



“It all starts at home”

Theme of the World Urban Forum, Cairo/Egypt, 2024

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR UN-HABITAT AFGHANISTAN 2026–2027

June 2025

Strategic Priorities UN-Habitat Afghanistan 2026-2027

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UN-Habitat's Mandate

UN-Habitat's mandate within the United Nations system focuses on sustainable urbanization, housing, and improving the lives of people in settlements of all sizes – including in crisis settings.

The agency works to ensure urbanization has a positive social, economic and environmental impact on people's lives – and to prevent urbanization from exacerbating inequalities and vulnerabilities, overburdening infrastructure, and increasing fragilities to climate and environmental risks. Guided by the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda, UN-Habitat's approaches are people-centred and anchored in international human rights standards.¹



“When well-planned and managed, cities and human settlements – along with their systems – can improve quality of life. At the core is the urgent need to address the global housing crisis affecting 2.8 billion persons. Improved access to housing, land and basic service is a foundation for human dignity, safety and prosperity in cities.”

Anaclaudia Rosbach, Executive Director of UN-Habitat

[1] United Nations System-wide Strategy on Sustainable Urban Development; endorsed by A/RES/77/173, OP 19

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Executive Summary

Afghanistan is a country of extremes: extreme beauty, an extremely strategic location, and a country with many natural resources and extremely resilient people but is still a country where people face extreme socio-economic and human rights challenges. The Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HRNP) 2025 names climate change-induced and natural hazards, inadequate or lack of service provision, decades of conflict and geopolitical dynamics, a weak economy and the socio-political restrictions (among many others) reasons, why almost half of the population were estimated to require humanitarian assistance of any form.

UN-Habitat has been supporting the people of Afghanistan since 1992. As the agency has just launched a new strategic plan at global level for 2026-2029, this paper focuses on strategic priorities for UN-Habitat Afghanistan for 2026 and 2027. Those priorities have been defined through analysis of the agency's (and other partners') data and the consultations with the communities and people in Afghanistan and are in alignment with the agency's overall mandate, the global priorities and the agency's role in the United Nations family in Afghanistan and the agreed upon priorities at country level (UNSFA 2023-2027).

For our team at UN-Habitat Afghanistan, those priorities will be:

A

Support the most vulnerable people by creating and enabling dignified living conditions and livelihood opportunities with a specific focus on those living in unplanned, underserved and informal settlements

B

Enhance preparedness, response, recovery, and reconstruction

C

Accelerate environmental and climate actions to save lives, livelihoods and assets

Acknowledging that women and girls, displaced people but also other marginalized groups are most at risk of being left behind in Afghanistan at the time of writing, we are committed to inclusive, participatory and gender-sensitive solutions and striving towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and based on the New Urban Agenda as a shared vision for a better and more sustainable future.

Join us on this journey for making Afghanistan's cities and human settlements of all sizes "inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" – and empower Afghanistan's people to live in dignity and enjoy their human rights.

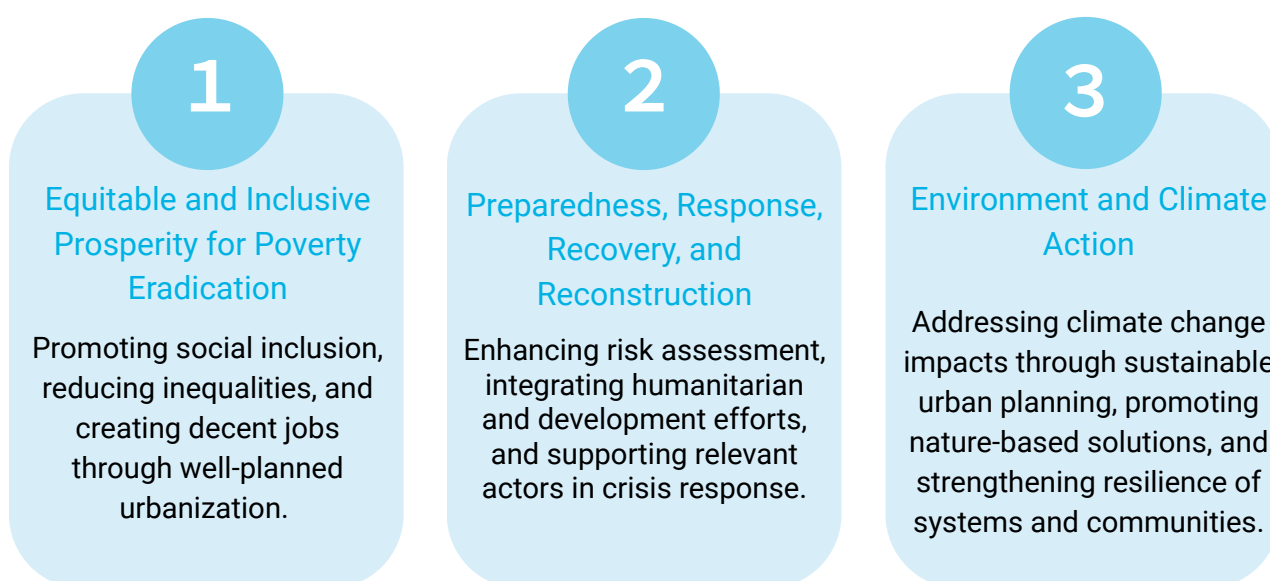


UN-Habitat's Global Strategic Focus 2026-2029

Strategic Focus

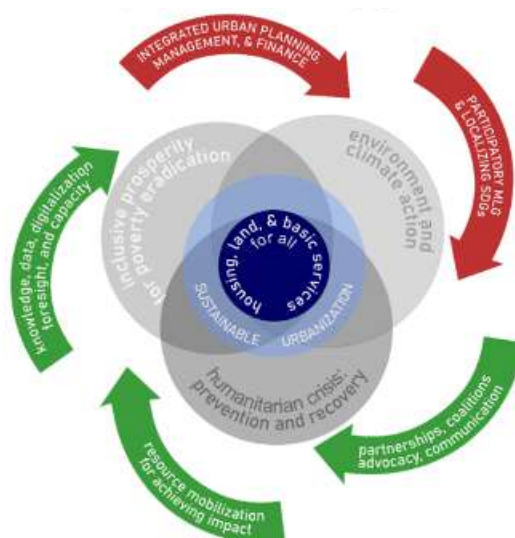
UN-Habitat's new (global) Strategic Plan (2026-2029)² focuses on adequate housing, land, and basic services for all, and on transforming informal settlements, which have in many countries grown rapidly and without planning due to conflicts, crises and climate change and a lack of capacity to address those challenges. The strategic priorities are based on the agency's core mandate and aim to maximize UN-Habitat's added value to the efforts of the United Nations and the broader multilateral system. This focused approach has been effective in improving peoples' lives and responding to today's most pressing global challenges.

For the period 2026-2029, three priority impact areas have been defined for the agency:



Globally, UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan for 2026-2029 aims to transform lives by putting "housing at the center", reducing poverty, preparing for and increasing resilience against climate change impacts, and responding to conflict or disaster related urban crises. By leveraging integrated (spatial/urban) planning, inclusive governance and community participation, and investing in resilience building, UN-Habitat seeks to improve living conditions and livelihood opportunities for people in vulnerable situations.

[2] UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan 2026-2029 was endorsed on 29 May 2025 during the UN-Habitat Assembly



The Strategic Plan for 2026-2029 builds on lessons learned from the previous plan (2020-2025) and addresses pressing global challenges using UN-Habitat’s expertise in sustainable urban development and housing. Improving access to adequate housing, as a fundamental human right, has linkages to most of the other Sustainable Development Goals. Adequate housing conditions and inclusive governance structures also have a specific impact for the empowerment of women and girls.

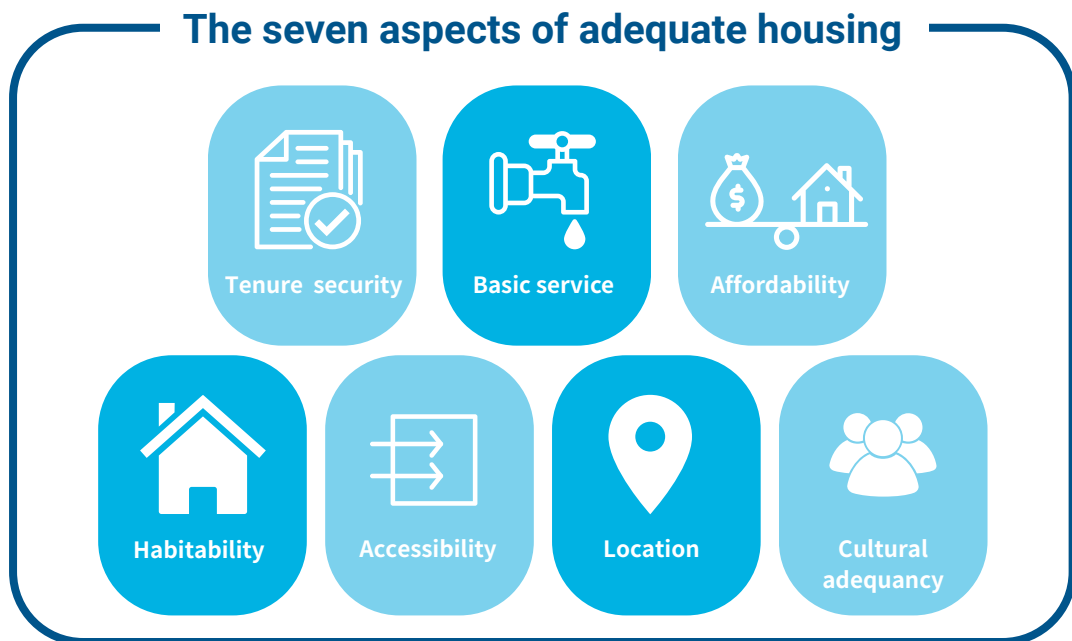


Global Challenges

Through its “housing lens”, the new global strategic plan puts “human rights” and “protection” at the forefront, but also responds to critical aspects of poverty reduction, mitigating climate change impacts, and the growing prevalence of conflict. Destruction of housing stock – on the one hand – exacerbates housing shortages and strains efforts to create stable living environments, while adequate housing and shelter, on the other hand, is one of the primary needs in a crisis. In crises contexts, addressing adequate housing and land issues, and enabling access to basic services “can help provide a framework for a more integrated response with all actors involved, using urban and territorial planning and multi-level governance to localize and enable solutions for the displaced.”

Housing at the Centre

Putting “housing, land and basic services for all” at the center, aligns with the core areas of UN-Habitat’s mandate and its unique position as a United Nations system focal point for adequate housing, sustainable urbanization and human settlements.



Adequate housing is more than just “having a roof”. It includes tenure security, access to basic services and a neighborhood that enables people to lead safe and healthy lives



Afghanistan – resumé of the current country context

Afghanistan faces significant challenges due to the complex convergence of prolonged armed conflict and violence, political instability, and severe economic hardships. The country has seen a substantial increase in the number of people living in informal settlements, with many of them (forced) returnees from neighboring countries, people in vulnerable situations due to protracted internal displacement, and the acute impacts of climate change, but also due to a continuously high birthrate³. The Human Rights situation in the country, especially for women and girls, has deteriorated dramatically since the takeover of the Taliban in August 2021.

The Common Country Analysis for Afghanistan (CCA/Dec 2024) underlines that “Afghanistan’s Human Development Index score has continued to decline following the completion of the previous CCA, with the country ranked 182 out of 193 countries and territories in 2022, falling two places from 2021 and eight places since 2015.”⁴ The GDP per capita as well as multidimensional and monetary poverty rates have significantly deteriorated since the takeover of the Taliban regime (De facto Authorities / DfA) in August 2021. Over 60 per cent of the population are now multidimensionally poor. The Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP)⁵ for 2025 underlines that nearly 23 million people, out of a total population estimated at 40 million, are “in need” of humanitarian assistance.

While data needs to be updated urgently, it is estimated that approx. 30 per cent of the Afghan population is living in urban areas, and the urban growth rate, according to the World Bank⁶, remains above 3 per cent (3.3 percent in 2023) - which means the urban population will nearly double in 20 years. The growth rate is also the highest in South Asia and among the highest in all of Asia⁶. Already in 2020, 73 per cent of the urban population lived in unplanned, informal settlements with inadequate housing conditions and lack of tenure rights; inadequate access to water, sanitation and services, at risk of climate change impacts and disasters, among other challenges. Due to protracted internal displacement as well as forced displacement from neighbouring countries, mainly Pakistan and Iran, and continuing rural-urban migration due to reduced livelihood opportunities in the agricultural sector, the number of people living in informal settlements is estimated to be even higher today. While there is still a rural-urban development gap in Afghanistan, the number of people who are considered “poor” in urban areas is on the rise, including in the capital, Kabul: “Due to its dense population (12.9 per cent of the overall population), the absolute number of poor people is large, placing it among the five provinces with the highest number of poor” (CCA, Dec 2024).

[3] According to the World Bank [Afghanistan | Data](#), the annual population growth rate is 2.1% .

[4] [Afghanistan | Data](#) / World Bank

[5] [Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025 \(December 2024\)](#) | OCHA

[6] [Afghanistan | Data](#) / World Bank

Addressing poverty in Afghanistan can no longer only target rural areas, and economic development can be a major way of strengthening urban-rural linkages.⁷

Humanitarian and “basic human needs” assessments in Afghanistan show that adequate shelter or housing (inc. a lack of tenure rights), access to water, sanitation as well as livelihood opportunities are among the priority needs for people in vulnerable situations, specifically for those in vulnerable situations due to displacement. At the same time, the overall access to basic services is low in all sectors, including WASH, electricity, health and education. This lack of access to services – combined with the growing number of restrictions in their daily lives – impact women and girls most, with many of them now confined to their homes due to restrictions. Kindly also see the special focus on the absence of adequate housing on women and girls at the end of this document.

The housing situation is inadequate in informal settlements (in urban, peri-urban and rural areas), with many people being forced to construct their homes with little means and little technical knowledge, making them vulnerable to earthquakes, landslides and flooding. The fact that people are at risk of forced evictions, if land and tenure rights are not secured, also hinders investments in homes and property.



The inadequate housing situation in Afghanistan's informal settlements impacts women and girls' health, but also has a strong impact on their resilience.

[7] Implementing the new Urban Agenda by strengthening Urban-Rural Linkages | UN-Habitat

Inequitable land governance has resulted in insecure Housing Land and Property (HLP) rights becoming a critical issue across the country, with residents of informal settlements at particular risk. Informal settlements are sites of displacement, where people forced from rural areas by climate breakdown or conflict have settled in close proximity to urban centers (for security, access to socio-economic/humanitarian services etc.). With insecure HLP rights, residents of informal settlements are subject to frequent evictions, particularly in high value urban areas where there is high competition for land. Insecure HLP rights also discourages investment in climate resilient housing and public assets in these areas: households, communities, utilities companies and NGOs/UN agencies do not invest in areas where assets are at high risk of appropriation.

Many areas of Afghanistan are now facing significant returns of IDPs and those from Pakistan and Iran – in some cases, returnees can account for 20 per cent of the total population – presenting severe HLP risks. Returnees face ambiguity about land and housing rights claims due to the social, economic and political disruption that has affected the country – particularly in conflict hotspots.

Key issues include: secondary occupation of land and housing (i.e. returnees land and housing occupied by another person); unclear public land/private land boundaries and lack of physical plot boundaries (boundary walls, markings etc.) causing boundary conflicts (constraining the demarcation of agreed plot boundaries); many years of acquisitions, transactions, sub-division and other changes in ownership and plot characteristics that complicate HLP claims.

Insecure HLP rights for women remains a critical issue. Research by the HLP Area of Responsibility (AoR) (co-led by UN-Habitat and NRC) and Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) working group (led by UN Women) shows that women are highly vulnerable to being evicted and suffer severely in the event of an eviction. In addition, the current policy of denying women advocacy licenses is impacting progress on women's HLP rights by preventing female partners from representing female beneficiaries in court.

Afghanistan's location in a seismically active area compounds housing and land deficits. The disastrous earthquake in Western Afghanistan, Herat, which impacted 1.4 million people, killed thousands of people and destroyed more than 30 000 houses⁸ – either completely, severely or partially – as well as many public buildings, such as schools or health facilities. As houses and public buildings were often not constructed to be earthquake resilient, strongly increased the number of casualties.

Access to drinking water is dire, especially in rural and informal urban settlements, with highly populated urban areas. Densely populated areas such as Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat (where 66 per cent of the country's urban population reside⁶²) face huge challenges for supplying water to their populations, due to the escalating impacts of climate change, as well as the lack of investments in related infrastructure.

[8] [Nature's Fury: The Herat earthquakes of 2023 - Afghanistan Analysts Network - English](#)

Studies show that Kabul is at risk of a depleted ground water reservoir by 2030. And already now, urban households have seen a drastic rise in expenditures on water, nearly doubling the costs per family from 2022 to 2024. The absence of adequate waste and wastewater management, meanwhile, has severe health implications due to the increased risk of water- and vector borne diseases. And again: women and girls suffer most from the lack of access to water, as they spend more time fetching from “far-away places”, which also brings an increase in risks to gender-based violence in unsafe public spaces.



Children using the new water tap built by UN-Habitat in Zindajan district, western Afghanistan.

While agriculture is still the main source of income for Afghans in rural areas, it currently only generates 33 per cent of Afghanistan’s GDP. As the country is witnessing an above-average global rise in temperature and as devastating climate shocks including widespread and protracted droughts, repeated flooding or other extreme weather events become more frequent and intense, rural/agricultural livelihood opportunities are under increasing pressure and become a leading cause of displacement in the country⁹. In addition, slow-onset effects of climate change are pushing people to transition to new livelihoods systematically over time. The combination of these factors, result in more people seeking opportunities in rapidly growing urban areas (CCA 2024). Due to low capacities and resources for planning, a rising number of people are settling in highly risk-prone urban areas – exposing them to further dramatic climate change impacts.

[9] Afghanistan Climate Vulnerability Assessment Round 1 (Nov-Dec 2024), | Displacement Tracking Matrix

Where (any) climate change adaptation efforts have been made in Afghanistan, they have focused on rural areas. The country's cities, however, are highly climate vulnerable, facing increased flood risks from the introduction of impermeable surfaces and heat island effect from their dense built environment. Climate risk breakdowns show that a lack of 'adaptive capacity' is behind most of the Afghan climate crisis, exceeding exposure and sensitivity as risk drivers - including also those resulting from environmental degradation.

Within the adaptive capacity pillar, in turn, limited access to basic services is a key culprit. Adaptation in cities oriented toward improving basic urban services and introducing natural elements to temper flood risks and urban heat island effects, then, is critical. This can be seen from a humanitarian and basic human needs perspective, but also with consideration to peace and security, as the impacts of climate change on natural resource access and livelihoods function as a risk multiplier of conflict in an already tense environment.

With more people moving to urban areas of all sizes, one of the major challenges for people is about livelihoods and employment opportunities, in order to integrate and sustain their families. Again, women and girls, being banned from higher education and universities and even medical training institutes, bear the highest burden. Unemployment rates, specifically for young people, are rising, and many lack "urban" skillsets; the lack of employment and livelihood opportunities for young people can increase frustrations and might lead to growing extremism, or search for alternatives, including irregular migration.



The graphic was submitted as a contribution to the art contest "My Urban Vision", an initiative by UN-Habitat in collaboration with UNWomen



Key challenges in Afghanistan

UN-Habitat aims to address based on the agency's core mandate

1.

Protracted internal displacement and massive forced returns lead to an increase of people living in unplanned and informal settlements:

The continuously high number of returnees and forcibly displaced from neighboring countries, as well as more than 7 million people facing protracted internal displacement due to conflict and/or climate change impacts, has led – and will continue to lead - to a high number of people in vulnerable situations and in need of humanitarian, basic human needs or livelihoods support.

22.9 million people, almost half the population, require humanitarian assistance to survive according to the HNRP 2025. With more than one million people having returned to Afghanistan since September 2023, and due to a lack of alternatives, many settle in informal settlements¹⁰, which often lack basic infrastructure, access to WASH/sanitation and other essential services.



[10] 80 per cent of Kabul's population is estimated to reside in informal settlements, and the situation is similar in provincial urban centres.

2.

Lack of access to shelter / housing, adequate living conditions and services and livelihood opportunities: The absence of adequate living standards (one of the criteria for enabling durable solutions^[11]), and especially the dire need for (improved and dignified) shelter, further accelerate vulnerabilities in other “sectors”. Having access to shelter/housing impacts protection outcomes and constitutes the basis for a dignified life^[12]. There is a need for adequate housing solutions – including enabling the transition from shelter to housing through securing Housing Land and Property (HLP) rights – and increased efforts for supporting the integration in the areas where people have chosen to settle. Improving access to basic services, including water and waste management, as well as livelihood opportunities are priorities for creating an enabling environment and supporting people on their pathways towards dignity, resilience and durable solutions.

3.

Acute and accelerating adverse impacts from climate change on assets, livelihoods and lives: Afghanistan is ranked seventh on the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index of countries most vulnerable and least prepared to adapt to climate change^[13]. The country experiences increasingly severe and frequent extreme weather events, notably heavy rains and floods which are the most devastating and costly hazard, as well as protracted drought and temperature extremes. These slow- and rapid-onset events put people’s lives, health, livelihoods and assets at risk, strain further already limited resources, and destroy critical public infrastructure. According to one recent study by the Afghanistan Analysts Network, climate change related shocks cost Afghanistan 550 million USD in years with normal precipitation, and 3 billion USD in drought years^[14]. These impacts and costs are accelerated by under-investment in adaptation and neglect of housing, basic services and infrastructure, notably in the water sector but also environmental degradation.



[11] [Durable Solutions Indicator Library - select your indicators!](#)

[12] [The Wider Impacts of Humanitarian Shelter And Settlements Assistance Key Findings Report | Humanitarian Library](#)

[13] University of Notre Dame, 2024, ND-GAIN: Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative

[14] Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2025, [The Economic Consequences of Climate Change for Afghanistan: Losses, projections ... and pathways to mitigation](#)

4.

Widespread abuse of Human Rights, especially those associated with gender equality and women's empowerment

Shortly after the take-over of the De facto Authorities, the overall human rights situation in the country has decreased, and it has gradually worsened since August 2021, especially for women and girls. Through various decrees, edicts and laws, including the “Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice” law (PVPV; August 2024), the De facto Authorities have reduced the rights of women in all major areas of their lives, including (secondary and higher) education above 12 years, imposing restrictions regarding employment and barriers on freedom of movement, and even creating “creating discriminatory barriers to their accessing healthcare¹⁵”. Women have also been banned from going to public parks and recreational facilities and are facing increasing imprisonment within the walls of their homes¹⁶. While still possible at community level with increased efforts, De facto Authorities at all levels make strong efforts to exclude women from decision-making processes, limiting their ability to express their specific needs.



[15] [World Report 2025: Afghanistan | Human Rights Watch](#)

[16] [Women in Afghanistan: From almost everywhere to almost nowhere | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

Special Feature

Inadequate living conditions & lack of inclusion: Impacts on Women and Girls

Inadequate living conditions undermine women's rights by affecting their safety, health, economic opportunities, social inclusion, mental health, and legal rights. Providing shelter/housing, services and skillsets is crucial for empowering women to achieve their full potential. UN-Habitat's activities play an important role to empower women and girl and allow them a dignified life – and opportunities.

Safety and Security

- **Increased Vulnerability to Violence:** Women living in inadequate shelter, especially in informal settlements, are more exposed to physical and sexual violence. Lack of secure shelter and unsafe living conditions as well as absence of privacy, combined with economic stress, make women and girls more susceptible to harassment and abuse.
- **Lack of Tenure Security:** Being at risk of force evictions due to lack of legal ownership or secure tenure, accelerate anxiety and can also prevent women (or entire families) from accessing credit and other financial services.

Health and Well-being

- **Poor Health Outcomes:** Inadequate shelters or the absence of basic services such as clean water & sanitation, lead to health issues. Women, who are typically responsible for household chores, are disproportionately affected by these conditions, impacting their overall well-being. Women's health is also strongly impacted by the inability to perform personal hygiene.

Psychological Impact

- **Mental Health Issues:** Being confined from public life, women are forced to stay home – which per se is a cause of trauma and stress and many women and girls deprived from higher education and opportunities struggle with depressions. This stress is then accelerated through inadequate living conditions, which can then intensify mental health problems, including anxiety and depression. Specifically in contexts of forced returns, having a stable place to stay can support integration and reduce mental health stress.

Economic Opportunities and Social Inclusion

- **Restricted Participation:** Women in inadequate shelter and in informal settlements may face social exclusion and discrimination, and limited participation in community activities and decision-making processes. This exclusion hampers their ability to advocate for their rights and needs.
- **Limited Access to Employment:** Poor housing conditions can restrict women's access to economic opportunities. Inadequate housing often means living far from job markets, but also – specifically important in Afghanistan – reducing women's ability to produce goods at home for supporting the household income, thus also further reducing women's opportunities for self-reliance.

Read more about the impact of UN-Habitat's work and its impact on women and girls in our [advocacy paper!](#)



Localizing UN-Habitat's global priorities: Strategic Priorities for Afghanistan (2026-2027)

The timeline of the “strategic priorities for UN-Habitat Afghanistan” is defined by its alignment to the new strategic plan of UN-Habitat (2026-2029) as starting date, as well as the UN Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (UNSFA; 2023-2027) as (current) end date. In a politically, socially and economically fragile context like Afghanistan, the timeline of two years is short, but appropriate for strategic considerations, as changes in the political, social and economic circumstances might make it important to adapt priorities. It is acknowledged though, that two years is a short time for a country that needs transformative changes, especially as UN-Habitat Afghanistan will continue to consider longer-term developments and solutions in programming and actions.

Based on the agency's analysis and in consultations with relevant stakeholders, including financial and technical partners, sister UN agencies and other humanitarian-development-peace or durable solutions actors, and based on adequate engagement with authorities, UN-Habitat will focus on the following strategic priorities in 2026-2027¹⁷.

[17] <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2025/05/2508372e.pdf>

A

Support the most vulnerable people by creating and enabling dignified living conditions and livelihood opportunities with a specific focus on those living in unplanned, underserved and informal settlements

Objective: Create an enabling, safe and adequate living environment and foster an inclusive society and productive through participatory and properly planned “urbanization processes” for Afghanistan’s rapidly growing cities and human settlements of all sizes.

Strategic Interventions:

- Increase access to basic services and support people to access adequate housing solutions for increased protection and dignity, including for women and girls - as adequate housing is more than a roof.
- Enhance participatory processes in urban/spatial planning and actions that support inclusion and ensure all voices are heard to enhance social cohesion, planning for future urban growth
- Advocate for and foster investments in community-driven basic infrastructures that meet basic human needs, but also serve to improve climate resilience and reduce environmental degradation (inc. waste and water management)
- Engage in efforts for safe and gender-sensitive public spaces of all kinds, empowering women and girls, reducing gender-based violence but also making neighborhoods attractive for local level economic development and private sector engagement
- Promote well-located and connected, mixed-use and social mix neighborhoods to enable and foster integration, social cohesion and livelihood opportunities
- Support people in developing skills that enable and empower them towards self-reliance and increasingly decent jobs or livelihoods, with a focus on women and vulnerable populations
- Advance and advocate for evidence-based processes through the collection and analysis of urban data and urban profiling (inc. provincial cities) and best practices to ensure that future investments can be based on a sound assessment of risks (such as climate change induced risks) but also long-term (development-oriented) opportunities. This can be done at different planning scales, inc. neighborhood, city and territorial level.



B

Enhance preparedness, response, recovery, and reconstruction

Objective: Advance preparedness, response, and recovery efforts, with particular attention to those people and areas most affected by natural and human-caused disasters and conflict through Build Back Better (BBB) and area-based approaches

Strategic Interventions:

- Improve risk, vulnerability and capacity assessments through participatory, community-driven processes to anticipate and prepare for future shocks and crises and apply integrated, cross-sectoral approaches that support the transition from humanitarian to basic human needs, including long-term considerations on adaptation and resilience
- Support integration of forcibly displaced people in areas where they settle through inclusive and participatory processes and improving living conditions for all people living in an area, acknowledging the challenges of but also the opportunities for displacement affected communities¹⁸
- Restore, reconstruct or construction basic services at the community level including a specific focus on life-saving infrastructure (water, sanitation, flood protection), applying a gender-sensitive approach and supporting people to (re-)build better through improving their skills and knowledge of materials and techniques
- Build upon UN-Habitat's expertise on housing, land, and property (HLP) rights for supporting the transition from shelter to housing in crisis situations, including for forcibly displaced, enabling people to invest in their "homes" and assets. Securing land and tenure rights is critical for humanitarian responses but also crucial for advancing economic development and livelihoods - ensuring that investments in housing, community infrastructure and private sector assets are sustainable.



In a country context prone to natural disasters, Building Back Better (BBB) is key

[18] UN-Habitat publication: Towards inclusive solutions to urban internal displacement: A global framework for Governments, UN agencies, the Resident Coordinator System and partners.



"Before, whenever I saw clouds during flood season, I lost my sleep and peace. But now, thanks to the flood retaining wall, I no longer worry, I can finally sleep in peace."

Shawazgai, a resident in Doormalaka Community, Tani District, Khost

C

Accelerate environmental and climate actions to save lives, livelihoods and assets

Objective: Address the interlinkages between climate change, environmental degradation, and safe, improved living conditions for people to enhance climate adaptation and foster resilient communities

Strategic Interventions:

- Promote well-managed urbanization and climate resilient neighborhood upgrading through urban and land-use planning that includes considerations of future (rapid) population growth and climate and environmental risks. Apply (participatory) urban/spatial planning that integrates climate adaptation measures; implement pilots that reduce environmental degradation inc. through ensuring adequate densities, retention of green space, reducing pollution through waste management and fostering nature-based solutions
- Improve access to climate and disaster resilient shelter/housing and basic services; strengthen resilience to climate-related hazards through risk- and gender-sensitive analysis, planning and upgrading or constructing infrastructure. Integrate climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, the use of local materials and resilience considerations in the construction / design of housing and public infrastructure (inc. through, where possible, urban policies)
- Link climate change and environmental degradation to health impacts through improvements of water-, waste-water and waste management services to reduce health risks for the population, which are caused by pollution, contamination or the lack of clean drinking water and the overall environment
- Increase awareness among people and communities of climate related and environmental risks and the impact on people's lives, aiming for behavior and transformative changes through community-led solutions and promote climate-smart behaviour through participatory processes.



Before



...and after

UN-Habitat – a strong actor across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus

UN-Habitat's work in Afghanistan has clearly been a strong "development-actor" until August 2021. But as proven in the last years, and in many other crises countries, the approaches promoted and implemented by UN-Habitat are impactful in crises settings, while considering long-term impacts and fostering longer-term solutions. As such, the agency is a "classic HDP" nexus actor: UN-Habitat's added value becomes most powerful in protracted crises but also in the transition periods – e.g. a returnee crises – when "responses" do not only need to consider rapid support, such as provided at the borders, but when solutions need to be developed that create an enabling environment for people where they settle – which need a cross-sectoral, integrated and risk-informed "spatial" (urban) planning approach.

- A classic example is (humanitarian) shelter¹⁹ support paired with HLP rights (including at communal level), which enables people to stabilize, feel safe and then invest – as soon as they can and in their own speed and with their own resources - in their homes and adapt them to their needs. Through providing "technical expertise" on architectural design, construction techniques or materials, those houses will then be more resilient to natural disasters.
- Based on a (participatory and area-based) assessment of risks induced by climate change, community-driven resilience infrastructures will protect people, their assets and livelihoods, from future disasters, the participatory process also allows to increase awareness on risks and advance behaviour changes (e.g. saving water; awareness on landslides or floods and increased preparedness); in a longer term, the assessments and pilots should inform into policies, early warning systems and actions to address loss and damage.
- UN-Habitat's inclusive, participatory approaches (assessments, community mobilization, community-driven action plans and implementation) foster social cohesion among different population groups, which is a first step towards peace.

[19] Including shelter repairs, transitional shelters or incremental (owner driven) housing

“

“Other women and I feel that this project belongs to us. It directly responds to the needs and problems in our area. Participating in such projects creates positive change and strengthens cooperation and solidarity among the people.”

Sakina Rahmati, single mother from Kadestan, an informal settlement in Herat province, and beneficiary of a UN-Habitat project on improved living environments and livelihood opportunities

By implementing projects directly – through UN-Habitat’s community mobilisers, architects and engineers – the agency builds trust with people and communities and with all relevant stakeholders, working with and for people of Afghanistan. Where possible, constructions and other projects will apply Cash-for-Work modalities and include skill development of people living in the respective neighborhood – foster socio- and economic opportunities for people in vulnerable situations and enable self-reliance over time.



UN-Habitat’s engineers work with beneficiary families, communities and firms to ensure quality of constructions

The UN in Afghanistan – UN Strategic Framework Afghanistan (SFA) and how the UN-Habitat strategic framework supports/is linked to the SFA

The UN Strategic Framework Afghanistan (SFA)²⁰ originally covering the period 2023-2025 and has now been extended to 2027. The continuous efforts of the UN in Afghanistan includes humanitarian needs, as well as durable solutions and interventions “addressing basic human needs”. A strong focus is put on advocating and improving the Human Rights situation, specifically for women and girls, ethnic minorities and other people in vulnerable situations.

The SFA is framed to “support Afghans, particularly women, girls, and other vulnerable groups, to a) build resilience to shocks, b) sustain livelihoods, c) protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, d) strengthen social cohesion and build social capital, and e) preserve hard-won development gains achieved over the past two decades, including with regard to service delivery.”²⁰

The UN Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (UNSFA) focuses on 3 priorities²¹:



UN-Habitat contributes to all three key priority areas and works together with partners across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to actively support the achievement of those goals. The agency's interventions are reflected in the joint UNSFA work plan and are included into the monitoring framework of the UNSFA at UN INFO, as the joint platform for results monitoring.

[20] [United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan](#) | [United Nations in Afghanistan](#)

[21] The UN in Afghanistan has also agreed to priorities related to two additional live-saving, humanitarian outcomes (“reducing food insecurity” and “reducing maternal and child mortality rates”).

While the SFA does not include a specific “urban chapter”, UN-Habitat was worked in close collaboration with others, including the Resident Coordinator’s Office, to ensure that the 2024 Common Country Analysis (CCA) includes urban challenges, as well as underlining urban areas as locations for social and economic opportunities for Afghan people. This has been specifically important in a period where urban areas rapidly grow due to demographic shifts, rural-urban migration, and forced displacement.

Thematic engagement and coordination and cooperation with sisters UN agencies and other actors

UN-Habitat is an active member of the UN Country Team, a “conceptual founding member” of the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA) and is engaging in the Durable Solutions Working Groups (at national and regional level) and different humanitarian clusters, including Shelter and NFI, WASH and protection, and is co-lead of the HLP Area of Responsibility (AoR). The agency is introducing our methodologies (inc. Participatory Hazard, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments/PHVCA; integrated spatial planning; setting up community committees and action planning; HLP for displaced persons including IDPs and returnees; ...) and is continuously advocating for specific “urban approaches” for durable solutions in displacement contexts (cross-sectoral; social mix; mix use; ...) and for other topics, such as climate change, livelihoods and women empowerment.

Among other activities, the UN-Habitat is engaged in the following efforts to strengthen joint programming and resource mobilization.

Due to UN-Habitat’s unique and cross-sectoral mandate, the agency collaborates with many sister UN agencies and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on:

- climate change and water-related topics;
- Durable Solutions efforts in coordination with the Resident Coordinator’s Office through the Senior Durable Solutions Advisor and key UN agencies (IOM, UNDP, UNHCR);
- creating safe, gender-sensitive and child-friendly spaces in urban areas (UNWomen; UNICEF);
- HLP rights (NRC);
- building upon “built cultural heritage” as entry point for improving living conditions and livelihoods of people living surrounding neighborhoods (UNESCO);
- access to safe shelter and socio-economic support for the reintegration of people impacted by drug addiction and homelessness (UNODC), ...

...to name just a few.

UN-Habitat Afghanistan, based on its broad mandate and the interlinkages with other mandates, is an ideal partner for further interagency cooperation and joint programming. The spatial planning approach of the agency can also play a strong role for coordination across sectors and actors, monitoring and advocacy – telling the story of a joint impact of the UN in Afghanistan.

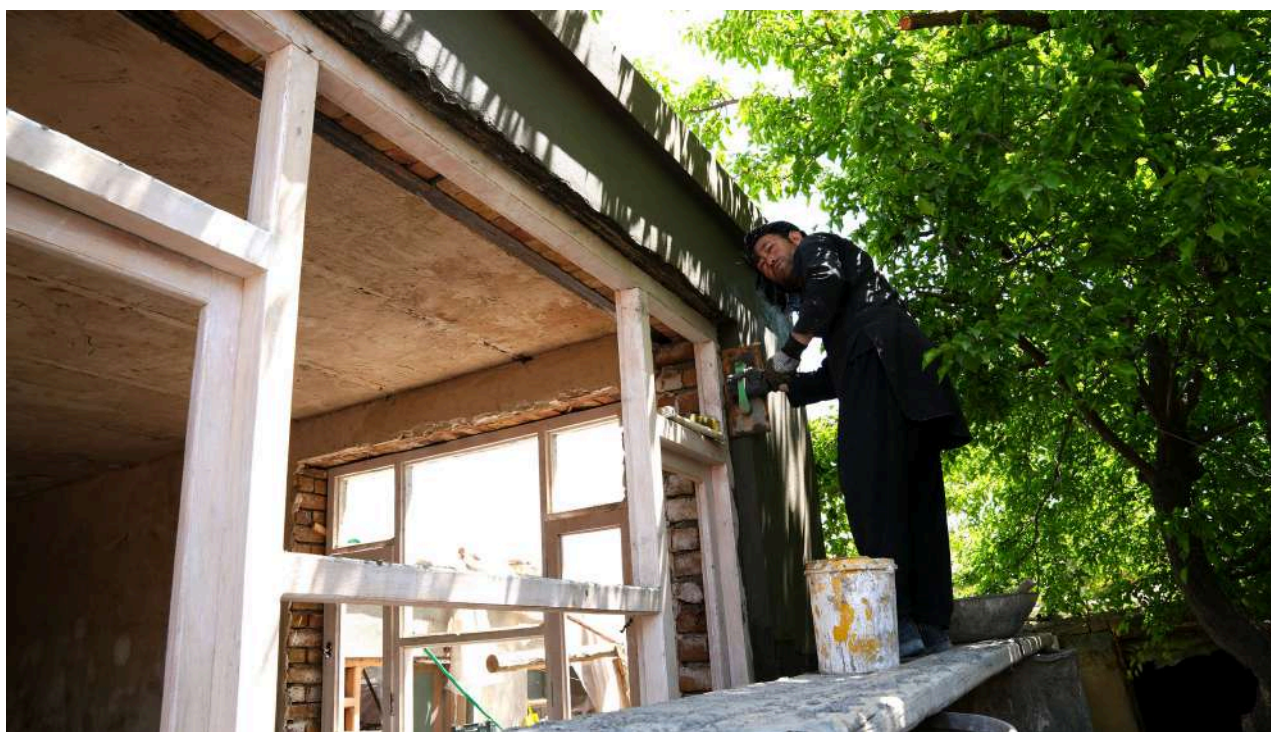
Engagement with Afghanistan's De facto Authorities (DfA)

UN-Habitat's engagement with the De facto Authorities (DfA) in Afghanistan is informed by relevant Security Council Resolutions, including S/RES/2626 (2022) and guided by the priorities set out in the UN Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (UNSFA).

Building on UN-Habitat's significant pre-2021 portfolio in Afghanistan, the agency continues to engage with local level DfA, and community representative bodies. For UN-Habitat, local actors play a crucial role, as they are key for service provision to populations, but also for coordination of different sectoral interventions under their jurisdiction and enabling participatory processes.

Specifically regarding climate action, engagement with DfA (NEPA; ANDAMA) will be important, acknowledging that the (updated) Nationally Determined Contribution (2021-2030) underlines that "The country's number one priority response to climate change is adaptation in the context of addressing key vulnerabilities in sectors, building adaptive capacity at all levels, addressing loss and damage, and increasing the resilience of communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems."²²

In order to achieve a transition from humanitarian to more sustainable solutions in Afghanistan, dialogue between relevant stakeholders is needed – and UN-Habitat is committed to support the people of Afghanistan through promoting inclusive, representative, participatory and responsive governance at the national and sub-national levels.



[22] NOTE: A delegation from Afghanistan, lead by DG NEPA attended COP29 (2024) in Baku, Azerbaijan. As the 13th session of the World Urban Forum (WUF) in 2026 will take place in Baku, the Azerbaijani government may also opt to include representatives of Afghanistan for the WUF.



UN-Habitat's impact and projects before August 2021

UN-Habitat has been working in Afghanistan since 1992, supporting people in both rural and urban areas (“in settlements of all sizes”) for increased participation, for improved access to adequate housing and services, and integration – aiming for advancing socio-economic as well as environmental development.

Large-scale, transformative projects of UN-Habitat include the “National Solidarity Programme” (NSP), with all its “sister- and child programmes” including the Urban Solidarity Programme, leading to the “Citizens’ Charter” - aiming to address poverty, exclusion and improve the basic infrastructure and social service delivery in Afghanistan and empowering communities.

Through projects like “Cities for all”, UN-Habitat used strategic urban planning for advancing socio-economic development of people living in urban areas, advance land allocation and enable municipalities to provide better services to people. The “Clean and Green Cities Programme” even went a step further, linking improved municipal service provision to job and employment opportunities and private sector engagement while creating a cleaner, safer and healthier living environment.

Even before 2021, UN-Habitat implemented many projects, including the LIVE UP and SHURA project, which helped displaced people, including internally displaced and returnees, to integrate in the neighborhoods and settlements they chose.

With support of a large variety of partners, UN-Habitat implemented projects with a value of more than 500 million USD to support the people of Afghanistan between 2010 - 2021.

Listening to the people is a core concept of UN-Habitat’s work in Afghanistan - this can be done through household surveys or consultations with community members





Providing hope to communities - tree planting ceremony as a sign of solidarity among women on International Women's Day 2025

Partners over the years

Throughout the years, UN-Habitat received strong support from many institutional and bilateral donors. UN-Habitat's work in Afghanistan would not be possible without those contributions and also the strong technical cooperation with our partners and trustful partnerships.

In the last 10 years, UN-Habitat's main donors included the people and governments of Japan, the European Union, the US, the UK, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Kuwait, as well as the World Bank, the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF), the governments who contribute to the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA) and the United Nations Road Safety Fund (UNRSF).

Conclusion and way forward

UN-Habitat Afghanistan is committed to serving the people of Afghanistan – men, women, girls, boys alike. The agency's mandate is broad but focused, and always based on the needs of the people, which are multifold, complex and often "place-based" - and so are our responses: tailored to the needs of people and the location. It's the agency's specific approaches – putting people first - which have proven to be valid in humanitarian as well as development-oriented contexts and situations, which make the difference: multi-sectoral and area-based thinking, considering risks but strongly focusing on creating an enabling environment for people to be self-reliant, safe and live in dignity.

With support of technical and financial partners, we will provide technical expertise and directly implement projects that improve peoples' lives, their living conditions and make them resilient, for sustainable economic, social and environmental development opportunities for all people in Afghanistan.



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For A Better Urban Future
