

Shelter and Housing Afghanistan



Context

Decades of conflict and natural disasters have internally displaced an estimated 6.3 million Afghans, forcing many to seek refuge in urban and peri-urban areas. Since September 2023, large-scale returns from Pakistan and Iran have further intensified the protracted humanitarian crisis. More than 4 million people have been repatriated since 2023, including over 2 million in 2025 alone, often with little more than what they can carry. This continued influx is placing immense pressure on the availability of shelter and housing, essential services, and livelihoods.

Displaced populations, as well as other vulnerable groups, frequently settle in informal, unplanned, and underserviced areas with inadequate access to basic infrastructures (including WASH facilities). Many have built houses with limited resources and technical knowledge in risk-prone areas, leaving them especially vulnerable to environmental hazards such as earthquakes and floods. Without secure tenure rights (HLP rights), they are vulnerable to forced evictions, which in turn prevents long-term investment in their homes and property.



Afghan Children, showing drawing of their dream home inside their newly constructed shelter in Kabul, April 2025,
©UN-Habitat/Piroz Amin

UN-Habitat has been at the forefront of addressing these shelter challenges, delivering life-saving assistance and enhancing living conditions, recognizing that adequate shelter and housing as well as HLP rights are central to the durable solutions strategy, enabling people to achieve self-reliance and resilience. Being active in Afghanistan since 1992, it has maintained a strong focus on area-based programmes, including improving access to adequate living environments, including safe housing and shelters, as well as essential basic services. However, in response to the country's socio-economic situation, massive returns, and frequent natural disasters, UN-Habitat has expanded its support, providing shelter assistance combined with access to basic services to promote sustainability and create adequate living environments for all. As a key need for people and a strategic priority for UN-Habitat, shelter and housing interventions remain essential components of the broader durable solutions strategy, supporting the Afghan people's resilience and self-reliance.

"The intersecting vulnerabilities underscore the need for a coordinated, protection-centred and gender-responsive shelter [...] response to address both immediate life-saving needs and longer-term shelter adequacy for the most vulnerable populations."

(Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan: Afghanistan 2026, p. 33)

In parallel, UN-Habitat invests in strengthening the capacity of local actors, including homeowners and local builders, through improved construction methods that enhance disaster resilience. Training, technical guidance, and on-the-job mentorship delivered under various humanitarian and durable solutions projects, have helped local stakeholders improve the skills and technical understanding needed to construct safer, more resilient shelters. These efforts not only ensure the sustainability and quality of shelter interventions but also reinforce broader community awareness of location-specific risks, increase local ownership, and reduce vulnerability to environmental hazards in the long term. Cross-sectoral and area-based approaches, such as those funded by the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA), advance integrated solutions that include shelter and housing. They also rehabilitate essential, resilient infrastructure and foster locally led maintenance and repair capacities, thereby complementing emergency shelter initiatives funded under the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF).

Tailored shelter interventions for advancing durable solutions

UN-Habitat's approach focuses on community-driven processes, ensuring vulnerable groups, such as women and girls, persons with disabilities, and/or displaced individuals, are prioritized and included in all phases of the process.. It also places strong emphasis on continuous communication with communities regarding the methodology and the beneficiary selection criteria. Community mobilizers play a crucial role in building trust and gathering accurate information, surveying households while integrating protection needs to ensure that the most at-risk groups are reached.

To ensure high-quality shelter improvements, UN-Habitat engineers assess individual shelter conditions, develop family-specific Bill of Quantities (BoQs), and provide close technical supervision throughout construction. Households selected as beneficiaries receive building materials or conditional cash assistance, alongside technical capacity-building to empower them with basic construction skills. For the most vulnerable, critical heating and winterization support is also provided during harsh weather periods.



A worker reinforcing the exterior wall of a home in Dage-e Tarakhil, Kabul, August 2023. ©UN-Habitat/Piroz Amin.

"Female-headed households report higher rates of inadequate shelter and face heightened eviction risks linked to insecure tenure. These protection and shelter deficits are further compounded by economic deprivation, high rental costs in urban areas and limited access to land or safe housing options."

(Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan: Afghanistan 2026, p. 33)

Beyond physical infrastructure, UN-Habitat's shelter interventions foster community resilience, helping to restore security, dignity, and stability for vulnerable households. By addressing immediate shelter needs through a sustainable and inclusive approach, these initiatives improve living conditions, strengthen social cohesion, and support recovery, including with housing, land and property (HLP) interventions. In many cases, incremental housing approaches are implemented to help families overcome barriers, allowing them to gradually adapt and expand their homes according to long-term needs, while also investing in basic services to ensure adequate living environments. These shelter and housing initiatives are integral to UN-Habitat's durable solutions strategy, supporting self-reliance and long-term resilience.



Women participate in a community mapping session to identify local hazards in Kabul. May 2025. ©UN-Habitat/Piroz Amin.

Selected Shelter and Housing Projects

Construction of Transitional Shelters in Nijrab District of Kapisa Province

March 2025 – November 2025

Donor: **Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF)**

This project addressed the **urgent shelter and protection needs** in Kapisa province, where recent **floods displaced numerous households**, resulting in 16 deaths, 4 injuries, and the destruction of up to 101 homes. Despite ongoing efforts, only 61% of planned shelter support in the central region, including Kapisa, has been delivered, while more than 150 permanent shelters remain required. The situation has been further intensified by large-scale returns from Pakistan, with an additional 400,000 returnees expected in 2024, placing added pressure on already vulnerable communities in return areas, displacement sites, and informal settlements.



Local community members constructing their shelters in Nijrab District of Kapisa Province, July 2025. ©UN-Habitat

In response, UN-Habitat implemented the project to **improve living conditions and provide life-saving assistance to flood-affected and displaced households**. Building on initial support provided by OCHA, which covered \$600 of the \$2,000 per household required, the project delivered the remaining **\$1,400 to 273 households**. This included 205 households with other vulnerabilities, 27 women-headed households, and 41 households with persons with disabilities. Verification of households is followed by technical assessments and the development of BoQs and designs.



Local community members constructing their shelters in Nijrab District of Kapisa Province, July 2025. ©UN-Habitat

Each household received **conditional cash assistance** in three installments: \$700 for material procurement, \$400 upon 30% completion, and \$300 at 80% completion of works. To further support women and girls, 20 of the most vulnerable households received hygiene and dignity kits. The conditional cash modality was developed in consultation with communities to ensure **accountability and ownership**.

By directly supporting **2,050 individuals** across IDPs, returnees, and host communities the project **strengthened household resilience, addressing urgent shelter needs, and reducing protection risks**.

Selected Shelter and Housing Projects

Provision of Shelter Repair Support and Seasonal Winter Assistance to Vulnerable Households Affected by Recent Floods in Kabul and Nangarhar Provinces

November 2024 – April 2025

Donor: **Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF)**

The project provided **life-saving winter shelter repairs and non-food item (NFI) assistance to vulnerable households** affected by floods and displacement in Kabul and Nangarhar provinces. Almost half of Afghanistan's population (23.7 million people) require humanitarian assistance, including **6.6 million in urgent need of shelter and NFIs**. Recent floods and ongoing drought conditions heightened protection and shelter risks, particularly for returnees, IDPs, and those in informal settlements, many of which lack basic services. **Urban populations remain highly vulnerable due to flooding** from heavy rainfall, rapid snowmelt, and environmental degradation, while prolonged drought continues to strain livelihoods and access to essential resources.



Afghan women participating in a community mobilization event in Nangarhar province. December 2024.
©UN-Habitat/Piroz Amin

The project targeted **645 households**, including 398 with other vulnerabilities, 150 women-headed households, and 97 with persons with disabilities, **aiming to improve living conditions and reduce protection risks during winter**. Each household received **\$550 in conditional cash assistance for resilient shelter repairs**, disbursed in two installments, along with conditional cash and in-kind support for winter clothing, heating systems, and blankets. Additionally, 30 vulnerable households with women and girls received hygiene and dignity kits to ensure safety and well-being.

The project was implemented through **participatory approaches**, including household verification, technical assessments, and development of tailor-made BoQs and designs for each shelter. Conditional cash modalities were designed in consultation with communities to ensure timely and effective repairs. UN-Habitat's long-term banking arrangements facilitated **secure and efficient cash transfers**, while technical staff monitored progress, provided guidance, and ensured compliance with quality, environmental, and social safeguard standards. Finally, post-distribution monitoring validated assistance provided and measured impact.

Overall, the project directly benefited **4,516 people** from IDPs, returnees, and host communities, **strengthening household resilience and reducing protection and winter-related risks**.



An Afghan family stands at the entrance of their home in Nangarhar Province. April 2025. ©UN-Habitat/Piroz Amin.

Selected Shelter and Housing Projects

Shelter Repairs and Winter Aid for Displaced People in Nangarhar, Kunar and Laghman

November 2024 – April 2025

Donor: **Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF)**

This project focused on **shelter repair support** and **winter assistance** in Nangarhar, Kunar, and Laghman, where many IDPs and returnees live in informal settlements. To **foster inclusion and transparency**, community groups, such as community development councils and women's sub-committees, were either established or strengthened to support awareness efforts and **ensure vulnerable groups** were prioritized in the beneficiary selection process.



UN-Habitat engineers assessing the shelters in Nangarhar, June 2025, ©UN-Habitat/Piroz Amin

Through **participatory approaches**, UN-Habitat conducted coordination meetings with local communities, followed by comprehensive household surveys that reached more than **8,000 people**. The assessment integrated HLP and Protection considerations, allowing for a tailored response to the needs of the population. As a result, **1,200 families** benefited from **major repairs and upgrades** to existing shelters, enhancing their living conditions and stability. Over **1,000 households** received critical heating assistance and winterization items through a combination of cash and in-kind assistance, ensuring the most vulnerable were supported.

By addressing immediate shelter needs and providing essential resources, this initiative **strengthened community resilience** and offered greater stability to thousands of displaced individuals. Its participatory approach not only improved housing security but also strengthened social cohesion and inclusivity for the communities.

Selected Shelter and Housing Projects

Strengthening Shelter in Dag-Tarakhil for Improved Living Conditions

August 2022 – November 2023

Donor: **Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF)**

This project provided **humanitarian shelter** support to over **4,500 displaced and returnee households**, benefitting approximately **30,000 people**. Through a combination of minor and major shelter repairs for more than 4,300 households, and the construction of 305 transitional shelters in Kabul's PD 21, **the project enabled a critical intervention for vulnerable communities** facing displacement and inadequate living conditions.

A participatory and inclusive approach ensured that local and displaced individuals were actively engaged from the outset. UN-Habitat's teams introduced the project with clear communication on methodology and beneficiary selection, **prioritizing the most vulnerable groups** such as women-headed households, child-headed households, and people with disabilities. Community mobilizers played a crucial role in gathering information and building trust, **surveying more than 6,000 households** to conduct an in-depth assessment of shelter conditions and tailor responses.



Afghan children stand beside their repaired shelter in Dag-Tarakhil, Kabul, September 2023, ©UN-Habitat/Piroz Amin

Selected Shelter and Housing Projects

Transparency remained central to the beneficiary selection process, which was guided by community councils and **publicly reviewed**. Once selected, households received essential **building materials** based on detailed BoQs. Technical capacity-building workshops further empowered beneficiaries and local laborers, equipping them with construction skills in line with community councils' standards. UN-Habitat's engineers closely monitored the progress, ensuring high-quality implementation of the shelter improvements.



Workers building transitional shelters in Dag-e Tarakhil, Kabul. September 2023. ©UN-Habitat/Piroz Amin.

Beyond physical infrastructure, this project strengthened community resilience and restored a sense of **security, dignity, and stability** for thousands of displaced families. By addressing immediate shelter needs with a sustainable and inclusive approach, the initiative significantly improved living conditions and has contributed to longer-term recovery efforts.

Selected Shelter and Housing Projects

Sustainable Human Settlements in Urban Areas to Support Reintegration in Afghanistan (SHURA)

March 2018 - December 2021 (the project ended before completion due to the takeover of the Taliban / De Facto Authorities in August 2021)

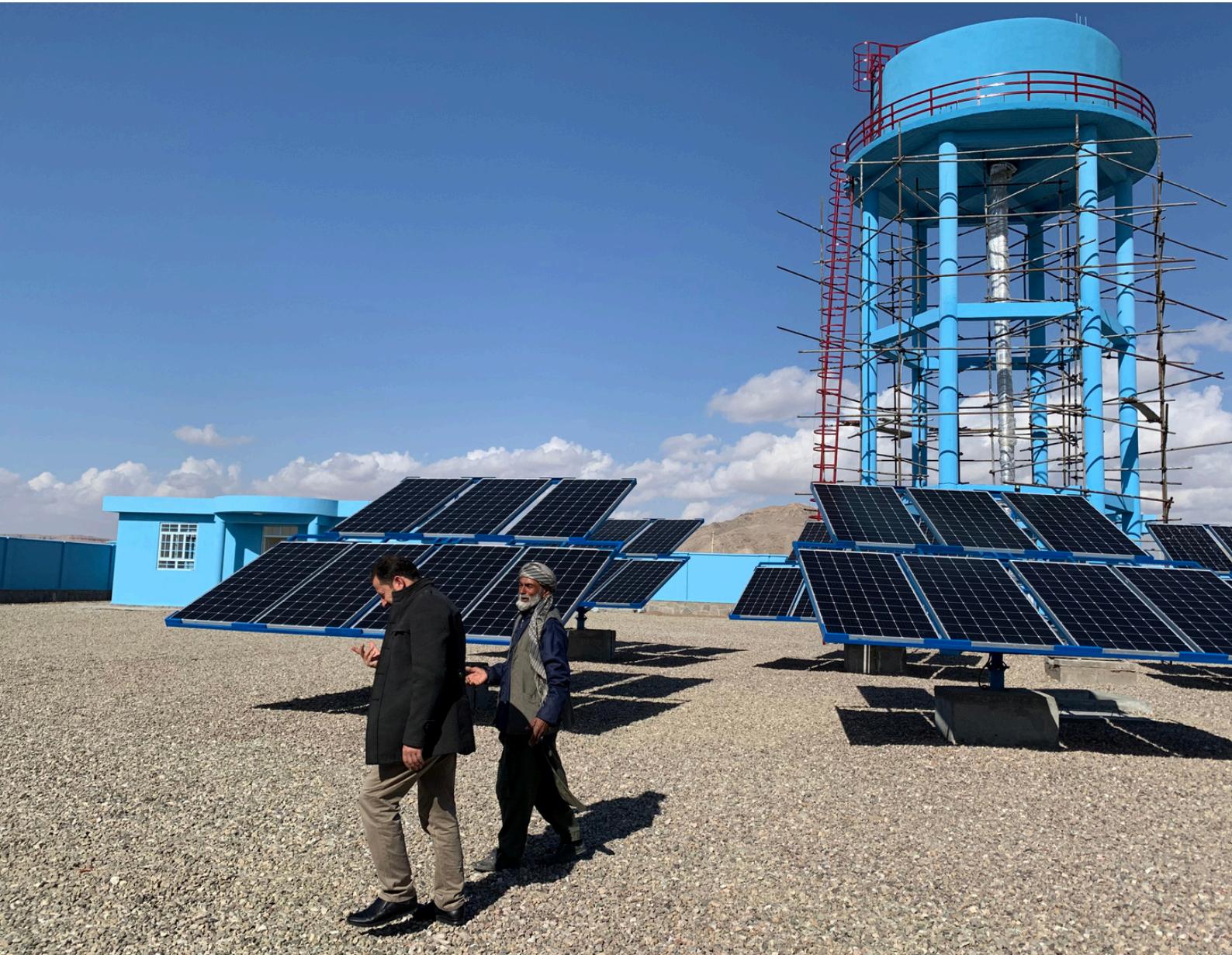
Donor: EU and Denmark

The SHURA programme supported the integration of displaced populations (IDPs and returnees) into host communities. The programme's central goal was to **help affected individuals reintegrate** and contribute to Afghan society as soon as possible.



During the construction period, the first houses and services, like water, were ready to use. March 2020 ©UN-Habitat/Piroz Amin

Building on lessons learned from over a decade of displacement initiatives, the SHURA programme focused on the rapid identification and **allocation of suitable land** near livelihood opportunities, laying a foundation for **self-reliance**. UN-Habitat coordinated with Afghanistan's line ministries and UN sister agencies to deliver this flagship urban reintegration initiative. The approach emphasized the development of inclusive, self-sustaining, and **resilient settlements** and created a platform for affected communities to drive their own integration and growth.



Solar-powered water supply facility in Saadat Township in Herat province. June 2020. ©UN-Habitat/Piroz Amin

The SHURA programme has supported **the integration of displaced populations within host communities**, facilitating access to serviceable land, providing secure tenure, and strengthening the capacity of urban neighborhoods **to accommodate diverse and growing populations**.

About UN-Habitat in Afghanistan

Since 1992, UN-Habitat has been actively working in support of the Afghanistan's people, by driving physical and social reconstruction of the country and promoting integration and socio-economic development. With over 30 years of continuous presence in Afghanistan, our approach includes:

- **Community-driven solutions:** UN-Habitat works to empower returnees, internally displaced people, and vulnerable groups through participatory, area-based approaches that strengthen living conditions and build climate resilience.
- **Urban/spatial planning:** Leveraging spatial mapping and cross-sectoral strategies, UN-Habitat works to build environments with improved living conditions, foster livelihoods, and enable recovery in rapidly growing urban areas through a multi-sectoral spatial planning approach.
- **From shelter to housing through HLP rights and access to essential services:** Efforts to support access to shelter and adequate housing must also ensure access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and housing, land and property (HLP) rights. Safe and dignified living environments, particularly adequate housing, generate positive ripple effects across sectors, improving health, food security, education, and livelihoods.
- **Safe, resilient neighborhoods:** While focused on meeting humanitarian shelter needs, UN-Habitat's work helps to address gender-based violence, climate risks, and accessibility challenges while strengthening social cohesion through integrated community projects.
- **Direct implementation for quality:** UN-Habitat's engineers and architects advance design, procurement, and monitoring of construction progress and quality to ensure effective execution, continuous improvement, and lasting impact for the people of Afghanistan.

For more information, please contact:

Piroz Amin, Communications Associate
UN-Habitat Afghanistan
E-mail: piroz.amin@un.org
Phone: +93 (0) 79 694 1427