



Children collect safe water at a UNICEF-supported tap at the Islam Qala border crossing in Herat. UNICEF delivers up to 120,000 litres daily for Afghan returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

unicef 
for every child

Humanitarian Action for Children

Afghanistan

HIGHLIGHTS¹

- People in Afghanistan continue to face an array of interconnected crises – natural disasters, a shrinking protection space, fragile economy, limited access to basic services and climate-induced shocks – all preventing recovery from more than four decades of conflict. In 2026, an estimated 21.9 million people, including 11.6 million children, will require humanitarian assistance.
- The protection crisis is deepening, with women of reproductive age, children, youth and marginalized groups facing escalating risks. As conditions worsen, UNICEF's continued presence is vital to deliver essential services and safeguard the most vulnerable.
- Afghan women and girls face a systemic rights crisis. Bans on secondary education and workforce participation, coupled with restrictive daily-life rules, have escalated protection risks and threaten long-term resilience. The impacts will be felt for generations to come.
- Chronic underinvestment in the WASH sector – compounded by relentless climate shocks – has intensified humanitarian needs and weakened community resilience.
- UNICEF urgently requires \$949.1 million to reach 12 million people, including 6.5 million children, with life-saving aid and basic services. This investment will address immediate humanitarian needs and strengthen long-term community resilience. This support is critical to ensuring every child in Afghanistan has the chance to survive and thrive.

KEY PLANNED TARGETS



12 million

Number of people accessing healthcare in priority provinces



1.3 million

Number of children 6-59 months with Severe Wasting and High-Risk MAM admitted for treatment



5.7 million

Number of children in public education (including shock-affected/vulnerable girls and boys) reached with emergency education support

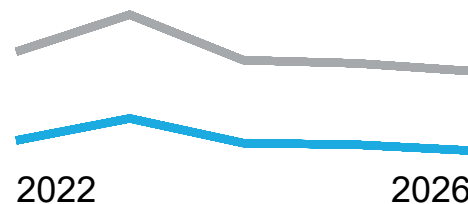


2.9 million

Number of people in humanitarian contexts reached with appropriate drinking water services, through UNICEF supported programmes

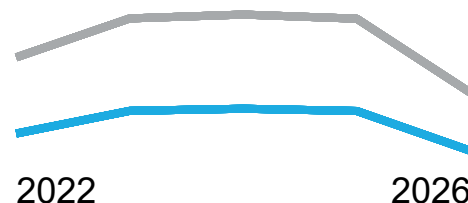
IN NEED

21.9 million people^{2,3} **11.6 million children⁴**



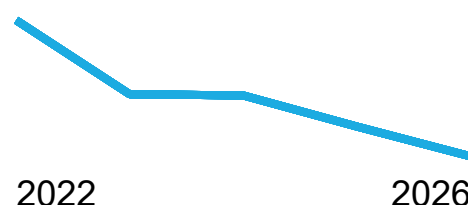
TO BE REACHED

12 million people^{5,6,7} **6.5 million children⁸**



FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

US\$949.1 million



HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND NEEDS

Humanitarian needs in Afghanistan are intensifying amid climate shocks, economic decline and regional instability. Children are experiencing the worst effects of these crises. The political transition, compounded by recurrent floods, droughts, landslides and earthquakes, continues to strain fragile systems. Restrictions on women and girls, coupled with reduced funding, have deepened protection risks and eroded household resilience. The return of more than 2.2 million Afghans to the country in 2025⁹ has overwhelmed local capacities, amplifying vulnerabilities.

Protection risks remain severe as women of reproductive age, children, youth and marginalized groups face disproportionate threats, while restrictive policies continue to undermine rights and hinder Afghanistan's social and economic recovery. Despite 6.8 million children enrolled in primary school, roughly half to one third of school-aged children remain out of school. Girls are excluded beyond Grade 6, leaving 2.2 million girls without access to secondary education. Chronic underfunding, lack of qualified teachers (especially in rural areas) and shrinking community-based education programmes have undermined quality.

WASH needs are escalating. In 2025, 25 per cent of households relied on unimproved water sources, and 46 per cent of households cited access to safe drinking water as their top concern – a sharp increase from 31 per cent in 2024. Poor hygiene and limited water access continue to drive malnutrition and disease outbreaks. Afghanistan ranks fourth globally for wasting among children and is among the hardest-hit countries in the global food and nutrition crisis. The latest projections are stark: 3.7 million children under age 5 are wasted, nearly 1 million are severely wasted and at imminent risk of death, 700,000 face life-threatening moderate acute malnutrition, 2.7 million suffer early-stage wasting and 1.2 million pregnant and breastfeeding women are acutely malnourished, jeopardizing maternal and child survival and perpetuating a cycle of malnutrition. This is a generational emergency.

Reduced funding closed 422 healthcare facilities in 2025, impacting 3 million people. Rising costs, medicine shortages and long travel times have left families, especially women in rural areas, without access to essential care.

Climate-related shocks and environmental hazards are further eroding resilience across the country, pushing households towards negative coping strategies.

SECTOR NEEDS¹⁰



7.5 million
people in need of
nutrition assistance



7.4 million
Children in need of
protection services



7.1 million
children in need of
education support



15.9 million
People in need of
WASH services

STORY FROM THE FIELD



A UNICEF-supported female health worker examines Shaheen, 1, in Khas Kunar camp, in late September 2025, just a few weeks after an earthquake hit. The temporary clinic is a vital source of care.

In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in eastern Afghanistan in September 2025, UNICEF-supported health workers continue to serve their communities with unwavering resolve. In just two weeks, more than 5,000 people had received primary health consultations, including 99 trauma patients and 37 safe deliveries and hundreds of antenatal and postnatal check-ups. Many of these dedicated health workers are themselves earthquake survivors who lost homes and loved ones yet still rise each morning to care for others. While the team continues to provide essential services from a temporary tent structure, preparations are underway to establish a hardwall facility.

In line with the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF will deliver integrated, life-saving assistance and maintain essential services for children through an agile, efficient and people-centred approach grounded in humanitarian principles, the realities of the operational environment, and shared responsibility, in line with the Humanitarian Reset. The response will connect emergency aid with basic human needs programmes to strengthen resilience and provide sustainable, inclusive support in protective, child-friendly environments. Core programming approaches will emphasize preparedness and anticipatory action, decentralization, advocacy, effective communication and efficient resource utilization. Integration across sectors will promote risk-informed, child-centred and gender-responsive programming, inclusive of children with disabilities, to achieve transformative, sustainable results for every child.

To address malnutrition and strengthen community resilience, UNICEF will leverage its multisectoral expertise, integrating health, WASH, social protection and social behaviour change programmes. Climate and the environment are key determinants of child well-being. UNICEF will expand climate-resilient technologies, promote solar-powered systems, and optimize water infrastructure to mitigate water scarcity, prevent disease outbreaks, and reduce child wasting.

UNICEF will enhance access to safe and equitable health services for vulnerable children and families, including secondary care for newborns and children. This will be achieved through community engagement, outreach, restoration of local health systems and capacity-building for healthcare workers. Preventive and curative nutrition services will follow a life-cycle approach, ensuring multisectoral support for children and women.

In education, UNICEF will continue to advocate for reopening secondary schools for girls, while supporting formal and non-formal learning, early childhood development and the reintegration of displaced and returnee children. These initiatives will strengthen institutions and promote early recovery.

UNICEF will also respond to critical protection needs by providing mental health and psychosocial support, case management for unaccompanied and separated children and targeted programmes to prevent gender-based violence. Safeguarding measures will include training humanitarian staff and ensuring accessible reporting mechanisms for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

To address sudden-onset disasters, UNICEF will enhance preparedness and activate cash-based Rapid Response Mechanisms. During winter months, it will scale up multipurpose cash assistance to help vulnerable households meet basic needs and prevent harmful coping strategies. Through expanded social protection programmes, UNICEF will help families withstand shocks, recover faster and stabilize livelihoods. With five zonal offices and eight outposts, UNICEF's strong field presence, along with its cluster leadership, will enable delivery of effective, multisectoral, community-based programmes for Afghanistan's most vulnerable populations. UNICEF will maintain its leadership within the reformed cluster system, including support to the Protection Cluster. UNICEF will continue to champion a lighter, more agile coordination model that protects, educates and sustains lives. At the same time, UNICEF will strengthen national capacity to coordinate humanitarian response at both national and subnational levels, ensuring an operations-focused system that fully integrates area-based coordination mechanisms.



Health (including public health emergencies)¹⁷

- 12,000,000 Number of people accessing healthcare in priority provinces
- 2,040,000 Children aged 6-59 months vaccinated against measles including in humanitarian situation



Nutrition

- 1,304,000 Number of children 6-59 months with Severe Wasting and High-Risk MAM admitted for treatment¹⁸
- 9,800,000 children 6-59 months who received vitamin A supplementation
- 2,625,000 primary caregivers of children 0-23 months who received infant and young child feeding counselling¹⁹



Child protection and GBViE

- 220,000 women, girls and boys accessing gender-based violence risk mitigation, and prevention interventions²⁰
- 150,000 children and caregivers accessing structured mental health and psychosocial support²¹
- 500,000 Number of children and caregivers accessing Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) through face to face and media²²



Education²³

- 181,300 Number of vulnerable school-aged children (girls and boys) provided with community-driven education initiatives²⁴
- 5,680,000 Number of children in public education (including shock-affected/vulnerable girls and boys) reached with emergency education support



Water, sanitation and hygiene

- 2,900,000 Number of people in humanitarian contexts reached with appropriate drinking water services, through UNICEF supported programmes²⁵
- 2,300,000 Number of people in humanitarian contexts reached with appropriate sanitation services, through UNICEF supported programmes²⁶
- 6,200,000 people reached with hygiene promotion programmes²⁷



Social protection

- 65,000 households reached with UNICEF-funded social assistance²⁸



Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP)²⁹

- 10,000,000 Number of at-risk and affected people reached with timely, appropriate, gender- and age-sensitive life-saving information on humanitarian situations and outbreaks, disaggregated by sex and age group
- 2,450,000 of children, caregivers and community members engaged in participatory behavior change interventions
- 210,000 Number of people who shared their concerns and asked questions/clarifications to address their needs through established feedback mechanisms
- 2,000,000 Number of people who have safe and accessible channels to report SEA



Emergency response

- 35,000 Number of households reached with UNICEF-funded humanitarian cash assistance³⁰



Gender, adolescents and youth development³¹

- 15,300 Number of UNICEF and implementing partner programme staff and frontline workers trained to deliver rights-based, gender and adolescent responsive, and disability-inclusive programmes at scale
- 12 Number of knowledge products, tools and plans completed to inform evidence-based programming and advance gender equality and adolescent girls' programming.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS IN 2026

In 2026, UNICEF is appealing for \$949.1 million to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance and support basic human needs for 12 million people in Afghanistan, including 6.5 million children. The scale of urgent needs demands sustained and adaptable support.

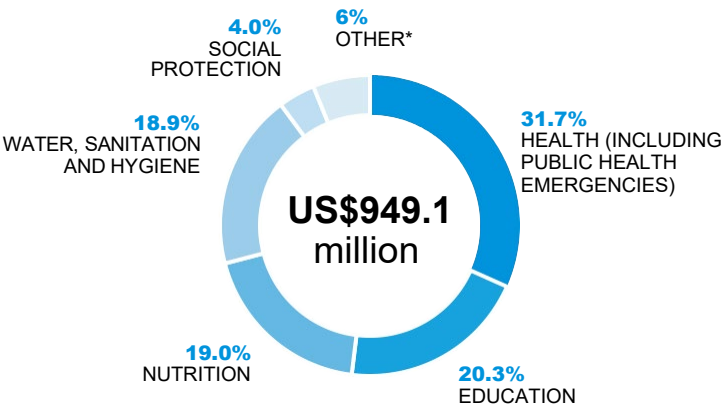
In line with the Humanitarian Reset, UNICEF’s response will prioritize life-saving interventions. The focus is on providing support in areas where the most severe sectoral needs converge while strengthening community resilience through integrated, risk-informed and gender-responsive programming. Ensuring inclusive access to essential services within safe and supportive environments will be essential. In a context marked by a shrinking protection space, climate-induced shocks and increasing restrictions on women and girls, UNICEF will stay and deliver and leverage localized approaches, effective communication and efficient use of resources to reach the most vulnerable.

While the 2026 funding requirement reflects a strategic prioritization of interventions, it does not signal a reduction in needs. On the contrary, humanitarian needs are deepening amid economic decline, environmental hazards and regional instability.

Funding cuts have caused humanitarian agencies to reduce their staff and operations and forced the closure of aid programmes and clinics. As a result, millions of people, particularly women and children, now have reduced access to humanitarian and basic essential services, which is leading to increased malnutrition, disease and preventable deaths.

Flexible and predictable funding will enable UNICEF to respond swiftly to evolving needs, sustain essential services and build long-term resilience for children and their communities. The next 12 months are critical. With new funding, UNICEF will deliver a rapid, life-saving response reaching children with healthcare, nutrition, water, education and protection.

UNICEF is deeply grateful to its partners, whose generous support has enabled vital results for children in Afghanistan. Continued flexible and long-term funding will be essential to maintain momentum and prevent a humanitarian catastrophe, and to enable UNICEF to adapt to the growing complexity of the crisis.



Sector	2026 requirements (US\$)
Health (including public health emergencies)	300,535,482
Nutrition	180,158,182
Child protection and GBViE	29,848,031
Education	192,557,324
Water, sanitation and hygiene	179,563,554
Social protection	37,658,295
Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP)	24,024,911 ³²
Gender, adolescents and youth development	4,728,787
Total	949,074,566

**This includes costs from other sectors/interventions : Child protection and GBViE (3.1%), Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP) (2.5%), Gender, adolescents and youth development (<1%).*

The funding needs are aligned to the HNRP PIN, targets and budgets.

ENDNOTES

1. Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026.
2. The numbers of people in need and children in need are significantly lower than in 2025 because, due to the global reduction in funding, the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026 will focus on the most acute needs. As part of the boundary-setting exercise, the Inter-Cluster Coordination Team (ICCT) agreed on a mixed shock approach which considers areas affected by defined shocks; and in addition, areas where most severe needs across sectors converge (included as a proxy for locations impacted by less visible or undefined shocks). This approach applies to a transparent, shock-based methodology aligned with global guidance, while allowing flexibility to capture the highest needs beyond the defined shocks framework.
3. Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026.
4. According to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026, children make up 53 per cent of the population.
5. The total number of people to be reached is calculated based on the number of people accessing primary and secondary healthcare services, both fixed and mobile facilities, to avoid duplication with other sectors. This includes 6.5 million children (50 per cent girls); 2.7 million women; and 1.5 million people with disabilities, including 800,000 children with disabilities.
6. The overall target decreased from 19 million people in 2025 to 12 million people in 2026. This is mainly because the UNICEF target is based on the health target: number of people accessing healthcare in priority provinces. In 2025, however, this target encompassed the whole country, in line with the health, emergency response (HER) programme geographical scope.
7. UNICEF is committed to needs-based targeting, which means covering the unmet needs of children; and will serve as the provider of last resort where it has cluster coordination responsibilities.
8. Children make up 53 per cent of the population.
9. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), operational data portal.
10. Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026.
11. This appeal is aligned with the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, which are based on global standards and norms for humanitarian action.
12. UNICEF is committed to supporting the leadership and coordination of humanitarian response through its leadership or co-leadership of cluster coordination for the WASH, Nutrition and Education clusters. In line with the Humanitarian Reset and the revision of the coordination architecture in Afghanistan, in 2026 child protection needs will still be included in the HNRP, with a workstream within the Protection Cluster to ensure integration of child protection services in delivery of protection interventions.
13. UNICEF is committed to empowering local responders in humanitarian crises in a variety of ways. The Core Commitments make investing in strengthening the capacities of local actors in the humanitarian response a mandatory benchmark for UNICEF action. A more localized response will improve humanitarian action and is fundamental to achieving better accountability to affected populations.
14. UNICEF will conduct district-level targeting and efficient prioritization to ensure maximum impact for more than 3 million girls. The primary focus will be delivering life-saving health, nutrition, WASH and child protection assistance as well as education and social protection services. UNICEF will also uphold principles of accountability to affected populations, disability inclusion, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and gender considerations. Ensuring education access for Afghan children, especially girls, remains a priority, through support for community-based education and innovative learning methods.
15. Basic human needs programmes are nexus interventions that also aim to address the underlying causes of vulnerabilities.
16. Beyond the UNICEF targets for these interventions, other humanitarian partners are expected to reach the remaining children/families in need.
17. Health care services consist of both primary and secondary healthcare.
18. This target includes 848,000 children with severe wasting and 456,000 children with high-risk moderate acute malnutrition. Children at higher risk of mortality will be admitted for treatment.
19. This target is included in the Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026.
20. This target is lower than in 2025 largely due to a combination of reduced operating space, reduced funding and bureaucratic impediments. This target is included in the Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. There has been a decrease in cluster targets (which impacts UNICEF targets) due to increased uptake of activities by basic human needs programme partners. In 2026, the cluster will prioritize supporting boys and girls aged 6–17 who face multiple risks and barriers (e.g., natural disasters, shocks, displacement, return to Afghanistan, risk of dropping out of school).
25. The target is lower than in 2025 due to a constrained operating environment and limited funding.
26. Ibid.
27. The Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2026 target is yet to be published.
28. This target is included in the United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan. This indicator focuses on social assistance cash transfers, which are part of the basic human needs programmes.
29. These cross-sectoral targets are all included in the Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026.
30. 25,000 households will receive winter in-kind kits and 10,000 households will receive cash assistance.
31. This target is included in the Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026.
32. This includes \$14 million for social and behaviour change/risk communication and community engagement; \$3.2 million for accountability to affected populations; \$4.5 million for humanitarian cash transfers; and \$2.3 million for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.