

Afghanistan Social Protection Monitoring Bulletin

About this bulletin: In 2021 the people of Afghanistan faced intensified conflict, the withdrawal of international forces followed by the political crisis of August 15, 2021, when the Interim Taliban Administration (ITA) was established. The resulting political, social, and economic outlook has reverberated across the country with a severe deterioration of the humanitarian and protection situation. This bulletin gives a current overview of the social insecurity challenge and social protection response using available data and resources, with the aim to keep relevant players in the international community informed about the status of social protection in Afghanistan for an effective and contextual operational re-engagement in the area.

Photo credits: Rumi Consultancy / World Bank



What is Social Protection according to the World Bank?

The notion of social protection in the World Bank includes the interconnected areas of social safety nets, social insurance including pensions, and the promotion of household income through the labor market via more and better jobs. There is also critical attention to the means of how social protection benefits reach their targeted beneficiaries, i.e., social protection delivery systems. The structure of the bulletin follows this understanding of social protection.



What is the Cluster Approach Designated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee?

Readers will come across mention of various humanitarian clusters, that are currently providing humanitarian aid and services to people in Afghanistan as part of the emergency crisis response. These clusters are groups of humanitarian organizations, both United Nations (UN) and non-UN, in each of the main sectors of humanitarian action, e.g., water, health, and logistics. They are designated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and have clear responsibilities for coordination (see Figure 1).

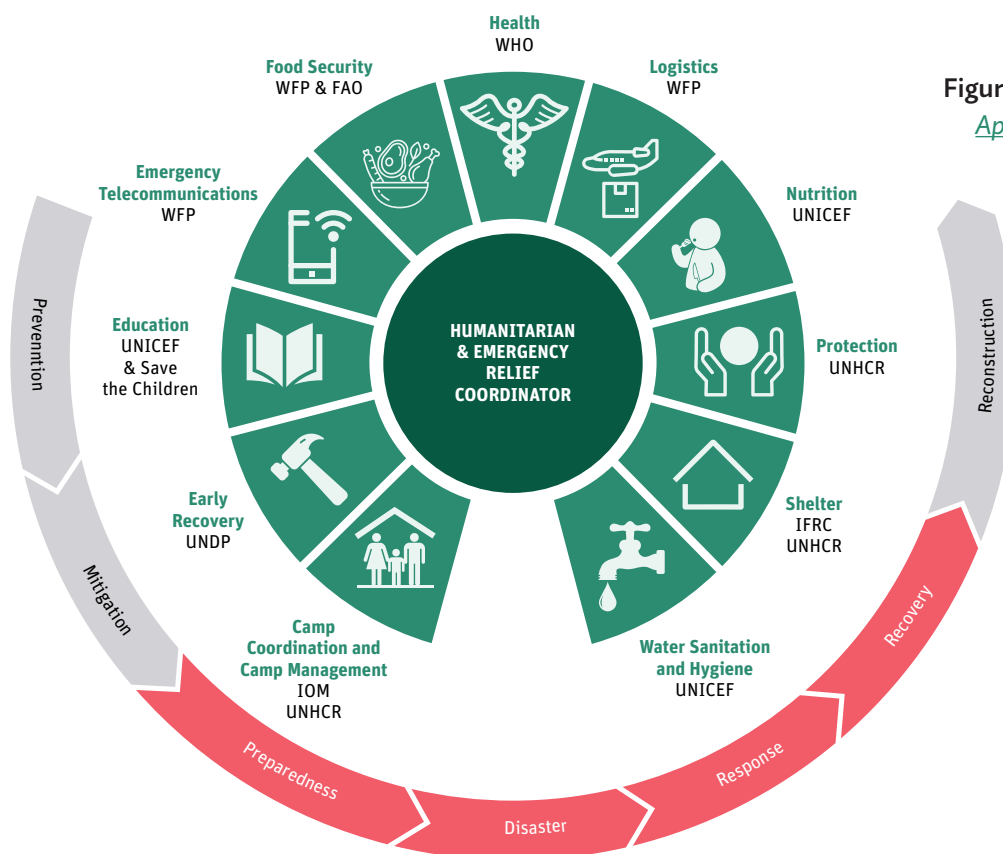


Figure 1: *The Cluster Approach*, OCHA

Highlights of the Crisis



24.4 million

People in need of humanitarian assistance in 2022



22.8 million

People expected to face acute food insecurity by March 2022



700,000

People newly displaced by conflict in 2021



1.2 million

Cross-border returnees from Iran and Pakistan in 2021

- The latest official poverty estimates from Afghanistan put **poverty at 47% in 2019–20**.
- Afghanistan is listed as a country of concern by the World Food Programme and Food and Agriculture Organization in 2022, **with 59% (24.4 million) of the population requiring lifesaving assistance**.
- **Relief agencies need US\$4.4 billion** to reach 22.1 million vulnerable people to provide emergency lifesaving multi-sectoral humanitarian support in 2022.
- **About 98% Afghans** experienced insufficient food consumption in January 2022 and 100% female-headed households are facing food insecurity. Furthermore, as a result of acute drought, a hike in food prices has been observed.
- Although most cash programming was severely reduced with the start of the political crisis in August 2021, the main cash actors have, however, **gradually resumed Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA)** programs as of the third quarter of 2021.
- **Worries about job loss** have been recorded as the highest concern (42%) in the last quarter of 2021.
- **Similarly, due to the fiscal shock in the aftermath of the political crisis**, the public pension program, which had been providing old age pension benefits to public sector pensioners (civil and military) remain suspended with no indication of resumption of the scheme.
- **About 700,000 people** have been internally displaced by the political conflict in 2021.

Figure 2: Barriers to service delivery



The World Bank response

- The World Bank is preparing a food security project for approval that will generate short-term employment opportunities.
- The World Bank is preparing a community resilience and livelihoods project for approval that will provide cash support and temporary employment opportunities

Note: These World Bank projects are under an expanded approach, Approach 2.0 (see page 6), and are Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) financed grants to UN agencies and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which are off budget and will not involve the interim Taliban administration.



The Current Situation (as of March 2022)

Afghanistan is experiencing a combination of distress due to political conflict, continuing impact of COVID-19, economic shocks, and the worst drought in the past three decades and is in need of urgent social assistance and protection.

The latest official poverty estimates from Afghanistan put poverty at 47% in 2019–20, with an additional 45% Afghans living on less than 1.5 times the poverty line and therefore at risk of falling into poverty.¹ Crop failure, livestock losses, and the collapse of rural incomes drove significant increases in acute food insecurity levels throughout 2021. In addition, with the change in authorities assuming control over Afghanistan, most on-budget social assistance in the form of cash was severely reduced or canceled. Continuation of off-budget distribution of cash and vouchers has been facing challenges, such as lack of liquidity within the formal financial sector that is impacting operations of banks, mobile money operators, and remittance

exchange companies. Record-breaking depreciation of the afghani against the US\$ by 30% has also been recorded as an all-time low in December 2021.²

About 700,000 people were internally displaced by the political conflict in 2021, of whom 60% were children and 20% were women.³ Breakdown of other vulnerable population groups in Afghanistan include 504,000 new internally displaced persons (IDPs), 858,000 refugees and cross-border refugees, 150,000 shock-affected non-displaced people, and 24.4 million vulnerable people with humanitarian needs.⁴ With an increasing number of IDPs and vulnerable non-displaced people, lack of government-issued identification documents (Tazkira) remains a limiting factor to deliver social assistance.

¹ [Afghanistan Development Update](#), April 2021, The World Bank

² Afghanistan Food Security Update 25, March 10 – March 17, 2022, The World Bank (internal)

³ [Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan \(2022\)](#), OCHA

⁴ [Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan \(2022\)](#), OCHA

Only 35% households have Tazkira, while no women in 31% households had Tazkira in 2021 and 63% displaced households had members missing Tazkira.

Afghanistan is listed as a country of concern by the World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)⁵ in 2022, where 59% of the Afghan population (24.4 million people)⁶ require lifesaving assistance. According to the Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey (AWMS), 70% of respondents indicated that their household was unable to cover basic food and non-food needs, a number that has doubled since May 2021.⁷ Relief agencies need an estimated US\$4.4 billion to reach 22.1 million vulnerable people to provide emergency lifesaving multisectoral humanitarian support in 2022. This planned outreach by the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) includes 21% women, 54% children, and 8.3% persons with disabilities facing food insecurity, loss of livelihood, malnutrition and water shortages, lack of access to health, and increasing protection risks. In January 2022, USAID announced more than US\$308 million additional funding for the Afghanistan response.⁸

Female-headed households, pregnant women, and adolescent girls are highly vulnerable. Nearly 100% of female-headed households are facing insufficient food consumption and they are more likely to employ crisis-level coping strategies (85%) compared to male-headed households (62%).⁹ The maternal mortality ratio in Afghanistan was already

among the highest in the world prior to August 15, 2021, and risk factors are greatly increased by undernutrition and rapidly escalating poverty and mobility restrictions.

There are 158¹⁰ dedicated humanitarian organizations active in Afghanistan to coordinate the administration and provision of assistance under the HRP. National NGOs form the largest portion of these organizations, which number 78, followed by 69 international NGOs, and 11 UN organizations. In other reports,¹¹ there are 11 United States Government (USG) implementing partners providing protection interventions, of which 10 are providing health support, 5 are providing shelter and settlements, and 3 are providing livelihoods and education interventions.¹² There are over 40 Cash and Voucher Working Group (CVWG) partners delivering various interventions in the country. **Note:** There is a possible overlap in these numbers and omission of non-reported interventions.

However, according to a phone survey done by the World Bank,¹³ access to social assistance is limited as only 8% households reported receiving some form of assistance.¹⁴

Social assistance is predominantly coming from the UN, international NGOs, and ITA. When prompted for their preferences, with multiple responses allowed, 77% households reported preferring in-kind assistance and 41% cash transfers¹⁵ in the current conditions of payment systems, inflation, and availability of food staples.

5 WFP and FAO. 2022. *Hunger Hotspots. FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity: January to March 2022 outlook*. Rome.

6 *Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan (2022)*, OCHA

7 *Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey*, Round 1, World Bank Group

8 *Afghanistan – Complex Emergency Factsheet #3*, USAID, January 11, 2022

9 World Food Programme Afghanistan: Situation Report, *WFP*, (February 17, 2022)

10 *Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan (2022)*, OCHA

11 *Afghanistan – Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #3*, USAID, January 11, 2022

12 *Afghanistan USG Response to Complex Emergency*, USAID

13 This survey was conducted from October to December 2021

14 *Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey*, Round 1, World Bank Group

15 *Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey*, Round 1, World Bank Group

Scoping Current Social Protection Challenges, Needs, and Provisions Through Available Data and Active Interventions

1. Social Safety Nets / Social Assistance

a) Cash Assistance

Needs and Challenges

Although most cash programming was severely reduced with the start of the political crisis in August 2021, the main cash actors have, however, gradually resumed Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) programs as of the third quarter of 2021.¹⁶ There are 38 humanitarian organizations active in Afghanistan providing CVA to those stricken by crisis, as it continues to be an essential multidimensional response modality that enables people to meet their immediate and basic needs including food and health services.

Exchange rate fluctuations, cash liquidity constraints, suspension of loan packages by international financial institutions and freezing of the financial assets of the Central Bank of Afghanistan pose considerable constraints in rolling out CVA interventions.¹⁷ Although the supply chains remain unaffected, inflation and rising food and other essential commodity prices have made CVA programs essential to maintain people's purchasing power at a time of crisis when they need these items, particularly food, the most. Furthermore, the impact of CVA interventions in stimulating market functionality is highly critical for short to medium term economic recovery of Afghanistan.

The liquidity crunch being experienced in the Afghan economy coincides with compounding needs on the ground. Liquidity inevitably poses a challenge to CVA, however, the preference for this modality of aid among affected communities and, increasingly, humanitarian actors is apparent. The market and these stakeholders have a vested interest in the continuation and proliferation of CVA and hence, to the extent possible, will take any measures necessary to continue implementation.

Provisions

Facing a humanitarian and monetary crisis, with increasing food and fuel prices, job loss and rise in unemployment,

and declining value of the afghani, humanitarian organizations have buckled up to provide CVA in various areas of Afghanistan.

- **Volume of CVA increased from US\$63,000 to US\$93,000 between quarter 3 and quarter 4 of 2021.** Geographical coverage increased from 240 to 271 districts out of a total 401 districts.
- **CVWG partner organizations distributed US\$3.75 million in the form of cash or vouchers** to 575,000 households in 271 districts in Afghanistan during the last quarter of 2021.¹⁸ This was an increase from US\$3.04 million distributed to 456,000 households in the third quarter of 2021.
- **WFP provided US\$36 million in cash-based transfers** to cover 2.6 million people throughout 2021 for emergency assistance and resilience activities as recorded in January 2022.
- **WFP has so far registered 6 million people for assistance** through SCOPE technology and, in 2022, plans to scale up to reach 6 million people per month from March to May with cash or voucher assistance. WFP has partnered with several financial service providers and remittance exchange companies to distribute direct cash, as well as local banks to offer prepaid cards and commodity vouchers.¹⁹
- **In March 2022, WFP assisted 24,717 people through food assistance for assets activities and 74,543 people through vocational skills training.** In total, WFP has reached 231,560 people²⁰ with asset creation and livelihood activities in 2022 and plans to support over a million beneficiaries throughout the year.
- **During the first quarter of 2022,** the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) provided 85,515 individuals with cash-based support, of whom 49% are women and girls.²¹
- **In the last quarter of 2021,** CARE implemented an emergency funding activity to respond to the urgent humanitarian crisis, distributing cash to 522 households, of which 75% were female-headed, in Kabul and Kandahar.²²

¹⁸ CVWG General Programmatic Snapshot (4th Quarter 2021)

¹⁹ *Cash-Based Transfers in Afghanistan*, WFP, January 2022

²⁰ Author's calculations. Cumulative figure from WFP Afghanistan Situation Report, *28 January, 2 February, 17 March*

²¹ *ReportHub.org*

²² *CARE Afghanistan: Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) Post Distribution Monitoring Report* (November 2021)

¹⁶ *Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan (2022)*, OCHA

¹⁷ *Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan (2022)*, OCHA

US\$900 million are expected to be delivered in cash to Afghans in 2022 under the HRP. About 200 million people who are members of vulnerable households headed by women, persons with disabilities, or elderly will receive unconditional cash transfers. Cash support will also be provided to vulnerable people in rural areas, including the landless, during the lean period.

b) Public Works

Needs and Challenges

Another type of social assistance to cope with the acute food insecurity, particularly in rural areas, is to implement public works (PWs) activities (often also referred to as cash-for-work, CfW, or food-for-work, FfW) to support landless but able-bodied laborers, particularly to boost their income and increase their resilience to cope with different shocks. FAO and WFP recommend PWs during the dry cropping season and small-scale aquaculture targeting newly displaced people and landless families,²³ although in the current conditions there are no active PW projects in the country. Some of the CfW activities are canal cleaning, rehabilitation of irrigation channels, water reservoirs, and kariz (ancient underground aqueducts) cleaning. CVA actors ensure that CfW rates are harmonized and do not distort local labor markets.

Provisions

One of the objectives of the HRP is to support income of the most vulnerable population through vocational skills and food/cash for work to improve community infrastructure.

- **FSAC, during the first quarter of 2022, provided cash to 41,264 individuals, of whom 49% were women and girls.**²⁴

The World Bank under its expanded approach, Approach Paper 2.0 approved March 1, 2022, has identified several projects to support basic services: (i) a food security project that will generate short-term employment opportunities of 6,250 million person-days for unskilled labor, including opportunities specifically dedicated for female unskilled laborers, through the provision of water and resilience cash for work activities; and (ii) community resilience and livelihoods project that will provide cash support (and financing for food/grain banks) to 105,000 vulnerable households through community

social grants, temporary employment opportunities to 781,000 households in rural areas, and 115,000 households in urban areas through cash for work and labor-intensive PWs. This project is expected to be approved by ARTF donors and the World Bank by end of April 2022.

C) In-kind Assistance

Needs and Challenges

The combination of conflict, insecurity, compounded economic shocks, acute drought and consequently increased food prices have created a hunger crisis in Afghanistan that is the highest level of acute food insecurity globally.²⁵ About 98% Afghans experienced insufficient food consumption in January 2022 and 100% female-headed households are facing food insecurity.²⁶ According to AWMS, over 90% household heads interviewed in October–December 2021 reported an increase in the price of cooking oil over the previous 30 days, while 88% reported an increase in the price of wheat flour in the same period. Most households reported substantial increases for other food staples, including chicken (74%), rice (62%), and green tea (61%) during the same reference period.²⁷ Households are adopting extreme measures to cope with food insecurity, which is resulting in declining quantity and quality of food consumption affecting 69% of the population.²⁸ With limited social assistance and reduction in remittances, people are spending maximum income on food.²⁹

The drought is driving food insecurity, endangering livelihoods of 85% Afghans who depend on agriculture for income.³⁰ Particularly in rural areas, farming and livestock-rearing households have been hit hard with the aftermath of the drought and are facing grain deficit and death of livestock, although urban households are suffering from food insecurity at the same rate as rural households. This calls for an integrated food and livelihood assistance.

Provisions

According to the HRP, FSAC plans to reach 21.6 million people with food assistance in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan through 158 active partners as reported by the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

²³ WFP and FAO. 2022. *Hunger Hotspots: FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity, February to May 2022 outlook*. Rome
²⁴ [Reporthub.org](https://www.reporthub.org)

²⁵ [WFP Afghanistan Situation Report](#), 19 January 2022

²⁶ WFP, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2022, Afghanistan – Complex Emergency Factsheet#2*, [USAID](#), December 30, 2021

²⁷ [Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey](#), Round 1, World Bank Group

²⁸ [HungerMap: Asia and the Pacific insights and key trends](#), WFP, March 17, 2022

²⁹ [Food Security Update, Round Five: January 2022](#), WFP

³⁰ [Afghanistan – Complex Emergency Fact sheet#2](#), USAID, December 30, 2021

(OCHA). To support food-insecure households to save lives and meet immediate needs while building resilience, FSAC will target households with an integrated assistance package. Some of the efforts include prepositioning emergency food items in hard-to-reach areas in peak winter months, increasing fleet and warehouse capacity, negotiating customs and import processes to avoid delays in delivery, and increasing procurement from regional suppliers such as Pakistan and Kazakhstan. FSAC partners are among the top three clusters that use CVA for food security outcomes as of February 2022.³¹

During the first quarter of 2022, FSAC provided in-kind support to 85,515 individuals, of whom 49% were women and girls. During the same time period, FSAC distributed fertilizer among 230,183 individuals (48% women and girls) and seeds to 281,758 individuals (48% women and girls) and provided kitchen gardening support to 46,949 individuals (52% women and girls).³²

Through the food security project, the World Bank plans to provide certified wheat seeds and 'backyard' cultivation support to vulnerable smallholder farming households for improving food security crop production. In December 2021, the World Bank also provided financial support ("transfer out") in the order of US\$180 million to WFP to address the food security emergency in Afghanistan to support the timely distribution of critically required food and nutrition assistance.³³

WFP has a network on 170 trucks and dozens of warehouses to deliver food assistance to all provinces and aims to meet the food and nutrition needs of more than 23 million people in 2022, requiring US\$2.6 billion.³⁴

- **WFP has reached over 11.5 million people (cumulative) with food assistance as of February 2022³⁵ and is using digital means to scale assistance.** However, the main payment mechanisms remain hawala (informal money transfer system), cash in envelopes, and private banks.
- **WFP has partnered with several financial service providers, local banks, and remittance exchange companies to distribute food vouchers to further mitigate the hunger crisis.**³⁶

- **WFP reached more than 15 million people with emergency food assistance and basic supplementary feeding in 2021,** as compared to 9 million in 2020, which for the first time, urban residents suffered from food insecurity at similar rates as rural communities.

d) WASH, Nutrition, and Other Complementary Services

Needs and Challenges

Due to the severity of drought in two thirds of the country, unmet water needs for consumption and handwashing are enormous. There are 15.1 million people in need of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions and the planned outreach of OCHA will cover 10.4 million, which include 2.3 million women, 5.5 million children, and 871,000 persons with disabilities. An estimated US\$332.8 million is required to meet the WASH needs of these individuals.³⁷

One of the objectives of the HRP is to improve access to food and lifesaving nutrition services for 21.5 million people facing acute food insecurity and malnutrition of associated diseases by the end of 2022.

Provisions

Currently, there are 101 partners active in the country to provide emergency WASH assistance under the HRP as compared to 49 partners active in quarter 3 of 2021, who targeted 10.4 million people to roll out WASH activities. The majority of the 2022 WASH response will involve provisions of safe drinking water particularly in drought-affected provinces; hardware infrastructural repairs; rehabilitations; reinforcements or set up of new water supply networks (e.g., reverse osmosis); water trucking (as a last resort option to avoid displacements in areas where people rely on rainwater due to unavailability of potable water or high salinity groundwater); promotion of handwashing through hardware installations; and provision of supplies to support WASH infrastructures such as spare parts, maintenance, and consumables (e.g., chlorine chemicals, fuel, soap).

The WASH cluster plans to increase its efforts to promote gender equity, including by utilizing female-led focus group discussions to more systematically consult women and girls in decisions on the location of WASH communal or sharing infrastructures (collective water points, toilets and showers,

³¹ As noted by CVWG colleagues

³² [Reporthub.org](https://reporthub.org)

³³ [Press release](#), December 10, 2021

³⁴ WFP in Afghanistan – [An Overview of WFP's 2022 Scale-Up Plans](#)

³⁵ As noted by FSAC colleagues

³⁶ [Cash Based Transfers in Afghanistan, WFP](#), January 2022

³⁷ [Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan \(2022\)](#), OCHA

handwashing points), the design of related equipment, and content of hygiene kits (e.g., sanitary pads, soap, containers, purification tabs or sachets). Affected women and girls will have access to menstrual supplies and facilities in the community with hygiene awareness-raising activities including menstrual health information.³⁸

Under the HRP, there is a planned reach to 5.9 million people in need of nutrition services with the assistance of 46 active partners utilizing US\$ 287.4 million.

WFP plans to reach 6.4 million children and pregnant and lactating women with nutrition assistance this year. As of March, WFP has reached 1 million children and pregnant and lactating women with nutrition assistance,³⁹ which includes providing nutritious foods to prevent cases of acute malnutrition. WFP has more than doubled its support for mobile health and nutrition teams, from 72 in August 2021 to 158 by the start of 2022.⁴⁰ These teams have reached remote areas in 24 provinces, providing treatment for moderate acute malnutrition.

Through the food security project, the World Bank plans to support nutrition needs of households headed by women, persons with disabilities, persons who are chronically ill, or children by providing input packages (seeds, basic tools) for backyard kitchen gardening and technical training on improved and climate-smart production practices as well as basic nutritional and food hygiene.

2. Jobs

Needs and Challenges

Worries about job loss have been recorded as the highest concern (42%) according to data collected by WFP in the last quarter of 2021.⁴¹ Currently, 87% income-earning household heads in Afghanistan are experiencing significant income decrease. Employed workers across all sectors have experienced a decline in income and a lag in payment of salaries. Particularly, public sector employment has declined with the change in government, such as jobs in security services, armed forces, police, and employees in the administration.⁴² Many public sector employees have shifted into informal work.

Self-employed individuals or individuals in casual work have seen the largest decline at 88%.⁴³

While there is a fall in employment opportunities in urban areas and increase in unemployment rates, rural employment has increased.⁴⁴ This expansion of employment in rural areas may have been led by the return of households to farm and non-farm activities and improved security situation due to decline in hostilities. Nonetheless, more people are looking for work, with the unemployment rate in both rural and urban areas having increased.

With the decrease in earnings, a decline in remittances,⁴⁵ and ongoing food insecurity, there is an increase in job search in both rural and urban areas. The share of working age household heads outside of the labor force has decreased from 16% to 5% as more people look for work⁴⁶ to supplement household income.

Provisions

According to an estimate by OCHA, humanitarian organizations will be spending approximately US\$414 million for the provision of livelihood services to 10.7 million people in need in 2022.⁴⁷ The planned services include providing vocational skills livelihood support, agricultural livelihood support, livestock support, asset creation through cash/food for work support, and backyard vegetable cultivation and poultry support with a particular focus on vulnerable women. USG has three active partners providing livelihood related services.

FSAC will be focusing on providing livelihood assistance to support local production of food, boost short-term income streams, and consequently mitigate adoption of negative coping strategies by vulnerable households. The interventions will account for the context-specific needs of rural and urban people by adjusting response modalities, for example, vulnerable people in urban areas, such as those who are displaced and refugees, will be targeted through skill building workshops in embroidery, carpentry, electricity, plumbing, and computer skills. In rural areas, livelihood assistance will be tailored to specific needs of income generation, crop

³⁸ *Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan (2022)*, OCHA

³⁹ Cumulative figure from WFP Afghanistan Situation Report, 28 January, 2 February, 17 March

⁴⁰ *WFP Afghanistan Situation Report*, 28 January 2022

⁴¹ *Food Security Update*, Round 5: January 2022, WFP

⁴² *Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey*, Round 1, World Bank Group

⁴³ *Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey*, Round 1, World Bank Group

⁴⁴ *Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey*, Round 1, World Bank Group

⁴⁵ A decline in remittances was recorded from 10% in 2019 (as reported by the Income Expenditure and Labor Force Survey) to 5% in 2021 (as reported by AWMS).

⁴⁶ *Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey*, Round 1, World Bank Group

⁴⁷ *Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan (2022)*, OCHA, Table 'Livelihoods', page

cultivation, and livestock keeping, finetuned according to climate risks, seasonality, and agroecological zones.

WFP has so far reached around 10,000 people with asset creation and livelihood activities in 2022 and plans to support over a million beneficiaries throughout the year.

WFP started several new vocational skills training activities across 12 provinces in December 2021 and January 2022.⁴⁸

USG-funded partners are focusing on providing livelihood programming and skills training to returning refugees, IDPs, and host communities.⁴⁹ Activities include courses to increase literacy, business knowledge, and skills development.

3. Social Insurance and Pensions

The only social insurance instruments in place prior to August 15, 2021, were two public sector pension schemes for civil servants and armed services officers offering old age, survivor, and disability pensions and work-injury benefits. The World Bank had engaged with the pre-August government of Afghanistan on multiple aspects of pension reforms to improve affordability and financial sustainability of the public sector pension schemes.

Key reform areas included efforts to (i) introduce a lump sum payment option in place of payment flows until death; (ii) moderate the generosity of survivor benefits; (iii) establish a public pension fund; and (iv) improve administration of the legacy public pension scheme. Efforts were also underway to introduce a whole new scheme for future public servants based on defined contribution principles. However, with the fall of the government on August 15, 2021, the reforms could not be completed.

Similarly, due to the fiscal shock in the aftermath of the political crisis, the public pension program, which had been providing old age pension benefits to public sector pensioners (civil and military) remain suspended with no indication of resumption of the scheme. This has obviously left the beneficiaries in a difficult situation and uncertain future.

4. Delivery Systems

Needs and Challenges

Since 2003, many development programs in Afghanistan have actively involved local communities in the planning and implementation of development projects. These programs relied on a national network of elected Community Development Councils (CDCs) to represent the interests of Afghan communities and deliver essential services. CDCs possess bank accounts to absorb funding toward their service delivery role. UN agencies have also relied on institutional arrangements with local organizations. For example, CVWG is supporting CVA actors to harmonize vulnerability selection and targeting approaches to ensure that participatory approaches are used throughout the whole process.

Major challenges in the smooth running of delivery systems are interference of the de facto authorities in the beneficiary selection process, distribution process, and imposing of active/armed soldiers as beneficiaries.⁵⁰

Due to a minimally functioning banking system, the access to cash for the smooth implementation of projects is still a big challenge for all humanitarian agencies. Also, due to the unavailability of cash in a timely manner, some of the cash projects of the agencies are lagging in implementation. However, new financial products are being brought into the market by the Afghanistan International Bank (AIB) and Azizi Bank to address some of the cash movement challenges.

Provisions

In the current emergency situation in Afghanistan, leveraging the country's longstanding community development platform, as well as local NGOs/facilitating partners, is critical to delivering vital services and providing emergency livelihood support to the people of Afghanistan. As an example, FAO will leverage existing institutional arrangements with partners such as international and local NGOs, local private service providers, and contractors to support implementation and beneficiary sensitization of the World Bank's food security project.

Additionally, there is an increased opportunity for humanitarian and development actors to brainstorm about the establishment of an off-budget registration system that could cater to different interventions and effectively reach people in need.

⁴⁸ *WFP Afghanistan Situation Report*, 28 January 2022

⁴⁹ *Afghanistan – Complex Emergency, Fact sheet#2*, USAID, December 30, 2021

⁵⁰ As noted by FSAC colleagues



Afghanistan Crisis in News

Famine may have been averted, but Afghan economic crisis deepens – U.N. envoy (Reuters) Humanitarian agencies may have distributed enough aid in Afghanistan to avert famine and large-scale starvation, but the country's economic collapse is "approaching a point of irreversibility," the U.N. envoy to Kabul said on Wednesday, March 2. [Full article](#)

Video: Afghanistan Food Crisis, Selling One Child to Save Another (VOA)



One in three Afghans is going hungry these days. Children are facing acute malnutrition. Poor Afghans are resorting to desperate measures, like selling one child to save the others. [Full report](#)

Herat women ask govt to re-create jobs for them (Pajhwok News Agency)

A number of women in western Herat province ask the government leadership to provide females the opportunity to again work in government organs. Fareshtah Ishaqozi is one of the women of Herat province who has been advocating for women's rights for years. [Full article](#)

Acknowledgements

This bulletin is a product of the Afghanistan Country Team of the World Bank's Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice. It was prepared by Sundas Liaquat, under the guidance of Andras Bodor, Hadia Samaha, and Maria Virginia Ceretti. The team gratefully acknowledges the inputs and guidance from George Bete (WFP), Daniel Mlenga (FAO), and Rami Beirkdar (Afghanistan CVWG), and provision of data by the ReportHub team. For more information, please email Maria Virginia Ceretti (mceretti@worldbank.org) or Sundas Liaquat (sliaquat@worldbank.org).