



DURABLE SOLUTIONS PROGRAMMING IN AFGHANISTAN

Supporting (Re)-integration of Displaced People in Areas of High Return



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Cover Photo: Children in Zindajan, Herat, wash their faces and hands at a newly constructed water tap built by UN-Habitat following the 2023 earthquake. [UN-Habitat/Piroz Amin, August 2024]

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Afghanistan continues to face one of the world's most complex displacement crises, driven by prolonged conflict, foreign occupation, economic contraction, climate vulnerability and largescale returns from neighbouring countries. Since late 2023, estimated 5.8 million Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan¹, placing acute pressure on already fragile urban and periurban settlements where access to adequate housing, basic services, livelihoods and infrastructure remains severely constrained. At the same time, nearly half of the population² continues to require humanitarian assistance, with displacementaffected communities facing heightened exposure to poverty, food insecurity, inadequate shelter and/or services, climaterelated hazards and protection risks.

In this context, durable solutions require a shift beyond shortterm humanitarian delivery toward strengthening the settlements' systems, infrastructure, livelihoods and community governance capacities that enable sustainable reintegration and resilience. Across Afghanistan, (re-)integration has a strong urban/peri-urban dimension, as returnees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and local communities live in underserved and climatevulnerable settlements, underscoring the central role of cities and neighbourhoods in recovery and stabilization processes.

In alignment with the United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (UNSFA) 2023–2027 and the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons (2010)³, UN-Habitat is implementing a portfolio of integrated, areabased durable solutions programmes in Afghanistan that translate global policy commitments into tangible, settlementlevel results. In line with its global mandate, UN-Habitat provides technical leadership on urban and settlementbased approaches to durable solutions, with a particular focus on shelter/housing, HLP rights, access to basic services, spatial planning and climate resilience⁴.

Through it's different programmes, including projects funded by the EU or, more recently, interagency projects funded by the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA), UN-Habitat enables durable solutions for returnees and displacement-affected communities through neighbourhood upgrading, incremental housing and shelter support, climateresilient infrastructure, livelihoods recovery, participatory spatial planning or/and housing, land and property (HLP) strengthening, based on the agency's inclusive community governance mechanisms and participatory processes. In all projects, the agency's interventions focus on improving the living conditions, strengthening re-integration capacities, and enhancing social cohesion and local resilience in areas experiencing high return and displacement pressures.

UN-Habitat's experience over the last 20 years⁵ demonstrated that strengthening existing settlements and urban systems is sustainable, socially cohesive and costeffective and benefits not only displaced but all people in a neighborhood. UN-Habitat implements integrated

1 [2026 Response Plan for Afghan Returnees \(RPAR\) from Pakistan and Iran. Border Response and \(re-\) integration Response in Areas of Return, United Nations and NGO Partners in Afghanistan.](#)

2 [2026 Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan \(HNRP\)](#)

3 [IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons, Project on Internal Displacement \(April, 2010\)](#)

4 [Towards inclusive solutions to urban internal displacement: A global framework for Governments, UN agencies, the Resident Coordinator System and partners \(UN-Habitat, 2025\)](#)

5 [Township in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned for Advancing Durable Solutions and Re-integration | UN-Habitat](#)

approaches through comprehensive settlement upgrading, community participation and incremental investments, with visible, scalable and high impact results that bridge humanitarian needs, recovery priorities and longer term resilience objectives.

This paper highlights how UN-Habitat's programming, including through funding by the EU and STFA, contributes to reintegration, climate adaptation and settlement stabilization in displacement affected areas across Afghanistan, while protecting donor investments, laying foundations for longer term recovery and stability, and reducing the risk of further displacement. The "durable solutions-specific" projects are complemented by UN-Habitat's other interventions, that include livelihood opportunities, recovery or other projects that support people in vulnerable situations.

1. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Afghanistan continues to face overlapping humanitarian, displacement, economic and climate crises that are placing increasing pressure on communities and settlement systems across the country. Decades of conflict, foreign occupation, political transition, economic contraction, climate-related shocks and large-scale returns have contributed to one of the world's most protracted displacement situations.

Since late 2023, almost six million Afghans have returned from neighbouring countries, many were deported, under highly constrained circumstances and now struggle with limited access to shelter, land, livelihoods or social support networks upon return. At the same time, millions of Afghans remain internally displaced due to conflict, natural disasters and economic vulnerability. According to the 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP), approximately 23 million people – nearly half of Afghanistan's population – continue to require humanitarian assistance nationwide.



Returned Afghan families at the Islam Qala border crossing between Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, 12 July 2025. © UNAMA/Abdul Hamed Wahidi

Return dynamics are increasingly concentrated in urban and peri-urban areas where services, infrastructure and labour markets already operate under severe strain. Many returnees and households in vulnerable situations settle in informal or underserved neighbourhoods due to limited access to affordable housing, land tenure, livelihoods and basic services in formally planned neighborhoods or areas. In provinces such as Herat, Farah, Kunduz, Kandahar, Helmand, Gardez, Khost, Baghlan, and Bamiyan, the rapid arrival of returnees is placing additional pressure on fragile settlement infrastructures and local municipal systems and economies.

These pressures are compounded by accelerating climate vulnerability. Afghanistan remains highly exposed to droughts, floods, harsh winters, earthquakes, erosion and land degradation. Climate-related hazards increasingly interact with displacement dynamics, undermining agricultural livelihoods, damaging infrastructure and increasing risks of secondary displacement, particularly among households living in informal settlements and inadequate shelters⁶.

Women, girls and groups in vulnerable situations are disproportionately affected by these intersecting crises. Restrictions on mobility, education and employment continue to reduce women's participation in public life, and access to livelihoods and basic services, while overcrowded living conditions and inadequate services heighten protection risks. At the same time, women play a central role in sustaining household resilience, community networks and local economies, particularly through home-based and culturally accepted livelihood activities⁷.

In this context, durable solutions cannot be achieved through stand-alone shelter (or other stand-alone sectoral) interventions or isolated humanitarian assistance alone. Sustainable (re-) integration requires integrated, area-based approaches that strengthen existing settlements, improve access to services and livelihoods, reinforce local resilience, and support inclusive community participation processes.

Within the framework of UNSFA 2023–2027, UN-Habitat is implementing a portfolio of programmes that operationalise durable solutions at neighbourhood and settlement scale. Through integrated investments in housing, infrastructure, HLP, climate resilience, livelihoods



Field team assessing returnee needs and situation in Kunduz province before the launch of the PAIDAAR project, December 2024. ©UN-Habitat

⁶ [Protecting the Housing, Land and Property \(HLP\) Rights of Displacement-affected Communities in Afghanistan: An Integrated Gender-responsive and Climate-resilient Approach](#), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) 2025.

⁷ [Gender alert: Four years of Taliban rule: Afghan women resist as restrictions tighten, UN WOMEN \(2025\)](#)

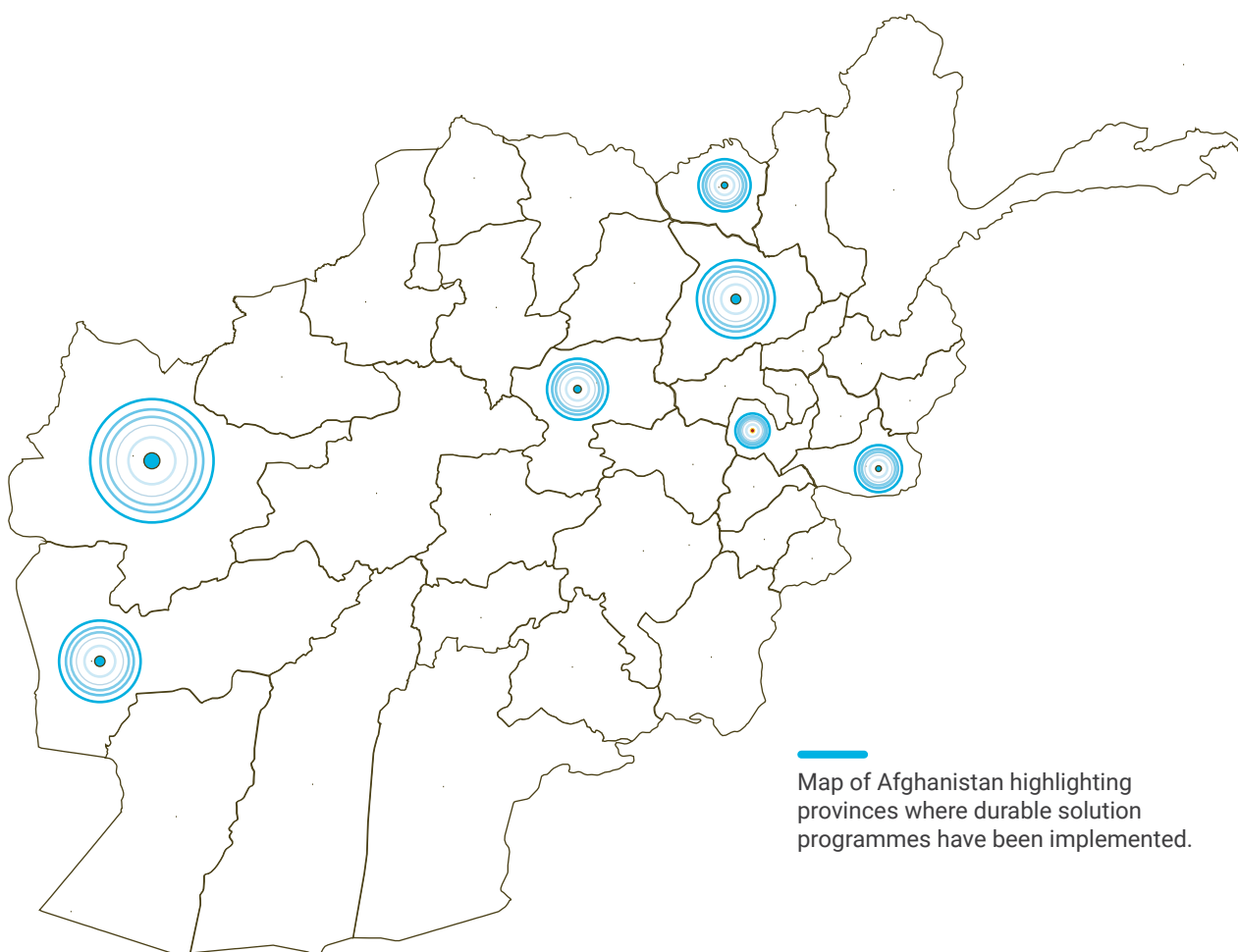
and participatory planning, UN-Habitat contributes to stabilizing displacement-affected communities while strengthening the integration capacity of urban and peri-urban settlements experiencing high return pressures through improving access to basic services and creating an enabling, healthy and safe living environment.

2. UN-HABITAT'S AREA-BASED DURABLE SOLUTIONS APPROACH

Afghanistan's displacement dynamics are increasingly urban and settlement-based. Returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are not primarily reintegrating into isolated rural locations, but move to existing towns and cities, settling in peri-urban areas and informal settlements where housing, infrastructure, services and livelihoods systems are already under significant pressure. In this context, durable solutions cannot be achieved through stand-alone shelter assistance or isolated humanitarian interventions alone. Sustainable reintegration requires inclusive, integrated, area-based approaches that strengthen the settlements, systems and community structures where displacement-affected populations live.

UN-Habitat's durable solutions programming in Afghanistan is therefore grounded in an area-based, settlement-focused approach that recognises displacement as both a humanitarian and urban development challenge. Rather than targeting populations solely based on displacement status, interventions focus on displacement-affected settlements and neighbourhoods where returnees, IDPs and local communities face shared vulnerabilities linked to inadequate housing, weak infrastructure, climate risks, limited livelihoods opportunities and overstretched services.

This approach aligns with the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons and contributes directly to UNSFA and donors' priorities related to resilient livelihoods, climate adaptation, sustained access to services, social cohesion and community resilience.



UN-Habitat's comparative advantage lies in operationalising durable solutions spatially through strengthening settlement systems, urban infrastructure, participatory planning processes and community institutions that enable sustainable reintegration over time. UN-Habitat combines humanitarian response, recovery and resilience investments at neighbourhood scale in ways that are locally grounded, cost-effective and scalable.

KEY AREAS OF INTERVENTION INCLUDE:

- Strengthening access to adequate housing and Housing, Land and Property (HLP) security through owner-driven shelter repair, incremental housing approaches, tenure history / participatory community tenure processes, and participatory settlement mapping;
- Upgrading underserved settlements through investments in WASH, drainage, roads, flood mitigation, public spaces and climate-resilient community infrastructure;
- Supporting livelihoods recovery and local economic resilience through labour-intensive upgrading, cash-for-work, vocational training and market-linked economic opportunities;
- Embedding climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction into settlement upgrading and infrastructure investments through participatory hazard and vulnerability assessments and climate-sensitive design;
- Promoting inclusive and gender-responsive participation through community mobilization, building upon the agency's long-year experience and "heritage" of implementing the "people's process" (which led to the establishment and training of thousands of Community Development Councils (until 2022), and is now being implemented through strengthening Local Implementation Committees (LICs), Community Action Plans (CAPs) and participatory spatial planning processes;
- Strengthening urban integration capacity and social cohesion by supporting integrated neighbourhood recovery that benefits displacement-affected and local communities alike.

UN-Habitat's experience across durable solutions programmes, including through those funded by the EU and the STFA, but also evidence from large scale programmes of earlier years or ongoing projects, demonstrates that strengthening existing settlements and urban systems is sustainable and cost-effective. Incremental upgrading of existing neighbourhoods allows communities to remain connected to labour markets, services, social networks and economic opportunities, while also reinforcing local resilience and reducing risks of secondary displacement.

Area-based programming also creates opportunities to integrate climate adaptation, HLP strengthening, participatory planning and livelihoods recovery into coherent neighbourhood-level recovery processes. This is particularly important in Afghanistan, where climate-related hazards and displacement pressures increasingly overlap in fragile and underserved settlements.

By combining spatial planning, integrated service delivery and community participation, UN-Habitat operationalises durable solutions in ways that strengthen settlement resilience, support social cohesion and contribute to sustainable reintegration across Afghanistan's evolving displacement landscape⁸.

⁸ Under STFA Durable Solutions Programme in the Eastern Region, UN-Habitat established 40 Local Implementation Communities (LICs) and 2 Water Sources Projects.

3. SELECTED UN-HABITAT'S PROJECTS FOR ADVANCING DURABLE SOLUTIONS

FORSAT – Facilitating Opportunities through Revitalization of Settlements and Traditional Community-Held Assets (ongoing)

Geographic focus:	Bamiyan Province (Dawodi, Surkhqul, Zargarán, Tajikan/Darah Fuladi, Sayed Abad/ Ghulghula, and Topchi communities)
Participating UN agencies (PUNOs):	UNESCO and UN-Habitat
Donor:	Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA)
Estimated total number of beneficiaries:	49, 619 individuals with 50% women beneficiaries
Strategic contribution:	Linking settlement upgrading, climate resilience and cultural livelihoods in displacement-affected heritage areas
Context:	Bamiyan Province has experienced sustained return and displacement pressures in recent years, compounded by geographic isolation, climate vulnerability and limited livelihood diversification. Increasing numbers of returnees and vulnerable households are settling in and around informal settlements located within the Bamiyan Valley World Heritage Property, often in areas exposed to flooding, harsh winters and environmental degradation.



Map of Afghanistan highlighting Bamiyan province in light blue, where the FORSAT project is being implemented.

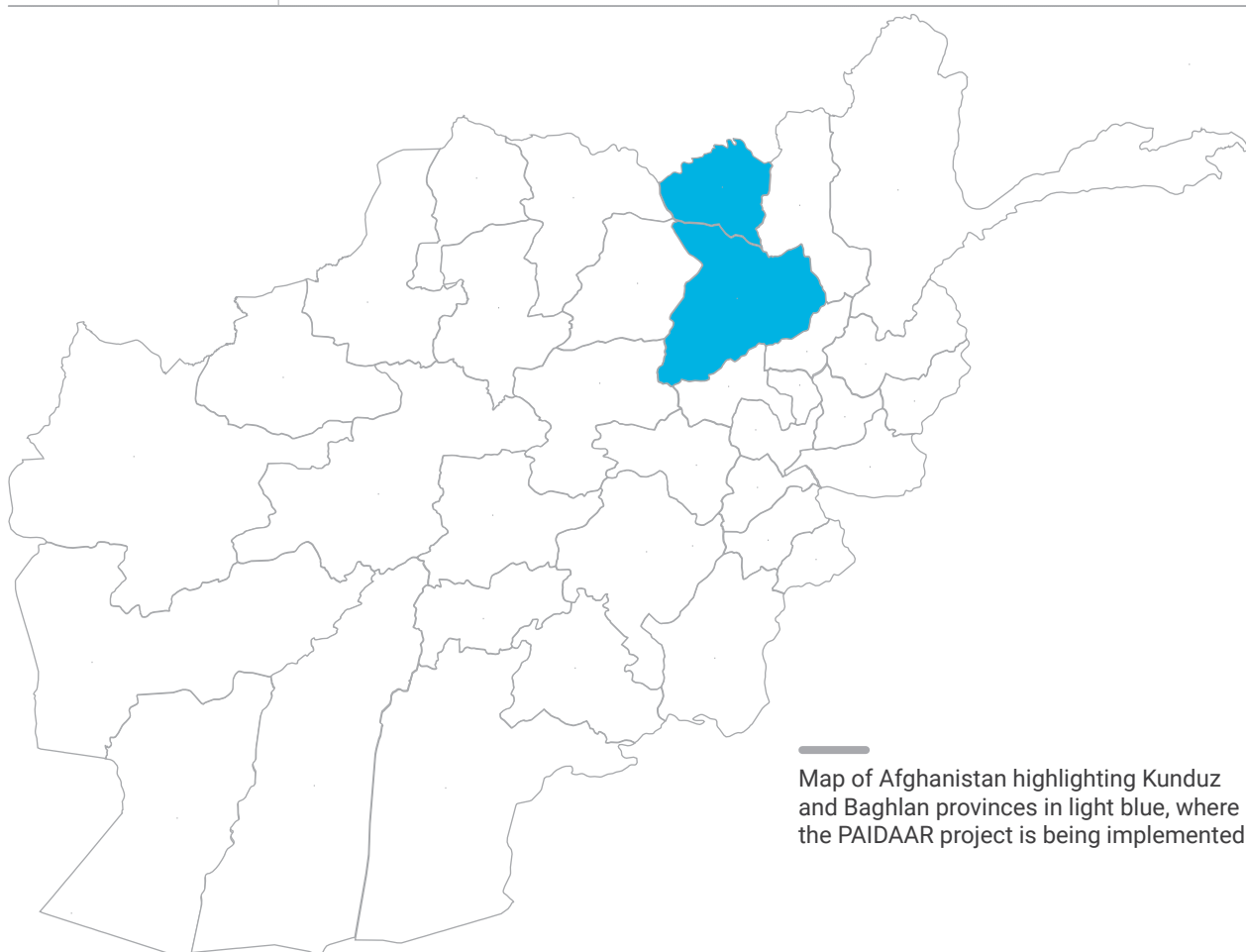
UN-Habitat's contribution:	UN-Habitat's interventions contribute to improving living conditions and economic resilience in displacement-affected settlements that have cultural heritage assets through an integrated approach that combines settlement upgrading, climate adaptation UN-Habitat's activities are complemented by UNESCO's interventions to support livelihood opportunities in cultural and creative industries and heritage protection.
Key interventions:	• Rehabilitation and upgrading of community infrastructure, including drainage systems, public spaces, WASH facilities and climate-resilient infrastructure designed to reduce exposure to flooding, erosion and harsh winter conditions, supporting both people, but also protecting cultural assets. • Participatory planning processes to identify and prioritise investments responding to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of informal settlements located within and around heritage areas. • Climate adaptation measures integrated into settlement upgrading and public infrastructure investments. • Complementary support to women-led livelihoods in handicrafts, tourism and cultural production through culturally acceptable and home-based modalities, implemented in coordination with UNESCO. • Strengthening local economic resilience while contributing to the preservation and sustainable use of Bamiyan's unique cultural heritage assets.



View of Bamiyan city showing houses stretched around the hills. ©STFA/Mohammad Omar Kamal

PAIDAAR – Participatory Action for Integrated Developmental Assistance to Areas of Return (ongoing)

Geographic focus:	Chahardara and Dasht-e-Archi districts (Kunduz Province) and Baghlan-e-Jedid district (Baghlan Province)
Participating UN Organizations (PUNOs):	IOM, UNDP, UN-Habitat and UNHCR
Donor:	Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA)
Estimated total number of beneficiaries:	57,648 individuals (40% women)
Strategic contribution:	All PUNOs work together for stabilising high-return areas through integrated settlement upgrading, community-driven reintegration, shelter housing support, livelihoods activities and climate resilience.
Context:	Kunduz and Baghlan have experienced significant return movements from neighbouring countries alongside protracted internal displacement caused by conflict and natural hazards. These dynamics have placed considerable pressure on settlements characterised by limited-service provision, inadequate infrastructure, weak integration capacity and high exposure to climate-related risks. Implemented jointly by IOM, UNDP, UNHCR and UN-Habitat, PAIDAAR adopts an area-based and multi-sectoral durable solutions approach grounded in participatory assessments. UN-Habitat leads Participatory Hazard, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (PHVCAs), spatial mapping and community consultations, ensuring that investments respond to local priorities while strengthening settlement systems and community resilience.



UN-Habitat's Key Interventions:

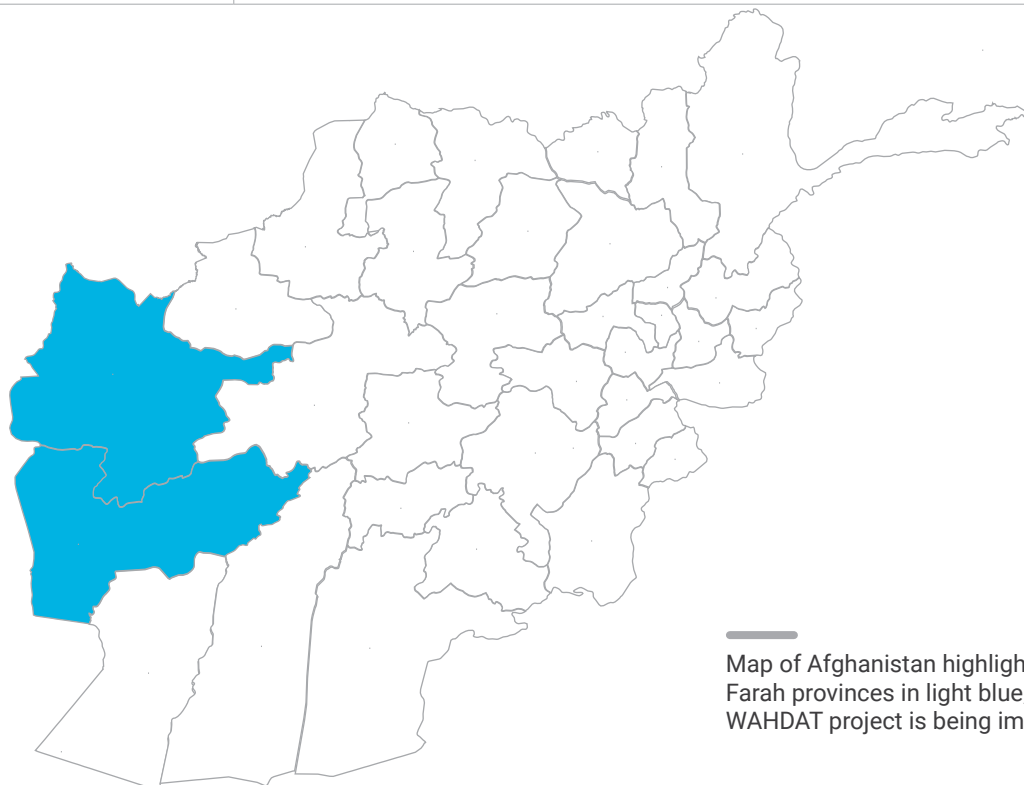
- **Participatory Planning and Community Governance:** Establishment and capacity development of 12 Local Implementation Committees (LICs) and preparation of Community Action Plans (CAPs), creating inclusive platforms through which returnees, IDPs and host communities jointly identify priorities and guide investments. Infrastructure interventions will be implemented across 24 LICs. Women's participation is promoted through gender-sensitive consultation processes and dedicated women's sub-committees.
- **Shelter / Housing and HLP Support:** Owner-driven shelter repair assistance for 800 households living in inadequate living conditions, combined with Housing, Land and Property (HLP) awareness activities aimed at reducing eviction risks, strengthening tenure security and preventing secondary displacement.
- **Neighbourhood Upgrading and Basic Services:** Rehabilitation of access roads, drainage systems, WASH facilities and community infrastructure in underserved and climate-vulnerable return areas, improving living conditions and settlement functionality.
- **Livelihoods Recovery and Skills Development:** Labour-intensive upgrading activities implemented through cash-for-work schemes and vocational training in climate-resilient construction techniques, creating short-term income opportunities while strengthening local capacities.
- **Climate Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction:** Integration of participatory risk mapping, climate-sensitive infrastructure design and community-level climate adaptation measures to reduce exposure to floods and other environmental hazards.
- **Community Grants for Social Cohesion:** Provision of small in-kind grants to LICs for community-selected, women-led and gender-sensitive initiatives. These projects are identified and implemented by community members themselves, strengthening local ownership, implementation capacity, and social cohesion.



Returnees set up their tents in the outskirts of Kunduz, close to the city centre, December 2025.
©UN-Habitat/Rebecca Dawson

WAHDAT – Weaving Afghanistan’s Hope and Displacement Actions Together (ongoing)

Geographic focus:	Herat City, Injil and Guzara districts (Herat Province), and Farah City (Farah Province)
Participating UN Organizations (PUNOs):	IOM, UNDP, UN-Habitat and UNHCR
Donor:	Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA)
Estimated total number of beneficiaries:	total 649,649 beneficiaries
Strategic contribution:	Strengthening urban integration capacity and neighbourhood resilience in western Afghanistan’s principal return corridors through integrated settlement upgrading, housing support, climate adaptation and Housing, Land and Property (HLP) interventions.
Context:	Herat and Farah are among the provinces receiving the largest numbers of returnees from Iran, with Herat serving as the primary return corridor into western Afghanistan. Rapid population growth has placed significant pressure on already overstretched urban services, housing markets, infrastructure systems and livelihood opportunities, particularly within informal and underserved settlements. WAHDAT is one of the largest programmes funded through the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA). The programme demonstrates the importance of strengthening urban systems and settlement resilience to support sustainable reintegration in contexts experiencing large-scale return movements.
UN-Habitat’s contribution:	UN-Habitat leads participatory planning processes to identify infrastructure priorities, strengthen community ownership and accountability, and support integrated neighbourhood recovery through settlement upgrading, shelter assistance, climate adaptation and HLP interventions.



Map of Afghanistan highlighting Herat and Farah provinces in light blue, where the WAHDAT project is being implemented.

UN-Habitat's Key Interventions:

- **Owner-Driven Shelter Repair and Housing Support:** Provision of shelter repair assistance to 880 vulnerable households, including women-headed households and newly returned families, alongside the construction of 200 environmentally sustainable household latrines. These interventions improve safety, sanitation, habitability, and housing security while reducing risks of eviction and secondary displacement.
- **Integrated Neighbourhood Upgrading:** Rehabilitation and construction of roads, drainage networks, flood mitigation infrastructure, WASH facilities, wastewater systems, public spaces and climate-resilient community infrastructure. Designed through participatory spatial planning processes, these investments are expected to benefit approximately 490,000 people living in displacement-affected communities.
- **Urban Agriculture and Food Security:** Establishment of household, community and school gardens, alongside climate-adaptive food production initiatives that contribute to food security, strengthen women's participation and create shared community spaces that promote social cohesion.
- **Climate Adaptation and Environmental Resilience:** Community-driven climate risk assessments, awareness-raising activities and climate adaptation infrastructure designed to reduce vulnerability to environmental hazards and strengthen local resilience.
- **Livelihoods Recovery and Economic Resilience:** Labour-intensive cash-for-work activities linked to settlement upgrading, environmental rehabilitation and infrastructure maintenance, benefiting at least 1,600 individuals directly, alongside skills development opportunities for an additional 400 craftsmen
- **Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Strengthening:** Participatory settlement mapping, tenure awareness campaigns and support for communal and household-level tenure documentation to enhance tenure security, reduce disputes and support long-term settlement consolidation.



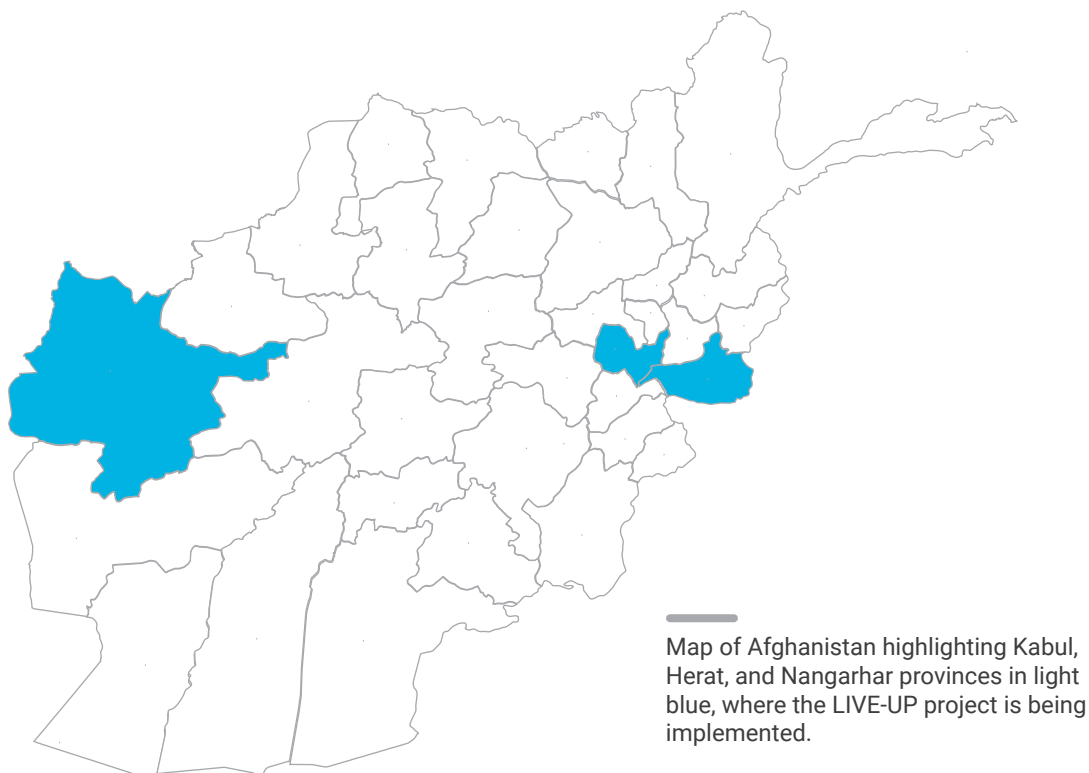
Living and WASH conditions in the unplanned, peri-urban areas where the WAHDAT project will be implemented are often inadequate. ©UN-Habitat/Stephanie Loose

SHURA – Sustainable Human Settlements in Urban Areas to Support Reintegration in Afghanistan (2018–2021)

Geographic focus:	Kabul and Herat Provinces
Partners	UN-Habitat (implemented in partnership with the Afghanistan Independent Land Authority (ARAZI), Ministry of Urban Development and Land (MUDL), Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), IOM and other national partners)
Donor:	The European Union
Estimated total number of beneficiaries:	Approximately 5,000 returnee and IDP households in vulnerable situations received access to serviced land (including WASH, electricity, etc.), incremental housing and tenure security, with broader institutional benefits through national land management reforms.
Strategic contribution:	Advancing durable solutions through land allocation, incremental housing, HLP strengthening, and integrated settlement planning for returnees and IDPs.
Context:	SHURA was developed in response to the limitations of previous land allocation schemes and township approaches, recognising that sustainable reintegration depends not only on access to land but also on proximity to livelihoods, urban services and existing settlement systems. The programme promoted a settlement-based approach by identifying suitable state land near urban centres, strengthening tenure security and supporting planned neighbourhood development to facilitate long-term integration of returnees, IDPs and local communities in vulnerable situations.
Key interventions:	• Strategic land identification and settlement planning, including assessment of state-owned land based on environmental, economic and social carrying capacity to support sustainable urban expansion in provinces experiencing high return. • Housing, Land and Property (HLP) strengthening, including the establishment of a national Land Bank, technology-based beneficiary registration and transparent land allocation procedures, together with innovative “permission-to-stay” tenure arrangements providing security of tenure while longer-term land administration processes were developed. • Incremental housing and basic infrastructure, supporting approximately 5,000 households in vulnerable situations through serviced plots, affordable housing solutions for 240 HH and access to essential infrastructure designed to improve living conditions and strengthen the carrying capacity of receiving settlements. • Institutional strengthening and policy support, including support to national authorities on land administration, beneficiary targeting, digital land management systems and the development of policy frameworks promoting transparent, equitable and durable reintegration.
Strategic lessons learned:	SHURA demonstrated that land allocation alone is insufficient to achieve durable solutions. Reintegration is more sustainable when land-related interventions are integrated within broader area-based approaches that combine settlement planning, infrastructure, HLP security, livelihoods and access to services. The programme provided important operational evidence that has informed UN-Habitat’s subsequent durable solutions programming, reinforcing the shift from isolated township development towards integrated settlement upgrading and urban reintegration approaches.

LIVE UP - Local Integration of Vulnerable and Excluded Uprooted People in Afghanistan (2015 - 2017)

Geographic focus:	Urban and peri-urban informal settlements in Kabul, Maslakh (Herat Province), and Qasamabad Damankhali and Jalalabad (Nangarhar Province)
Partners	UN-Habitat, in coordination with UNHCR, UNAMA and members of the Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Task Force
Donor:	The European Union
Estimated total number of beneficiaries:	Approximately 145,162 individuals (17,296 households) across 63 displacement-affected communities
Strategic contribution:	Advancing local integration and urban reintegration as durable solutions through settlement upgrading, participatory governance and urban systems strengthening.
Context:	The LIVE-UP project was implemented in response to the growing urbanisation of displacement in Afghanistan, where increasing numbers of returnees and IDPs were settling in urban and peri-urban informal settlements rather than returning to rural places of origin. The project demonstrated that sustainable reintegration depends less on isolated township construction and more on strengthening existing settlements, infrastructure systems and local governance structures capable of supporting long-term integration. Implemented through UN-Habitat's People's Process approach, LIVE-UP supported displacement-affected communities through integrated neighbourhood upgrading, settlement regularisation, shelter assistance and participatory planning. The programme mobilised 63 Community Development Councils (CDCs) and 13 mixed-gender Gozar Assemblies, enabling communities to identify priorities, contribute to implementation and engage directly with municipalities and provincial authorities. Community contributions reached nearly 40 per cent of infrastructure investment costs in several locations, demonstrating strong local ownership and social cohesion.



UN-Habitat's Key Interventions:

- **Integrated Settlement Upgrading and Basic Service Delivery:** Construction and rehabilitation of roads, drainage systems, street lighting, pedestrian infrastructure, water supply networks and public facilities across displacement-affected settlements. The project delivered more than 842,000 m² of paved roads and over 126,000 metres of drainage infrastructure, significantly improving mobility, flood mitigation, public health and connectivity.
- **Incremental Housing and Shelter Support:** Homeowner-driven shelter assistance combining material support with technical guidance to improve housing conditions, strengthen tenure security, reduce environmental risks and support long-term settlement consolidation.
- **Participatory Planning and Local Governance:** Preparation of Community Action Plans (CAPs) and Gozar Assembly Action Plans (GAAPs) through joint community-municipality processes, strengthening accountability, investment prioritisation and community participation in urban development while increasing municipal engagement in previously underserved settlements.
- **Housing, Land and Property (HLP) and Policy Reform:** Leadership through the HLP Task Force to advance durable solutions-oriented land allocation and urban integration policies. LIVE-UP contributed directly to the reform of Afghanistan's land allocation framework and informed the revised Executive Decree replacing Presidential Decree 104, introducing minimum standards linked to livelihoods access, urban connectivity and long-term sustainability.
- **Area-Based Durable Solutions Programming:** Promotion of local integration through investments in existing settlements rather than isolated township development. Interventions benefited both displaced and host communities, helping reduce tensions, strengthen social cohesion and reinforce urban absorptive capacity.
- **Women's Economic Participation and Community Resilience:** Establishment of vocational training and enterprise centres that created culturally appropriate opportunities for women's livelihoods, skills development and participation in local decision-making processes.



Children playing in an unhygienic abandoned space in Kabul's PD #16. ©UN-Habitat/Piroz Amin

4. Cross-Cutting Results

Over decades, UN-Habitat's durable solutions programming demonstrates how integrated, settlement-based approaches can simultaneously address humanitarian needs, recovery priorities and longer-term resilience objectives. The programmes show that area-based settlement upgrading and neighbourhood-scale recovery are more sustainable and cost-effective than isolated, standalone interventions, particularly in displacement-affected urban and periurban contexts, and, as in case of the STFA funded projects, how interagency and cross-sectoral approaches achieve a wider and more comprehensive support for people in vulnerable situations. By combining community participation, local labour, incremental settlements upgrading and improving of living conditions (including housing and at neighborhood level) based on integrated spatial planning, UN-Habitat maximises donor investments while reducing future humanitarian risks and infrastructure costs.

The agency's approaches further highlight the value of localisation and community-driven implementation, with participatory planning processes, community-based organizations (such as the Local Implementation Committees or former CDCs) and Community Action Plans (CAPs) transparently positioning communities as active partners in prioritising investments and sustaining outcomes. Across all interventions, climate adaptation, gender sensitivity and gender responsiveness as well as protection considerations are embedded as cross-cutting principles, ensuring that programmes respond effectively to the multidimensional nature of displacement and vulnerability in Afghanistan. The lessons generated by SHURA and LIVE-UP directly inform current durable solutions programming in Afghanistan. The projects provided early evidence that displacement is increasingly an urban phenomenon and that strengthening existing settlements, infrastructure systems and local governance structures offer a more viable pathway to sustainable reintegration than creating isolated and economically disconnected townships.

5. CONCLUSION

UN-Habitat's durable solutions and (re-)integration programming showcases that durable solutions are achievable in Afghanistan when investments prioritise the strengthening of settlements, urban systems and community resilience through integrated, area-based approaches – and they are complemented by the agencies' integrated and people-centered approaches, implemented in other projects. Across Bamiyan, Kunduz, Kabul, Baghlan, Nangarhar, Herat and Farah provinces, UN-Habitat operationalises durable solutions for more than 20 years through neighbourhood upgrading, participatory planning, climate-resilient infrastructure, incremental housing or shelter solutions, housing, land and property (HLP) strengthening and livelihoods opportunities, linking immediate humanitarian responses with longer-term reintegration, social cohesion and stability outcomes.

As displacement dynamics continue to evolve, urban and periurban settlements will remain central to reintegration and recovery processes. Sustained investment in settlement upgrading and urban resilience is therefore essential to prevent secondary displacement, strengthen local integration capacity and support pathways to recovery for displacement-affected and local communities alike. UN-Habitat's experiences with integrated re-integration approaches, implemented by UN-Habitat or/and through inter-agency cooperation projects, demonstrate that durable solutions are not achieved through isolated sectoral interventions, but through coordinated investments and based on spatial planning at settlement scale, connecting housing, services, livelihoods, climate adaptation, participation and livelihood skills, offer a scalable and strategic model for durable reintegration in Afghanistan's complex displacement context.

**A better quality of life for all
in an urbanizing world**



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