difficult **(8%),** and households faced socio-cultural barriers **(6%)** or lacked knowledge of the relevant procedures **(5%).**

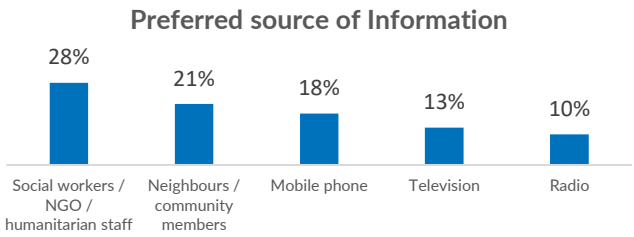
- **In addition,** the findings show that **68%** of respondents reported **being unable to access legal services** to obtain **civil documentation** and **Housing, Land and Property (HLP) services.**
- **The lack of documentation** has a significant **impact, as 32% of respondents** reported that it **prevents** them from accessing basic services. It also creates barriers to receiving public or humanitarian assistance, accessing education and enjoying freedom of movement.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED PEOPLE AND PREVENTION OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

78% of respondents were unaware of feedback mechanisms

67% reported no system to report misconduct, exploitation, or abuse by aid workers.

- According to CBPM findings, **78% of respondents were not aware of the multiple humanitarian feedback or reporting mechanisms** to raise concerns or complaints related to humanitarian services or staff behavior. In response, UNHCR CO is taking additional measures to strengthen CFM capacity and will further share the findings with the Accountability and Disability Inclusion Working Group (ADIWG) for follow-up.
- Among respondents who had received information about basic services in their area, **the main sources of information were social workers, NGO or humanitarian staff (28%)**, followed by neighbors or community members (21%), Respondents also obtained information by calling hotlines to request it (18%)



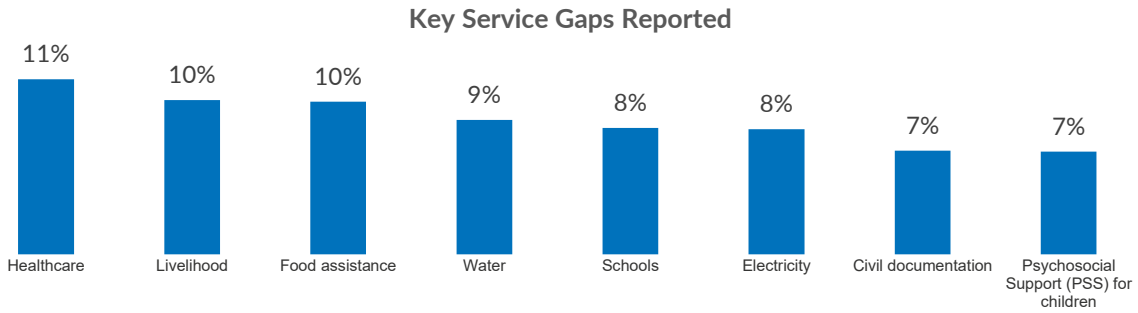
- **Around 12% of households** reported facing **external interference** when accessing humanitarian assistance. The main forms of interference included involvement of community leaders in **beneficiary selection or distribution processes (25%), lack of female staff** among aid service providers **(24%),** interference by de facto authorities **(DfA)** in beneficiary selection or distribution processes **(23%),** and restrictions on movement, including absence of a mahram **(14%).** These barriers particularly affected women and girls' ability to access assistance and services safely and equitably.
- Findings show that communities have **limited awareness** about how aid workers are expected to behave and how to report concerns. Specifically, **69%** of households said people do not know what conduct to expect from aid workers, while **67%** indicated there is either **no reporting system or** they are unaware of one for misconduct, exploitation, or abuse, including sexual exploitation and abuse **(SEA).** This highlights a concerning lack of clear information on community rights, expected standards of aid worker behavior, and safe reporting. Thirty percent of households indicated that some community members encountered barriers to reporting exploitation and abuse by aid workers. Among these respondents, women were most frequently identified as facing such challenges (**27%**), followed by girls (**24%**) and persons with disabilities (**13%**).
- Regarding **preferred reporting channels,** respondents identified hotlines as the most preferred option (24%), followed by focal points from the UN and NGOs (22%), complaint boxes (20%), community committees (19%) and help desks during aid distribution (9%).

ACCESS TO SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

42% of households reported not being able to access services

14% of households reported experiencing problems related to housing, land and property

- **Access to services remains a key concern.** While 56% of surveyed households reported being able to access available services, **42%** were unable to do so, showing that service availability does not necessarily ensure effective access.
- The **main unmet needs** reported by households were inability to access services were healthcare, livelihood support, food assistance, water and electricity.



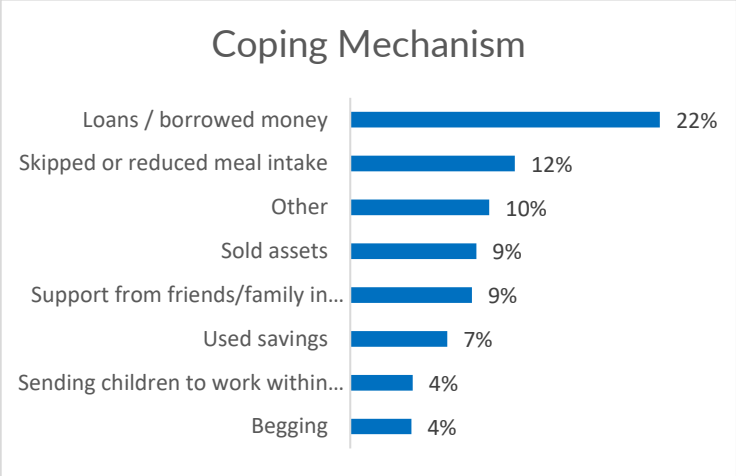
- **Women and girls** were identified as the most affected group by access constraints, particularly in relation to health, legal assistance, education, civil documentation, food assistance and MHPSS. Key **barriers** included **high service and transportation costs, lack of available services, lack of civil documentation, movement restrictions, cultural norms** and **absence of a mahram.**
- **Housing, Land and Property (HLP)** issues also remain a concern. Refugee returnees and undocumented households were reported as among the groups most at risk of eviction within the next 12 months. In addition, **14%** of households reported HLP-related challenges, including rent disputes, harassment by landlords, ownership disputes over land and property, and unlawful occupation of property. Most affected households relied on community elders to resolve disputes, followed by public and DfA's offices, *shura* (informal body based on Islamic law), family or relatives, and the formal justice system.
- These findings highlight the need to improve affordability and physical access to services, strengthen information-sharing and referral mechanisms, support access to civil documentation, expand specialized protection and MHPSS services, and increase access to legal assistance and formal dispute-resolution mechanisms for vulnerable households.

SOURCE OF INCOME AND COPING STRATEGIES

86% of households reported **income was insufficient to sustain themselves**

93% reported having **accrued debt**

- **86%** of households reported that their income was insufficient to sustain the household, while 93% reported having incurred debt to meet basic needs. This highlights the severe economic hardship faced by Afghan families and their limited capacity to meet essential needs.
- **Due to financial constraints and high poverty**, many families reported having to resort to **harmful coping mechanisms,** with severe implications that especially impact women and children. CBPM data indicate that most **households borrow money (23%)** to cope with their financial problems. The prevalence was even higher for refugees and forced returnees surveyed.
- **Nine percent of households** reported that **their children are involved in income-generating or labour-related activities.** The most commonly reported tasks included garbage collection and fetching water (19%), agricultural work (16%), looking after livestock (14%), street vending (8%), domestic work (8%), transporting people or goods (7%), working with machinery or carrying heavy loads (4%), and working as waiters (3%).
- **Of particular concern, 84%** of households with working children reported that these activities are performed during school hours, directly affecting school attendance and limiting children's access to education.
- **Other coping mechanisms** identified were skipping meals or reducing meal sizes (14%), and selling assets (11%), support from friends and family in Afghanistan (10%), and sending children to work within Afghanistan (5%).
- The findings highlight the urgent need to support vulnerable families through integrated programming interventions, including child protection, livelihoods, and community engagement.

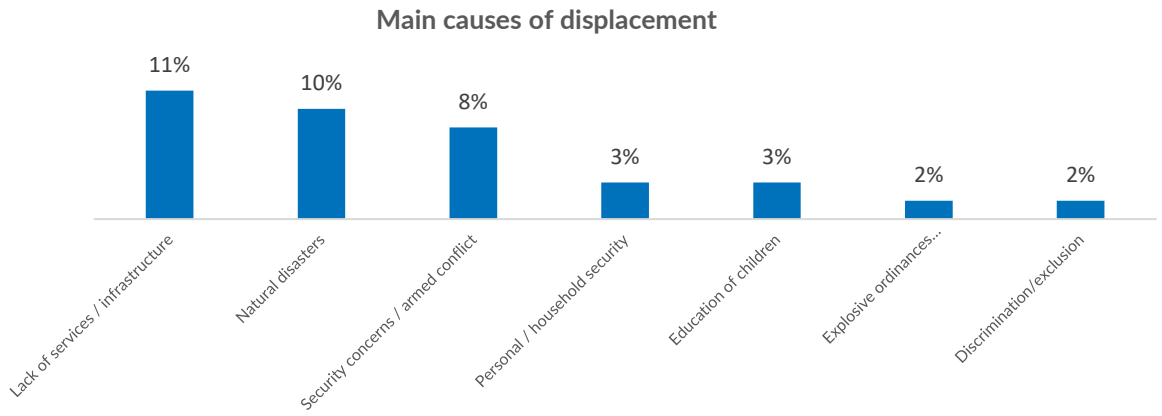


LEADING CAUSES OF DISPLACEMENT

33% of returnees reported having returned **within the past year**

10% of returnees displaced due to natural disasters

- **Among individuals who returned to Afghanistan** within the past 10 months to 12 months, the majority reported an intention to remain in their current location (94%). A smaller proportion indicated an intention to return to their country of asylum (3%) or relocate elsewhere within Afghanistan (3%). Among those considering onward movement, the main reasons cited are as follows.



- The leading reported causes of displacement among returnees included lack of services and infrastructure (11%), natural disasters (10%), security concerns or armed conflict (8%), concerns about personal or household security (3%), education-related concerns for children (3%) and explosive ordnance and discrimination or exclusion (2% each). The remaining 10% respondents attributed their displacement to natural disasters, demonstrating the link between displacement and climate-related hazards. Respondents also reported economic hardship (45%), lack of humanitarian assistance (19%), limited services and infrastructure (15%) and concerns about personal or household security (5%).
- **Among IDPs** whose displacement lasted one year or more, **52%** expressed an intention to locally integrate, while **5%** intended to move onward. Meanwhile, **39%** remained uncertain about whether to return, integrate locally, or move onward, primarily due to a lack of humanitarian assistance (23%) and economic hardship (18%).
- 10% of returnees reported natural disasters as the reason why they were displaced. In addition, 17% of households reported noticeable changes in local climate and weather patterns. The most frequently reported changes were flooding (33%), heatwaves (31%), and drought (20%). A large majority of respondents (94%) reported that no services were available in their communities to support people affected by climate-related impact. Women, girls and older persons were identified as the most affected groups, mainly due to increased exposure to water shortages, livelihood pressures and reduced mobility.



Figure 2: *Thousands of Afghans return via the Islam Qala border in Herat as mass returns surge from Iran, with many arriving in difficult conditions and limited belongings. @UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production*

UNHCR Afghanistan

September 2026