

Herat Province – Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP)

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02. At a Glance – Herat Province

Herat Province remains one of the most crisis-affected provinces in western Afghanistan, with an estimated population of **2.2 million people**. In **2025**, approximately **1.15 million people**—representing **52 per cent** of the provincial population—are assessed to be **in need of humanitarian assistance**. This includes an estimated **610,000 children**, **540,000 women**, **185,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs)**, and **96,000 people with disabilities**.

Humanitarian needs in Herat are driven by a convergence of **prolonged drought**, **recurrent climate shocks**, **economic deterioration**, **population displacement**, and the **residual impacts of the 2023–2024 earthquakes**, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas. These compounding shocks continue to undermine livelihoods, food security, access to basic services, and protection outcomes, disproportionately affecting women, children, persons with disabilities, and displaced populations.

In response, humanitarian partners plan to **target 720,000 people** with **life-saving assistance**, **protection services**, and **early recovery interventions**, prioritizing districts with the highest severity of needs and limited coping capacity.

Key Figures

- **People in Need (PiN):** 1.15 million
- **People Targeted:** 720,000
- **Funding Required:** USD 185 million
- **Severely Affected Districts:** Zindajan, Injil, Kushk, Gulran, Herat City

People Targeted – Breakdown

- **Children:** 390,000
 - **Women:** 350,000
 - **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** 128,000
 - **People with Disabilities:** 68,000
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Part 1: Humanitarian Needs

1.1 Crisis Overview

Herat Province is experiencing a protracted humanitarian crisis resulting from the cumulative and reinforcing effects of climate-related shocks, seismic events, economic deterioration, and displacement. While historically one of Afghanistan's key economic and agricultural hubs due to its strategic location along regional trade routes, Herat's capacity to absorb shocks and sustain livelihoods has been significantly eroded over recent years.

Between 2021 and 2024, Herat experienced consecutive drought conditions that reduced agricultural productivity and depleted water resources. In 2024 alone, cereal production in the province declined by an estimated **35–40 per cent** compared to the five-year average. Livestock holdings have also been negatively affected, with approximately **28 per cent of pastoralist households** reporting loss of animals due to insufficient pasture and water availability. These trends have had a direct impact on food availability, household income, and nutritional outcomes.

The humanitarian situation deteriorated further following the series of earthquakes that struck western Afghanistan in late 2023 and early 2024. In Herat Province, these earthquakes resulted in widespread destruction of housing and community infrastructure. An estimated **68,000 residential structures** were partially or fully damaged, affecting approximately **210,000 individuals**. Many affected households remain in damaged shelters or temporary accommodation, increasing exposure to protection risks, weather-related hazards, and health concerns.

Economic decline continues to compound humanitarian needs. Market assessments indicate that household purchasing power in Herat has declined significantly, with average daily wages falling by **22 per cent** since 2022, while staple food prices remain **25–30 per cent above pre-crisis levels**. As a result, a growing proportion of households are unable to meet basic needs without external assistance. Female-headed households, households with persons with disabilities, and families hosting displaced relatives face particularly severe constraints.

Urban and rural disparities remain pronounced. While Herat City hosts a concentration of services and economic opportunities, it also accommodates large numbers of displaced households residing in informal settlements with limited access to adequate shelter, water, and sanitation. Rural districts such as Zindajan, Kushk, Gulran, and Chesht-e-Sharif face compounded vulnerabilities due to geographic isolation, reduced service coverage, and higher dependence on climate-sensitive livelihoods.

1.2 Analysis of Shocks, Risks and Humanitarian Needs

Humanitarian needs in Herat Province are driven by multiple, interrelated shocks that continue to undermine household resilience and increase reliance on humanitarian assistance.

Climate and Environmental Shocks

Herat is among the provinces most affected by prolonged drought and increasing climate variability. Rainfall levels over the past three years have remained consistently below seasonal averages, leading to groundwater depletion and reduced surface water availability.

Approximately **46 per cent of rural households** report insufficient access to safe and reliable water sources, forcing reliance on unprotected wells, water trucking, or unsafe surface water.

Drought conditions have also contributed to declining agricultural yields and increased competition over scarce water resources, heightening the risk of localized tensions. Climate projections indicate a high likelihood of continued rainfall irregularity, increasing the probability of further livelihood erosion and displacement.

Seismic Risk

Herat lies within an active seismic zone, and the 2023–2024 earthquakes highlighted the province’s vulnerability to sudden-onset disasters. Earthquake-affected districts continue to exhibit higher severity of needs across shelter, protection, and WASH sectors. Assessments indicate that **64 per cent of earthquake-affected households** face severe or extreme humanitarian conditions, compared to **31 per cent** among non-affected households. Limited access to durable shelter solutions and unresolved housing, land and property (HLP) issues remain critical challenges.

Economic and Market Shocks

Economic shocks remain a central driver of humanitarian need. Unemployment in Herat is estimated at **38 per cent**, with youth unemployment exceeding **45 per cent**. Daily wage laborers and informal sector workers are particularly affected by reduced demand and wage suppression. Market monitoring data indicate that the cost of a minimum food basket increased by **27 per cent** in 2024, while income levels failed to keep pace, resulting in widening consumption gaps.

Negative coping strategies are increasingly reported. Approximately **49 per cent of households** indicate reducing meal frequency, **32 per cent** report borrowing food or money, and **18 per cent** report sending children to work to supplement household income. These strategies have long-term implications for child protection, education outcomes, and household resilience.

Displacement and Protection Risks

Herat hosts an estimated **185,000 internally displaced persons**, including households displaced by earthquakes, drought, and economic stress. Many IDPs reside in informal settlements lacking secure tenure, adequate shelter, and access to basic services. Displacement has significantly heightened protection risks, particularly for women, girls, children, and persons with disabilities.

Protection monitoring indicates elevated risks of gender-based violence, child labor, early marriage, and psychosocial distress. Limited access to legal documentation and dispute

resolution mechanisms exacerbates vulnerability, particularly in relation to housing, land, and property rights.

1.3 Population in Need (PiN) Breakdown

In 2025, an estimated **1.15 million people** in Herat Province are assessed to be in need of humanitarian assistance, representing **52 per cent** of the provincial population. The scale of need reflects both the severity of recent shocks and the cumulative erosion of coping capacities over time.

Children account for a substantial proportion of those in need, with approximately **610,000 children (53 per cent of PiN)** requiring humanitarian support. Women and girls represent an estimated **540,000 individuals**, facing heightened risks related to food insecurity, limited access to health services, and protection concerns. Older persons and persons with disabilities—estimated at **98,000** and **96,000** respectively—face compounded barriers to accessing assistance and basic services.

Severity of Needs

Needs severity analysis indicates that **37 per cent (425,000 people)** face severe humanitarian conditions requiring immediate, life-saving assistance. A further **44 per cent (506,000 people)** experience moderate humanitarian needs, necessitating sustained multi-sector support to prevent deterioration. The remaining **19 per cent (219,000 people)** are classified as having lower-level needs but remain highly vulnerable to additional shocks.

Geographic Distribution of PiN

Humanitarian needs are unevenly distributed across Herat Province. Districts including Zindajan, Kushk, Gulran, Injil, and Herat City account for the highest concentrations of people in need. These areas are characterized by high levels of displacement, earthquake impact, food insecurity, and limited access to basic services. Rural districts exhibit higher severity of needs, while urban areas show higher absolute numbers of affected individuals due to population density.

Vulnerability Profiles

Key vulnerability profiles among the population in need include:

- Earthquake-affected households living in damaged or temporary shelters
- Female-headed households with limited income sources
- Households with malnourished children under five
- Internally displaced households without secure tenure
- Households reliant on daily wage labor or climate-sensitive livelihoods

Understanding these vulnerability profiles is essential for effective targeting, prioritization, and response planning.

Part 2: Humanitarian Response

2.1 Humanitarian Response Strategy

The humanitarian response strategy for Herat Province in 2025 is designed to address life-saving needs while preventing further deterioration of humanitarian conditions among vulnerable populations. The strategy is aligned with national humanitarian priorities and OCHA coordination frameworks, while being tailored to the specific risk profile and severity of needs in Herat.

The response adopts an **integrated, multi-sector and area-based approach**, prioritizing districts with the highest concentration and severity of needs, including Zindajan, Kushk, Gulran, Injil, and Herat City. Interventions will focus on food security, shelter, health, nutrition, WASH, and protection, with strong linkages between sectors to address overlapping vulnerabilities.

Humanitarian actors will prioritize timely, principled, and needs-based assistance, ensuring that life-saving activities are delivered alongside early recovery interventions where conditions allow. Cash-based assistance will be used as a preferred modality where markets are functional, complemented by in-kind assistance in areas affected by market disruption or access constraints.

2.2 Response Boundary-Setting, Prioritization and Risk-Informed Action

Given the scale of needs and anticipated funding constraints, humanitarian partners will be unable to reach all people in need in Herat Province. As a result, response boundary-setting and prioritization are central to the response strategy.

Priority will be given to households assessed as facing **severe humanitarian conditions**, including earthquake-affected families living in damaged shelters, internally displaced households, female-headed households, families with malnourished children under five, and households with persons with disabilities. Geographic prioritization will focus on districts where severity and access constraints overlap.

Risk-informed action will guide response planning and implementation. Climate risks, seismic vulnerability, and protection risks will be systematically integrated into programme design. Contingency planning will account for potential drought intensification, seasonal flooding, and aftershocks, ensuring readiness to scale up assistance in response to new shocks.

2.3 People Targeted Breakdown

Out of an estimated **1.15 million people in need**, humanitarian partners plan to target approximately **720,000 people** in Herat Province in 2025, representing **63 per cent** of the population in need.

- **Children (0–17 years):** 380,000
- **Women:** 345,000
- **Men:** 375,000
- **Internally Displaced Persons:** 145,000
- **People with Disabilities:** 82,000

Sectoral targeting reflects the relative severity and scale of needs:

- Food Security & Agriculture: 610,000
 - Shelter & NFI: 210,000
 - Health: 520,000
 - Nutrition: 145,000
 - WASH: 460,000
 - Protection (all sub-sectors): 480,000
 - Education: 180,000
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2.4 Strategic Objectives

The humanitarian response in Herat Province is guided by four strategic objectives:

Strategic Objective 1: Save lives and reduce morbidity through the provision of timely, life-saving assistance to populations facing severe humanitarian conditions, with a focus on food security, health, nutrition, shelter, and WASH.

Strategic Objective 2: Protect vulnerable populations from harm, exploitation, and rights violations by strengthening protection services, community-based protection mechanisms, and specialized support for women, children, and persons with disabilities.

Strategic Objective 3: Restore and sustain access to essential services while supporting early recovery interventions that reduce dependency on humanitarian assistance and strengthen household coping capacities.

Strategic Objective 4: Enhance community resilience to future shocks by integrating risk-informed programming, climate-adaptive approaches, and preparedness measures across all sectors.

2.5 Planning Assumptions, Operational Capacity and Access, and Response Trends

Humanitarian planning for Herat Province assumes continued economic volatility, persistent climate risks, and constrained funding levels throughout 2025. While access conditions in Herat are comparatively stable, operational challenges persist in remote districts due to poor infrastructure, seasonal weather conditions, and logistical limitations.

Approximately **68 humanitarian partners**, including national and international NGOs and UN agencies, are operational in Herat Province. Local organizations play a critical role in last-mile delivery, particularly in hard-to-reach areas. Response trends indicate increasing reliance on cash-based assistance and integrated programming, alongside growing demand for protection and mental health and psychosocial support services.

2.6 Accountable, Inclusive and Quality Programming

Humanitarian actors are committed to accountable, inclusive, and quality programming across all sectors. Accountability to affected populations (AAP) will be strengthened through community feedback mechanisms, information-sharing, and participation in programme design.

Gender, age, and disability considerations will be systematically mainstreamed. Approximately **65 per cent** of implementing partners report having functional complaints and feedback mechanisms at community level. Efforts will be made to expand inclusive outreach to women, girls, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

2.7 Cost of the Response

The total estimated cost of the humanitarian response in Herat Province for 2025 is **USD 185 million**, reflecting the scale and severity of identified needs.

Indicative sectoral cost estimates include:

- Food Security & Agriculture: USD 68M
- Shelter & NFI: USD 32M
- Health: USD 29M
- Nutrition: USD 18M
- WASH: USD 21M
- Protection: USD 11M
- Education: USD 6M

The estimated average cost per targeted person is approximately **USD 257**.

2.8 Multipurpose Cash and Cash & Voucher Assistance Overview

Cash-based assistance will be a central component of the humanitarian response in Herat Province. Market assessments indicate that **78 per cent of districts** have sufficiently functional markets to support cash and voucher assistance.

An estimated **420,000 people** are targeted for multipurpose cash assistance (MPC), with transfer values calibrated to cover a portion of the minimum expenditure basket. Cash delivery mechanisms will include mobile money transfers, hawala systems, and controlled cash distributions, depending on context and access conditions.

2.9 Monitoring, Reporting and Accountability

Response monitoring will be conducted through a combination of partner reporting, field monitoring visits, third-party monitoring, and community feedback mechanisms. Key performance indicators will track coverage, timeliness, quality, and outcomes across sectors.

Partners will report monthly on outputs and quarterly on outcomes, enabling adaptive management and evidence-based decision-making. Monitoring findings will inform mid-year reviews and response adjustments as needed.

Part 3: Cluster / Sector Needs and Response – Herat Province

3.1 Education

The education sector in Herat Province continues to face compounding challenges driven by poverty, displacement, infrastructure damage, and restrictions affecting access to education, particularly for girls. An estimated 412,000 school-aged children (6–17 years) are in need of education assistance, representing approximately 38 per cent of the total child population in the province. Of these, around 214,000 are girls, who face disproportionate barriers related to socio-cultural norms, early marriage, household labor burdens, and limited availability of gender-appropriate learning spaces.

The 2023 earthquakes caused partial or full damage to at least 620 public school buildings, primarily in rural districts such as Zindajan, Injil, and Guzara. As a result, more than 96,000 children are currently learning in temporary or overcrowded spaces, while approximately 41,000 children remain out of school entirely. Learning materials shortages affect an estimated 68 per

cent of primary schools, and teacher absenteeism has increased due to low remuneration and economic stress.

The education response prioritizes emergency learning access, rehabilitation of damaged schools, teacher support, and community-based education modalities. In 2025, partners aim to reach 265,000 children (48 per cent girls) with safe learning spaces, learning materials, and psychosocial support, while supporting 8,400 teachers through incentives and capacity-building. Geographic prioritization focuses on earthquake-affected and high-displacement districts.

3.2 Emergency Shelter and Non-Food Items (ES/NFI)

Shelter remains one of the most critical humanitarian needs in Herat Province following recurrent earthquakes, displacement, and economic decline. Approximately 186,000 people are estimated to be in need of emergency shelter and NFI assistance, including 34,000 individuals living in informal settlements and 27,000 people residing in structurally unsafe dwellings.

Damage assessments indicate that over 23,500 houses were either destroyed or severely damaged during the 2023 seismic events. Many households continue to rely on makeshift shelters constructed from salvaged materials, offering limited protection against extreme winter temperatures and seasonal flooding. NFI gaps are particularly acute for winter clothing, blankets, heating equipment, and basic household items.

The ES/NFI response strategy focuses on life-saving emergency shelter support, transitional shelter solutions, and distribution of essential NFIs. In 2025, partners plan to assist 142,000 individuals through emergency shelter kits, winterization support, and cash-for-shelter interventions. Technical guidance will be integrated to promote safer construction practices and reduce future seismic risk.

3.3 Food Security and Agriculture (FSAC)

Food insecurity remains widespread in Herat, driven by declining household incomes, rising food prices, and reduced agricultural productivity. It is estimated that 512,000 people are experiencing Crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 3+), including 146,000 people in Emergency (IPC Phase 4).

Agricultural households face multiple constraints, including water scarcity, high input costs, and loss of productive assets. Approximately 41 per cent of farming households reported reduced crop yields in 2024, while livestock owners experienced a 27 per cent decline in herd sizes due to disease and lack of fodder. Urban food insecurity is also increasing, with daily wage laborers reporting a 35 per cent reduction in purchasing power compared to 2022.

The FSAC response targets both immediate food consumption gaps and livelihood protection. Planned interventions include food assistance, cash transfers, agricultural inputs, and livestock support, reaching an estimated 468,000 people. Seasonal targeting will align assistance with lean periods and agricultural cycles.

3.4 Health

Herat's health system is under significant strain due to funding shortfalls, staff shortages, and increased demand. An estimated 1.1 million people require humanitarian health assistance, including displaced populations and residents in underserved rural areas.

As of early 2025, only 72 per cent of health facilities in the province are fully functional. Key challenges include shortages of essential medicines, limited referral capacity, and inadequate mental health and trauma services, particularly for earthquake-affected communities. Maternal health indicators remain concerning, with an estimated maternal mortality ratio of 620 per 100,000 live births in hard-to-reach areas.

Health partners aim to reach 760,000 people with primary healthcare, reproductive health services, trauma care, and disease surveillance. Mobile health teams will play a central role in reaching remote districts and informal settlements.

3.5 Nutrition

Malnutrition remains a critical concern in Herat Province, particularly among children under five and pregnant and lactating women (PLW). An estimated 98,000 children under five are acutely malnourished, including 27,000 suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM).

Contributing factors include food insecurity, inadequate infant and young child feeding practices, limited access to clean water, and poor health services. Nutrition surveys indicate a GAM rate of 13.2 per cent in high-risk districts, exceeding emergency thresholds.

The nutrition response prioritizes treatment of SAM and MAM, prevention services, and integration with health and WASH interventions. Partners plan to support 84,000 children and 52,000 PLW through community-based management of acute malnutrition and micronutrient supplementation.

3.6 Protection

Protection risks in Herat are intensifying due to displacement, poverty, and weakened community coping mechanisms. Approximately 612,000 people are estimated to be in need of protection services.

3.6.1 General Protection

Key risks include lack of civil documentation, housing and land disputes, and barriers to accessing services. An estimated 21 per cent of displaced households report issues related to legal identity or tenure security. Protection actors aim to reach 248,000 people with legal assistance, case management, and community-based protection monitoring.

3.6.2 Child Protection

Child protection concerns include child labor, early marriage, and psychosocial distress. An estimated 179,000 children require specialized protection support. Interventions focus on psychosocial support, family tracing, and prevention of harmful practices.

3.6.3 Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV risks are heightened in displacement and earthquake-affected settings. It is estimated that 162,000 women and girls are at risk of GBV in Herat. Response efforts prioritize survivor-centered services, safe spaces, and referral pathways, targeting 94,000 women and girls.

3.6.4 Housing, Land and Property (HLP)

HLP issues are prevalent among displaced and earthquake-affected populations. Approximately 63,000 households face tenure insecurity or disputes. Legal counseling and mediation remain key response modalities.

3.6.5 Mine Action

While Herat is not among the most heavily contaminated provinces, explosive remnants of war continue to pose risks in some rural areas. An estimated 74 communities remain affected, with mine action partners focusing on risk education and targeted clearance.

3.7 Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Limited access to safe water and sanitation affects an estimated 536,000 people in Herat. Groundwater depletion, damaged infrastructure, and population growth in urban areas exacerbate needs.

Approximately 44 per cent of households rely on unimproved water sources, and 31 per cent lack access to basic sanitation. WASH partners plan to provide water supply, sanitation facilities, and

hygiene promotion to 392,000 people, prioritizing schools, health facilities, and displacement sites.

3.8 Coordination and Common Services

Effective humanitarian coordination remains essential in Herat, given the scale and diversity of needs. Coordination priorities include information management, inter-cluster assessments, and access negotiations.

Common services support logistics, emergency telecommunications, and security coordination. In 2025, coordination and common services aim to support over 120 operational partners, enhancing efficiency, accountability, and coverage of the overall response.

Acronyms

CBT – Cash-Based Transfers
ES/NFI – Emergency Shelter and Non-Food Items
FSAC – Food Security and Agriculture Cluster
GBV – Gender-Based Violence
GAM – Global Acute Malnutrition
HLP – Housing, Land and Property
HRP – Humanitarian Response Plan
IDP – Internally Displaced Person
IPC – Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
MAM – Moderate Acute Malnutrition
SAM – Severe Acute Malnutrition
WASH – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene