

# Annual Results Report

**2023**

**Afghanistan**

## Acknowledgements

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# Section 1: Context and Overview

## 1.1 Changes to the Operational Context

Afghanistan faced a complex humanitarian crisis in 2023 exacerbated by socioeconomic challenges, insecurity, climate shocks and natural disasters as well as food insecurity. The erosion of human rights posed additional challenges, particularly for women and girls, who were increasingly excluded from public and political life. Women's education continued to be undermined and the ban by de facto authorities on women working at national and international NGOs, including the United Nations, remained in place. Although the security situation in Afghanistan improved, enabling geographical accessibility for humanitarian actors, there was a notable shift from generalized to more targeted violence and a lack of transparency regarding the judicial system and rule of law. These conditions, coupled with limited access to education, scarce job opportunities and high levels of debt, created a highly volatile environment. Addressing these interconnected issues holistically remains essential to mitigating risks and promoting stability and peace in the region in 2024.

A notable number of Afghan refugees returned to the country in 2023 from the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan. This was primarily due to an increase in the number of Afghans who returned in late-2023 after Pakistan's Ministry of Interior enacted its "Illegal foreigners' repatriation plan (IFRP)". The Office anticipates that the large number of returns from Pakistan will continue in 2024. The expiration of Proof of Registration (POR) cards – which provide temporary legal stay and freedom of movement to Afghan refugees in Pakistan – in December 2023, and subsequently extended for a three-month period at the time of reporting, has made the situation more precarious for Afghans. Moreover, a notable influx of returnees from Iran (Islamic Republic of) required careful management and integration strategies, highlighting the need for continued humanitarian assistance in areas of return as well as at border points.

Afghanistan continued to lose skilled and educated people seeking opportunities abroad, adversely affecting the country's economic stability and development prospects. The trend towards urbanization became increasingly pronounced, requiring UNHCR to re-evaluate its focus and place more strategic emphasis on urban development and the needs of growing urban populations.

Overall, the operational environment in Afghanistan remained complex and multifaceted and required a comprehensive and well-coordinated response that addressed both immediate and long-term challenges.

## 1.2. Progress Against the Desired Impact

### 1. Impact Area: Attaining Favorable Protection Environments

**By 2024, the protection environment for all Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Refugee Returnees in Afghanistan is enhanced in line with humanitarian, human rights, and international refugee protection standards.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Actual (2023)
1.1 Proportion of people seeking international protection who are able to access asylum procedures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	0.00%
1.2 Proportion of people who are able to move freely within the country of habitual residence	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	25.00%	100.00%

The August 2021 takeover created uncertainty over the applicability of Afghanistan's laws and judicial system. As a result, identity management became a critical issue for refugees, IDPs and returnees. In 2023, UNHCR launched a pilot legal assistance project in the western and south-eastern regions, supporting thousands in successful applications to secure relevant documentation.

UNHCR strengthened its complaints and feedback mechanism and expanded its scope in all the regions, with participation from women, men and children of various ages. In July, the Office introduced an online feedback and response system to streamline the process of receiving, documenting, and responding to complaints and feedback. The system enhanced UNHCR's ability to collect and analyze data from forcibly displaced and stateless communities. Access to asylum was granted by continuously registering newcomers. UNHCR also bolstered case processing by developing the knowledge and skills of national staff. All these efforts combined led to the completion of a verification exercise for urban refugees, their biometric enrolment, UNHCR's migration to proGres V4, and the submission of the first 10 people to be considered for resettlement.

Through the legal assistance project, refugees in rural areas accessed legal awareness sessions and birth registration, while the protection space for urban refugees was expanded with enhanced access to health care and individual counselling. The protection environment for women and girls deteriorated further following a ban on Afghan women working, studying, or moving freely. These restrictions increased the risk of sexual exploitation, abuse and discrimination. To address this, UNHCR bolstered its core protection activities by expanding women and child protection services across several provinces. Border and returnee monitoring and counselling, additional complaints and feedback mechanisms, and a community engagement pilot project launched across the country, ensured the most vulnerable had access to information and referral mechanisms, including through women outreach volunteers. UNHCR strengthened mental health and psychological and social services (MHPSS) and recreational activities in the women protection centres. The distribution of hygiene kits, completion of dedicated safety audits, and workshops to develop partner staff skills and knowledge on protection concerns and the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation, mitigated protection risks among the community.

### 2. Impact Area: Realizing Rights in Safe Environments

**By 2024, refugees and asylum-seekers, returnees and IDPs will benefit from, and have equitable access to, inclusive quality life-saving assistance that will enable them to live in safety and dignity**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Actual (2023)
2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	IDPs	28.00%	39.00%
2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	27.00%	1.00%
2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Returnees	37.00%	10.99%
2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	IDPs	50.00%	100.00%
2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	37.20%	100.00%
2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Returnees	59.00%	100.00%

UNHCR and partners in Afghanistan and Pakistan continued to support a cross-border response to the Government of Pakistan's 3 October decision to return undocumented people residing inside the country from 1 November 2023. Between 15 September and 31 December 2023, 493,300 people returned to Afghanistan. The flow of returnees entering Afghanistan from Pakistan through the Torkham and Spin Boldak border crossing points declined towards the end of the year, with some 58,700 returns in December.

The Office worked with partners to support those affected by the four powerful earthquakes that hit the country in October 2023. More than 7,500 families from 77 villages in Herat received various core relief items (CRIs), including family tents, blankets, kitchen sets, solar lamps and dignity kits.

Some 16,000 people in Ghoriyan, Gulran, Guzara, Injil, Karukh, Kushk Rabat Sangi and Zindajan districts were better able to prevent, identify and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse following awareness-raising sessions and improved access to services delivered by UNHCR and partners. Community engagement activities were also carried out with more than 330 sessions on protection assistance. At least 4,700 people received psychological and social support through counselling sessions and 130 child protection issues, including child labour and early marriage, were identified and attended to in the Chahak, Mamezak, Naib Rafi and Sarbaland villages of Zindajan District. Additionally, around 1,800 children were able to take part in creative wellbeing activities such as painting therapy and access hygiene promotion guidance and life skills training in the three established child-friendly spaces in Zindajan District.

UNHCR and partners reached an estimated 1.5 million people with emergency assistance in all 34 provinces countrywide by year-end. 363,500 were supported with cash assistance while 622,100 were reached with in-kind and other individual assistance. In Afghanistan's priority areas of return and reintegration, 785,800 people were assessed and 630,500 potentially benefited from activities. Other assistance included protection, CRI distributions, shelter, and seasonal support.

As the year came to a close, UNHCR signed three agreements with the Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund to enhance access to education, health care and livelihood opportunities. The agreements, which amounted to \$14.3 million, sought to benefit more than 240,000 people in locations inside and outside the UNHCR-designated priority areas of return and reintegration.

### 3. Impact Area: Empowering Communities and Achieving Gender Equality

**1. By 2024, refugees and asylum-seekers, returnees and IDPs benefit from a wide range of solutions.**

The World Bank's Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey estimated that monetary poverty declined from 51% to 44% in rural areas but increased slightly in urban areas from 55% to 58% in June 2023. Against a backdrop of increased yet fragile economic activity, income and expenditure increased for all population groups, including IDPs, returnees, refugees and host communities. The crisis faced by the banking sector was underpinned by the declining number of operators in the microfinance sector. The overall unemployment rate in Afghanistan increased from 14.10% in 2022 to 15.40% in 2023. The rate was highest among Afghan women and young people, with 58% of women household members lacking employment opportunities and 31% of young men and 57% of young women aged 14 to 24 years.

UNHCR implemented livelihood and economic inclusion interventions to enable people to become more resilient and self-reliant, providing income generation opportunities for 33,653 people – 75% of whom were women. These opportunities included training for micro-, small-, and medium-sized businesses, the provision of cash assistance and assets, technical, vocational and educational training support, job placements, investment in production, women business centres as well as carpet weaving and processing centres. In 2023, the Office piloted the first livelihood projects for refugee populations in urban and rural areas of Afghanistan intended to enhance Afghans' capacities and livelihood opportunities to them in order to make them less reliant on humanitarian assistance and facilitate their introduction into the job market.

In view of UNHCR's shift towards a solutions-oriented approach, refugee empowerment became a strategic priority in Afghanistan. As part of UNHCR's objective to strengthen its engagement and communication with communities, the Office launched a country-wide pilot project establishing a network of community-outreach volunteers, nearly half of whom were women. Placing communities at the centre of the response and empowering them to become agents of their own protection significantly improved UNHCR's outreach to the most vulnerable population groups.

## 4. Impact Area: Securing Solutions

**By 2024, refugees, IDPs and returnees have increased access to durable solutions.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Actual (2023)
4.2a Number of people who departed on resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0
4.2b Number of people who departed through complementary pathways	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0
4.3a Number of stateless people for whom nationality is granted or confirmed	None	Unknown	0
4.3b Number of refugees for whom residency status is granted or confirmed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0

Refugee returns increased in 2023, while the provision of protection services such as cash grants of \$375 continued in Encashment Centres. 75,948 returnees were assisted by year-end, including 36,791 refugees (most of whom were from Pakistan), who returned under UNHCR's facilitated return programme, and 39,157 refugees or people in refugee-like situations who were returned from Pakistan. This 473% increase in returns was attributed to the implementation of the IFRP by the Government of Pakistan which prompted the return of nearly half a million (mostly undocumented) Afghans. Since then, Afghans in Pakistan, including refugees, have been particularly vulnerable to verbal harassment, arrest, extortion and night raids by local authorities.

Online tools such as the Afghan Refugee Returnee Database and the Forcibly Afghan Returnee Enrolment programme at Encashment Centres, which employ the biometrics identity management system and GDT/CashAssist, facilitated registration, the regional data repository, and improved reporting in 2023. Returnees were also provided with health, legal and social counselling, transit facilities for overnight stay and awareness raising sessions on mine and ordnance risks. Protection monitoring was carried out at

official and unofficial crossing points as well as at four Encashment Centres with 165,376 outflow and inflow monitoring interviews conducted at eight official and 40 unofficial crossing points with neighboring countries. The findings of return trends and border monitoring were shared with UNHCR offices in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan.

UNHCR continued improving the living conditions of the displaced population in priority areas of return and reintegration. Livelihood interventions through community-based protection and solutions programmes focused on all age and gender groups. The positive impact of these interventions was measured via the sustainability of small farming business projects, skills development and volunteerism interventions targeting women, men and young people alike. Shelter improvement and construction activities supported 35,000 people, while the construction of schools and health clinics supported 290,000 people and 45,000 children, respectively. Access to clean water through the solarization of borewells was improved for more than 242,000 people and reintegration assistance was provided to 68,597 people (8,206 households) who received CARE reintegration grants.

## 1.3 Challenges to Achieving Impacts

The deteriorating protection environment for women and girls due to bans imposed by the de facto authorities impacted women and girls' humanitarian access and effectively removed them from public life. The continued ban on post-secondary education for girls and women, mahram requirements and prohibitions on women working in specific businesses, organizations and sectors limited their participation in their communities, access to services, and undermined their fundamental human rights. These restrictions also increased the risks of sexual exploitation, abuse and discrimination against women. In response, the Office enhanced its core protection activities by expanding gender-based violence and women and child protection services across several provinces. Border and returnee monitoring and counselling, enhanced complaints and feedback mechanisms and the launch of a community engagement pilot project across the country, ensured vulnerable population groups had access to information and referrals, including through women outreach volunteers.

The growing threat of forced evictions from informal settlements and large number of returnees from Pakistan in late-2023 continued to drive housing, land and property needs. The lack of a legal framework for housing, land and property administration and ambiguities regarding the enforcement of property law since 2021 raised further risks for these vulnerable groups. Women remained vulnerable to evictions, with bans on women firms representing women in court coupled with the de facto authorities' refusal to issue women advocacy licenses impeded progress on women's housing, land and property rights.

Persistent economic insecurity forced families to adopt harmful coping mechanisms, including taking on debt, and prompted both internal and cross-border movement with many sending children away from home in search of employment. Restrictions on Afghan women aid workers reduced access to essential health and child protection services, while the ban on post-primary education for girls, which affected 1.4 million girls to date, exacerbated protection risks, including child marriage, child labour and psychological distress among children and their families.

## 1.4 Collaboration and Partnerships

In line with the Global Compact on Refugees and UN Sustainable Development Goals, UNHCR scaled-up its partnerships with development actors to mobilize their support in displacement settings and advance the inclusion of displaced populations into development actors' programmes in common areas of sustained essential support, economic opportunities, resilient livelihoods, social cohesion, inclusion, gender equality,



human rights, and the rule of law, as outlined in the 2023-2025 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Afghanistan.

In 2023, the Office collaborated with 21 partners, including five INGOs, one UN organization and 15 national NGOs. In addition, a UNOPS disbursement agreement was signed to support UNHCR staffing capacity in sectors, including Shelter and Infrastructure and Cluster Coordination. UNHCR continued to support partner capacity development efforts, in line with commitments outlined in the Grand Bargain agreement and UNHCR's Strategic Directions.

Collaboration with partners was strengthened through quarterly meetings, regular programme monitoring and monthly partner reporting. UNHCR was also part and chair of the Protection Cluster which included the gender-based violence, child protection and mine action areas of responsibility and the housing, land, and property task force. The protection cluster was led by UNHCR and co-coordinated by NRC.

## Section 2: Results

### 2.1. Outcomes and Achievements

#### 1. Outcome Area: Access to Territory, Reg. and Documentation

**People with and for whom UNHCR works have access to efficient registration and documentation in line with global standards.**

**Returnees and IDPs have access to sustainable solutions.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
1.1 Proportion of refugees and asylum seekers registered on an individual basis	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
1.2 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Unknown	Unknown	0.00%
1.3 Proportion of people with legally recognized identity documents or credentials	IDPs	71.17%	69.00%	25.00%
1.3 Proportion of people with legally recognized identity documents or credentials	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0.97%	100.00%	0.00%

#### Progress Against the Desired Outcome

Legal identity lies at the core of the mobility and protection challenges displaced Afghans, refugees, asylum-seekers and returnees face. The de facto authorities are currently responsible for managing civil registration and documentation processes through different entities. However, several obstacles hindered progress in 2023, including a general lack of coordination and a notable rise in the costs associated with essential documentation. Recognizing these challenges, UNHCR collaborated with the United Nations Legal Identity and Identity Management Working Group to conduct a study, which identified the gaps and challenges and proposed recommendations to enhance the legal identity framework and inform advocacy and programming on civil documentation. The Office also launched its legal assistance project in the western and south-eastern regions on legal awareness, legal counselling and legal aid. While the delivery of these services was primarily carried out by partners, UNHCR played an active role in supporting the project by providing technical guidance, participating in activity monitoring, advocating for Afghans' legal rights, and contributing to capacity-building initiatives. By year-end, the legal assistance project reached thousands of people in hard-to-reach locations and facilitated the issuance of essential documents such as 'Tazkeras' (official Afghan national identity document) and birth certificates, particularly among vulnerable displaced and returning populations.

#### 3. Outcome Area: Protection Policy and Law

**Refugees and Asylum-seekers benefit from national reception procedures supported through UNHCR**

## Progress Against the Desired Outcome

UNHCR advanced its advocacy initiatives through ongoing engagement in bilateral meetings with de facto authorities. This targeted approach involved addressing specific refugee cases, notably those related to family reunification and detention issues. By fostering open and constructive dialogue in these interactions, UNHCR strived to facilitate greater understanding and cooperation with the authorities to contribute to improved protection for refugees and access to rights. A noteworthy outcome of these efforts was the agreement reached with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, which committed to supporting livelihood initiatives for urban refugees. This commitment not only promoted their self-reliance but also ensured their active participation in society, despite the absence of a legal framework safeguarding their rights in the country.

### 4. Outcome Area: Gender-based Violence

**1.1. Gender-based violence risks are reduced; all survivors have adequate and timely access to quality services and gender-based violence prevention programming effectively addresses the root causes of gender-based violence.**

## Progress Against the Desired Outcome

UNHCR scaled up efforts to enhance the protection environment for women refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs, IDP and refugee returnees, and their host communities by providing gender-based violence response and mitigation services, as well as mainstreaming the prevention of gender-based violence throughout sectoral interventions. Considering the highly restrictive operating environment and sensitivities underpinning this thematic area, the Office focused on providing safe and quality services for women and girls while respecting the 'do no harm' principle and partner staff safety. UNHCR's project focused on strengthening women and girls' awareness of available support services to encourage survivors to seek help. This was achieved by raising awareness in the communities and promoting dialogue with community leaders. Community leaders were identified as important entry points to sensitize community members on women's protection-related issues and activities. In addition, women community centres provided safe spaces for women and girls to learn more about this sensitive topic, seek support and initiate referrals, including for case management provided by operational partners.

To ensure the quality of awareness raising and other women's protection interventions, UNHCR continued to build the capacity of staff and partners on 'women's protection core principles and inter-agency referral pathways informed by the gender-based violence sub-cluster standing operating procedures. Training covered non-gender-based violence partners and UNHCR staff operating protection hotlines to ensure the safe referrals of survivors following disclosure. UNHCR also developed targeted messaging to enhance peoples' understanding of the negative impact of violence on people, families and communities, as well as to improve information on the available services. Targeted MHPSS interventions in the form of group or individual counselling sessions contributed to improving the mental health situation of women and girls, which had significantly deteriorated given the highly restrictive environment and subsequent loss of social relationships, autonomy and agency.

Several recreational, social and educational activities were organized at women community centres to improve the wellbeing of women and girls and support skills building. This was particularly important for adolescent girls who were banned from accessing education. Linking protection and economic empowerment activities ensured the multifaceted needs of survivors were met through comprehensive responses. Gender-based violence risks were also mitigated through the implementation of gender-based violence safety audits, including observation walks during the Herat earthquake response.

## 7. Outcome Area: Community Engagement and Women's Empowerment

**Refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, IDPs and the host community have access to a wide range of solutions.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
7.2 Proportion of people who have access to safe feedback and response mechanisms	IDPs	41.00%	100.00%	100.00%
7.2 Proportion of people who have access to safe feedback and response mechanisms	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	1.00%	100.00%	100.00%
7.2 Proportion of people who have access to safe feedback and response mechanisms	Returnees	44.00%	100.00%	100.00%

### Progress Against the Desired Outcome

Complaints and feedback mechanisms were integral components of humanitarian assistance and protection efforts. These mechanisms served as channels through which affected populations could voice their concerns, provide feedback on services, and seek assistance.

In 2023, UNHCR significantly expanded the scope of its complaints and feedback interventions in Afghanistan, aiming to reach all regions of the country and promote the active participation of all population groups, including women, men, and children of various ages. This expansion was guided by a commitment to inclusivity, with efforts made to engage marginalized and hard-to-reach communities. In July, the Office introduced an online feedback and response system designed to streamline the process of receiving, documenting, and responding to complaints and feedback from affected populations. This new system significantly enhanced the operation's ability to collect and analyze data and facilitated the identification of trends and recurring issues across diverse regions and population segments more effectively.

Moreover, complaint and feedback mechanisms were extensively accessible to all demographic groups. UNHCR established various avenues to ensure broader community engagement such as toll-free numbers, community outreach programmes, email correspondence, in-person counseling services, complaint boxes, and referrals through the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation.

While these channels were widely accessible, not everyone found it necessary to reach out to UNHCR. As part of the Office's strategic objective to strengthen engagement and communication with communities, it launched a country-wide pilot project that established a network of community-outreach volunteers, nearly half of whom were women. The project significantly enhanced UNHCR's outreach to the most vulnerable population groups, establishing effective two-way communication and ensuring access to information, feedback and response systems for communities in remote areas. This proved critical to ensuring access to women and girls, who depend on their community and social networks to receive information on assistance and share their concerns. Protection concerns were regularly and systematically captured via community-based protection monitoring, facilitating the referral of vulnerable individual cases to relevant actors through established complaints and feedback mechanisms.

## 8. Outcome Area: Well-Being and Basic Needs

**Refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees and IDPs at heightened risk can meet their basic needs within six months of displacement.**

**Refugees, returnees and IDPs have unhindered and equitable access to multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	IDPs	1.41%	29.00%	8.38%
8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	17.26%	93.00%	9.15%
8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Returnees	8.30%	83.00%	119.65%
8.2 Proportion of people with primary reliance on clean (cooking) fuels and technology	IDPs	0.00%	Unknown	0.81%
8.2 Proportion of people with primary reliance on clean (cooking) fuels and technology	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0.00%	Unknown	0.00%
8.2 Proportion of people with primary reliance on clean (cooking) fuels and technology	Returnees	0.00%	Unknown	0.02%

## Progress Against the Desired Outcome

UNHCR provided people with specific needs with specialized services to mitigate protection risks and harmful coping mechanisms. This group was identified through different channels such as self- and partner referrals, hotlines and protection monitoring. Most vulnerable people with heightened protection risks received comprehensive support through projects specifically targeting people with specific needs or referrals to other services such as education, health, and MHPSS.

UNHCR provided monthly cash assistance to 4,795 refugees and asylum-seekers in Kabul and Herat to enable them to meet their basic needs. Another 54,870 refugee returnees received a voluntary repatriation cash grant of \$375 per person to prevent, mitigate and respond to immediate protection risks and vulnerabilities upon return to Afghanistan and to cover transportation costs. Whether used to address basic needs, access health care services, secure shelter, or invest in livelihood opportunities, cash assistance offered flexibility, enabling forcibly displaced people to navigate their own paths towards recovery and self-sufficiency. Injecting cash into local economies also stimulated market activity and bolstered livelihoods, fostering economic stability and social cohesion. Additionally, cash assistance enabled households to build their assets, diversify income streams and withstand any future shocks.

By prioritizing the well-being and resilience of people forced to flee and embracing the transformative potential of cash assistance, UNHCR was not only able to meet the immediate humanitarian needs but also invest in the long-term self-reliance of people forced to flee, ultimately paving the way to a more sustainable and inclusive future for all. In 2023, 54,870 Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan from the Islamic Republics of Pakistan and Iran and other countries. In addition, there were 32,320 returns from Pakistan, following a decree by Pakistan for undocumented people to leave the country. While voluntary repatriation grant recipients continued to receive the regular \$375 per person allowance, Afghan returnees received \$140 per household based on the minimum expenditure basket survey, which is a way of establishing poverty lines for refugee populations. In addition, everyone received \$20 for transportation. CARE provided return and reintegration cash support to 270,167 IDPs and returnees' families in 2023 aimed at meeting their basic needs and facilitating their reintegration into their communities.

However, restrictions on women's participation in public and professional life impacted access to assistance, with advocacy being an important tool in securing gender quality when accessing assistance. Coordination with the de facto authorities remained a challenge as requirements such as having memorandums of understanding in place affected the delivery of assistance, particularly for people with specific needs.

## 9. Outcome Area: Sustainable Housing and Settlements

Refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees and IDPs have access to adequate dwellings.

Refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees and IDPs have sufficient access to energy.

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
9.1 Proportion of people living in habitable and affordable housing	IDPs	1.96%	9.00%	0.93%
9.1 Proportion of people living in habitable and affordable housing	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	31.25%	80.00%	4.87%
9.1 Proportion of people living in habitable and affordable housing	Returnees	1.96%	72.00%	71.24%
9.2 Proportion of people that have energy to ensure lighting	IDPs	16.00%	3.00%	0.82%
9.2 Proportion of people that have energy to ensure lighting	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	8.93%	71.00%	7.39%
9.2 Proportion of people that have energy to ensure lighting	Returnees	12.00%	77.00%	21.39%

### Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2023, the Office undertook an extensive shelter assistance programme in Afghanistan, addressing the diverse needs of displaced populations and vulnerable communities. UNHCR's shelter assistance efforts emphasized its commitment to ensuring a safe, dignified and sustainable shelter response. By year-end, 149,467 people lived in adequate shelters that enabled people to live in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities. UNHCR ensured inclusivity by actively involving women in the selection process. Vulnerability criteria and protection measures sought to improve living conditions by prioritizing those most at risk. In response to crisis situations, the Office provided 41,560 permanent shelters and emergency shelters to 56,994 people. Additionally, 5,623 people benefited from transitional shelters and a further 45,290 people had their existing shelters repaired. UNHCR played a critical role as the first responder to earthquake-affected populations, providing 1,500 households with earthquake-resistant permanent shelters. These shelters were built using locally available materials thereby empowering people to meet their maintenance costs independently. As part of the permanent shelter support, the Office provided solar panels to support clean energy and sustainability efforts. Protection partners used the rapid households assessment tool to identify people and prioritize vulnerable people through a scorecard system. Once construction was finalised, UNHCR conducted post-distribution monitoring through multifunctional teams to assess outcomes and synthesise feedback. The permanent shelter support provided by UNHCR not only offered a permanent housing solution but also ensured families' safety and dignity and addressed the particular challenges women face.

## 10. Outcome Area: Healthy Lives

By 2024, the health status of forcibly displaced and stateless people has improved.

### Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2023, UNHCR activities in Afghanistan improved access to health services for 202,581 women and men, contributing to healthier lives across the 80 priority areas of return and reintegration. UNHCR supported the

construction of 13 health facilities, including comprehensive, basic and maternal health clinics. Six facilities aimed at improving access to services for an additional 87,245 people were under construction by year-end. Completed facilities were handed over to local community leaders, community development councils as well as the de facto Ministry of Public Health.

## 11. Outcome Area: Education

**Refugees, asylum-seekers, and refugee returnees have access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
11.1 Proportion of young people enrolled in tertiary and higher education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	25.00%	60.00%	0.00%

### Progress Against the Desired Outcome

The 2023 Whole of Afghanistan Assessment is a multi-sectoral needs assessment conducted through in-person household-level interviews to provide data on household needs on health, education, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food security and protection. In 2023, the assessment highlighted that 58% of school age children attended school at the primary school level, 23% at the secondary level and 19% at the upper secondary level, demonstrating a declining attendance rate as learners progress from lower to higher grades.

Attendance by girls was significantly higher at the primary school level for girls, while attendance at the secondary school level was 26% for boys and 15% for girls. Attendance at the upper secondary level for boys was 24% compared to 9% for girls, highlighting significant dropouts from lower to higher grades. The most reported reasons for children not attending school were the restrictions on girls accessing school education (40%) and shortage of schools in the area or long distances pupils need to travel (32%) which is why attendance was lower in rural areas compared to urban areas.

To reduce pressure on service delivery and increase access to quality of education in the priority areas of return and reintegration, UNHCR bolstered investments in education related infrastructure via the construction, rehabilitation and expansion of 30 schools benefitting more than 33,402 learners, including 17,123 boys and 16,279 girls. Eight more schools with 11,950 students, including 5,745 boys and 6,205 girls, were still under construction by year-end. However, the construction of nine schools could not go ahead as planned due to challenges partners faced in signing memorandums of understanding with the de facto Ministry of Education. UNHCR also supported the training of 38 women volunteer teachers to help reduce the teacher-pupil ratio and foster the delivery of quality education.

To enhance access to tertiary education, UNHCR established an agreement with the American University of Afghanistan currently based in Doha, Qatar, to facilitate the enrollment of several refugee female students in online tertiary education. These students successfully completed their first year in 2023 and the project is set to continue until their graduation. This initiative reflects UNHCR's commitment to providing educational opportunities for refugee women, fostering their academic progress and enhancing their job prospects in order to become self-reliant.

## 12. Outcome Area: Clean Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

**Refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs, returnees and the host community access safe water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities.**

## Progress Against the Desired Outcome

74.4% of households were using improved drinking water sources by year-end while 57.2% of households used improved sanitation facilities, according to a UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. UNHCR contributed to improving access to safe water sources by constructing and solarizing 62 boreholes, providing clean and safe drinking water to 217,409 people. This effort played a vital role in improving people’s health and wellbeing by reducing the potential for diarrhea and other water borne diseases often transmitted by drinking unsafe drinking water and exacerbated by limited access to proper sanitation facilities. By year-end, three additional water projects targeting more than 25,000 people were in the works.

### 13. Outcome Area: Self Reliance, Economic Inclusion and Livelihoods

**Refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees and IDPs have access to decent formal employment or self-employment.**

## Progress Against the Desired Outcome

Although data disaggregated by population type was not available in 2023, studies by the development sector demonstrated a generally low and linear decline in income among forcibly displaced and stateless people over time. Of the 45% drop in per capita income since 2012, two-thirds of the decline took place in 2021 – the year of de facto authorities’ takeover. Declining income trends have since continued, combined with the banking sector crisis and limited access to digital financial services, impacted the number of people opening accounts at banks, other financial institutions or with mobile money service providers. A World Bank report (2023) showed a 31% unemployment rate among young men and 57% among girls aged 14 to 24 years. In the 24 to 25 years age category, the unemployment rate stood at 17% for men and 47.6% for women. Unemployment rates for other age groups were 12% for men and 39% for women aged between 35 and 44, 16% for men and 40% for women aged 45 to 54 and 16% for men and 39% for women aged 55 to 64.

High unemployment rates underscored the disproportionate impact the socioeconomic situation had on women in 2023. To mitigate this, the Office implemented livelihood and economic inclusion interventions, improved access to income-generating opportunities and empowered 33,653 people (of whom more than 75% were women). Key interventions included capacity building training on micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises, distributing cash assistance and assets, supporting technical, vocational, and educational training and job placements, investing in production-enabling infrastructure such as greenhouses and women’s business centers as well as carpet weaving and processing centres.

### 14. Outcome Area: Voluntary Return and Sustainable Reintegration

**Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Refugee Returnees have the necessary information and resources to voluntarily return to their country of origin.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
14.1 Proportion of returnees with legally recognized identity documents or credentials	Returnees	47.00%	50.00%	35.00%



## Progress Against the Desired Outcome

Refugee returns significantly increased in 2023. UNHCR provided comprehensive protection assistance, including a cash grant of \$375 to returnees and coordinated and timely data collection to ensure adequate preparedness and response at border crossing points. 36,791 refugees returned to Afghanistan under UNHCR's facilitated return programme, with the majority returning from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (36,167), followed by a smaller number from the Islamic Republic of Iran (497), and other countries (127). The voluntary repatriation figure in 2023 was 473% higher than the total return figure (6,424) recorded in 2022.

This significant increase was attributed to the implementation of the IFRP by the Government of Pakistan on 1 November 2023. Subsequent measures imposed under this plan reduced the protection and asylum space for Afghans in Pakistan, who often experienced verbal harassment, arrest and detention, extortion, and nightly raids at the hands of local authorities. This dynamic context resulted in the return of nearly 500,000 Afghans between January and December, mainly undocumented, including 39,157 people who possessed POR cards, UNHCR's slip or asylum certificates as well as people with sensitive protection backgrounds. Return rates from Iran (Islamic Republic of) in 2023 remained at levels recorded in 2022 and 2021.

Online tools such as the Afghan Refugee Returnee Database and the Forcible Afghan Returnee Enrolment at Encashment Centres which employ the biometrics identity management system and GDT/CashAssist facilitated the registration and regional data repository and improved reporting in 2023. Systematic protection monitoring was carried out at official and unofficial crossing points, as well as at four encashment centres. 3,286 returnee monitoring interviews with randomly selected, newly arrived returnees were conducted at Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, and Herat Encashment Centres using an age, gender and diversity approach. This monitoring exercise helped analyze return trends, assess the voluntary nature of return, and check the level of information returnees received to make an informed choice to return home. Returnees were also provided with health, legal and social counselling, transit facilities for overnight stay and awareness raising sessions about mine and ordnance risks.

165,376 outflow and inflow monitoring interviews with Afghans irrespective of their status were conducted, prior to their departure from Afghanistan or upon entry into Afghanistan at eight official and 40 unofficial crossing points with neighboring countries. On average, 35% of returnees interviewed upon arrival stated they had a tazkira, and 59% of households confirmed having one. Tazkira ownership among their spouses and children was 30% and 16% respectively. Border monitoring remains a protection-focused exercise which enables UNHCR to better understand the triggers, intentions, and reasons for Afghan cross-border movements, assess access to territory and the right to seek asylum, as well as identify barriers that hinder the movement of people who may need international protection. These findings informed the Office's contingency/response planning and advocacy efforts and were shared with UNHCR colleagues in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan during monthly and ad-hoc cross-border coordination meetings

## 15. Outcome Area: Resettlement and Complementary Pathways

**Refugees can access resettlement and complementary pathway programmes to support in finding solutions in a third country where they can enjoy their full rights.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
15.1 Number of refugees submitted by UNHCR for resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	33	51	2
15.3 Number of people admitted through complementary pathways from the host country	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0	0

## Progress Against the Desired Outcome

The restrictive and deteriorating protection environment in Afghanistan severely hampered refugees' and asylum-seekers' access to durable solutions, with resettlement and complementary pathways the only remaining viable durable solution for most of the urban refugee population.

Through daily interactions with the refugee population as well as the information gathered during the verification exercise conducted in 2023, UNHCR identified approximately 100 people for whom resettlement could be considered the only available durable solution. Within this context, the Office submitted the first 10 cases for resettlement through unallocated quotas and initiated resettlement procedures for other cases.

## 16. Outcome Area: Integration and other Local Solutions

**IDPs and IDP returnees have access to sustainable solutions.**

### Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2023, households across Afghanistan continued to be exposed to multiple shocks such as droughts, floods and earthquakes. The 2023 Whole of Afghanistan Assessment indicated that 67% of households reported exposure to droughts, an increase from 64% in 2022, while 65% reported exposure to economic shocks, marking an increase from 54% in the previous year. Additionally, 17% of households reported exposure to floods.

Droughts and increases in agricultural costs resulted in food price hikes. This, coupled with rising unemployment and reduced income-earning opportunities, contributed to food insecurity and heightened humanitarian needs. Women and young people remain disproportionately affected, with data indicating that returnee households were particularly vulnerable. In 2023, 80% of Afghan households were living on less than \$1 a day per household member, with 28.3 million people requiring urgent humanitarian assistance (OCHA 2023). The capacity of the de facto authorities was limited in terms of providing social protection to this population. As a result, most of the population was almost entirely dependent on support from humanitarian and development agencies.

In 2023, UNHCR provided cash support to 4,795 refugees and asylum-seekers in Afghanistan as well as 54,870 refugee returnees and 270,167 IDPs and IDP returnees' families thereby enabling them to meet their basic needs. UNHCR provided temporary jobs and livelihood opportunities to 5,647 people in Afghanistan through a cash for work scheme which allowed them to earn income to meet their needs, regain some level of dignity and support reintegration.

## 2.2. Age, Gender and Diversity

UNHCR applied its age, gender, and diversity approach to all of its work in Afghanistan in 2023, allowing displaced and host communities from different backgrounds to enjoy equality in decision making as well as access to services. In line with UNHCR's policy on age, gender and diversity, the Office continued to systematically capture gender and age disaggregated data across various activities through partner and direct monitoring activities across the country. These monitoring activities included household and key informant interviews as well as focus group discussions. Rapid household needs assessments supported information gathering on people with disabilities, including their access to protection, assistance and solutions. The specific needs of displaced populations, including their gender, age or disability, were also captured through complaints and feedback mechanisms and during border and return monitoring.

UNHCR's cash assistance and other protection and sectoral interventions prioritized people with specific needs. A skills training project for people with disabilities highlighted UNHCR's efforts to capture the needs of all age, gender and diversity groups. The specific needs of urban refugees were captured during the verification exercise and updated on proGres for the purpose of programming for solutions and planning with an age, gender and diversity perspective. Protection monitoring tools also captured the mental health and psychological and social needs of all age and gender groups, including people with disabilities and vulnerable families.

Community engagement projects enhanced communication with people in remote areas who face movement restrictions, in particular women, girls and people with disabilities. The findings of participatory assessments and gender-based violence safety audits enabled UNHCR to incorporate the priorities of women, men, girls and boys of diverse backgrounds into protection, assistance and solutions programming. At the women community centres, targeted livelihood activities allowed women and girls equal access to services and economic opportunities. Women volunteers made up nearly half of UNHCR's outreach network, highlighting UNHCR's commitment to advancing women's participation in community structures.

## Section 3: Resources

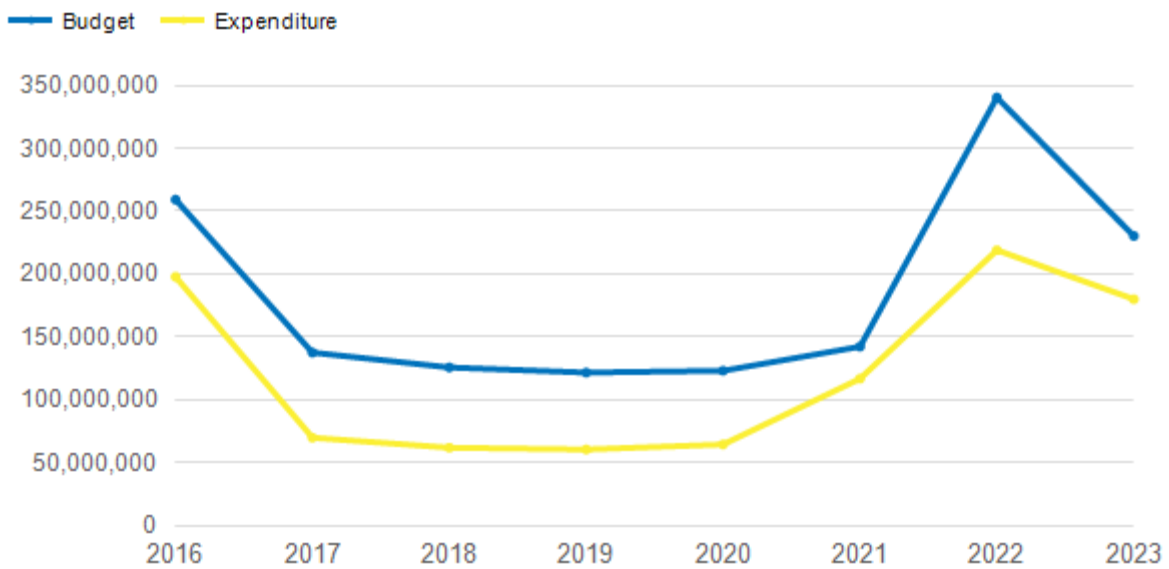
### 3.1 Financial Data

(Financial figures in USD)

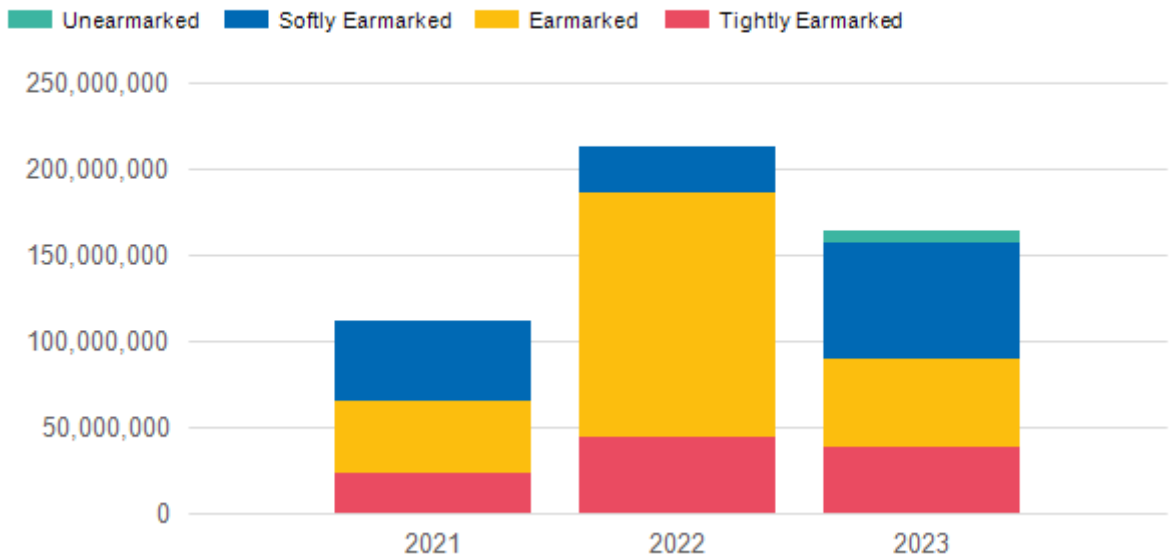
Impact Area	Final Budget	Funds Available	Funds Available as % of Budget	Expenditure	Expenditure as % of Funds Available
IA1: Protect	20,258,689	6,612,672	32.64%	6,612,672	100.00%
IA2: Assist	93,171,118	96,018,805	103.06%	89,196,559	92.89%
IA3: Empower	47,461,482	51,700,914	108.93%	51,700,914	100.00%
IA4: Solve	69,418,994	33,387,095	48.10%	32,565,845	97.54%
All Impact Areas		2,987,685			
<b>Total</b>	<b>230,310,282</b>	<b>190,707,171</b>	<b>82.80%</b>	<b>180,075,990</b>	<b>94.43%</b>

Outcome Area	Final Budget	Funds Available	Funds Available as % of Budget	Expenditure	Expenditure as % of Funds Available
OA1: Access/Doc	5,680,895	5,349,453	94.17%	5,349,453	100.00%
OA3: Policy/Law	3,363,231	1,107,431	32.93%	1,107,431	100.00%
OA4: GBV	12,756,327	1,799,499	14.11%	1,799,499	100.00%
OA7: Community	21,708,768	20,740,442	95.54%	20,740,442	100.00%
OA8: Well-being	36,527,708	44,458,742	121.71%	37,389,801	84.10%
OA9: Housing	35,801,778	27,852,187	77.80%	26,472,875	95.05%
OA10: Health	9,060,246	10,953,076	120.89%	10,953,076	100.00%
OA11: Education	11,786,952	15,216,819	129.10%	15,216,819	100.00%
OA12: WASH	2,872,663	2,926,727	101.88%	2,783,283	95.10%
OA13: Livelihood	13,343,188	16,315,122	122.27%	15,151,943	92.87%
OA14: Return	28,284,836	18,894,117	66.80%	18,072,867	95.65%
OA15: Resettle	3,038,036	886,812	29.19%	886,812	100.00%
OA16: Integrate	34,455,439	9,174,674	26.63%	9,174,674	100.00%
EA17: Systems	4,389,602	6,150,671	140.12%	6,150,671	100.00%
EA18: Support	4,519,121	5,446,852	120.53%	5,446,852	100.00%
EA20: External	2,721,493	3,379,492	124.18%	3,379,492	100.00%
All Outcome Areas		55,055			
<b>Total</b>	<b>230,310,282</b>	<b>190,707,171</b>	<b>82.80%</b>	<b>180,075,990</b>	<b>94.43%</b>

### Budget and Expenditure Trend



### Contributions Trend by Type



## 3.2. Resources Overview

UNHCR successfully diversified income streams in Afghanistan and raised over \$108 million from various donors from the public sector, including local fundraising, as well as the private sector and national partners.

## Section 4: Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

### 4.1 Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

The current operational environment remained precariously permissive. Despite bans enforced by the de facto authorities, UNHCR maintained access to and undertook significant work with forcibly displaced and stateless people although challenges varied from region to region. The Office successfully expanded from assistance-focused support to response strategies aimed at addressing core protection issues. In 2024, UNHCR will continue to exercise vigilance and thorough monitoring to minimize the risks of aid being redirected or misused, ensuring assistance reaches those it is intended for.

The expansion of partnerships with other sister UN agencies, development actors and clusters such as the Durable Solutions Working Group were productive. UNHCR was able to empower and harness local expertise and capacities by working more with implementing partners, generating larger impact on the ground.

Following the December 2022 decree banning women from working for national and international NGOs as well as UN agencies, UNHCR successfully advocated for the de facto authorities to allow women to gradually return to their roles, restoring its full workforce by the end of the year.

Following the Herat earthquakes and the large number of returns from Pakistan in 2023, UNHCR was able to respond swiftly and exercise flexibility. Through the reprioritization of activities and reallocation of targets, UNHCR ensured forcibly displaced and stateless people could access immediate life-saving assistance.

Bureaucratic and administrative impediments continued to hamper the delivery of UNHCR programmes. Persistent implementation delays due to the added requirement of memorandums of understanding between authorities and implementing partners was another challenge. The absence of an established partnership agreement with the de facto Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation continued to negatively impact the Office's engagement with the de facto authorities.

More support is needed to scale up UNHCR programmes focused on sustainably addressing the impact of climate change on the lives of forcibly displaced or stateless people in Afghanistan in view of water shortages and droughts that gripped the country in 2023.

In light of emerging needs, which were highlighted during the 2023 earthquakes in Herat and the returns from Pakistan, there is a need for an effective and methodological recount of up-to-date population planning figures. New returnees should be considered in future planning scenarios, with a focus on sustainable interventions targeting areas of reintegration and return.

Moving forward, UNHCR will focus on areas of local engagement in Afghanistan, along with enhancing strategic partnerships with UN agencies and development partners while advocating for greater protection for forcibly displaced and stateless people and returnees. The continued capacity building of local NGOs and partner organizations will encourage local engagement and empower local communities. UNHCR will explore ways to establish positive channels with the de facto authorities to enhance coordination and establish a common roadmap. The Office will also look to prioritize interventions in geographical areas and sectors where UNHCR holds a strategic and comparative advantage to enhance the quality, efficiency and impact of its work.



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