

OVERVIEW

On 10 March 2025 – seven weeks into the 90-day pause and foreign aid review announced via executive order on 20 January 2025 – the US Government announced that it had cancelled more than 80% of all USAID programmes globally (Reuters 10/03/2025; WH 20/01/2025). These cancellations followed a series of stop-work orders (SWOs) issued on 24 January on all US-funded aid activities (NPR 24/01/2025). Despite a waiver for life-saving humanitarian assistance announced on 28 January for some programming categories, some organisations still terminated programmes even without receiving a termination notice because of the unclear communication and implementation of the waiver (US DOS 28/01/2025; JAS 24/02/2025 b). Almost all USAID direct hires have since been placed on administrative leave, and NGOs and UN agencies with US-funded programmes have begun to receive termination notices (OIG 10/02/2025; The Times 03/02/2025; The Guardian 25/03/2025; Devex 26/02/2025; NBC 28/02/2025).

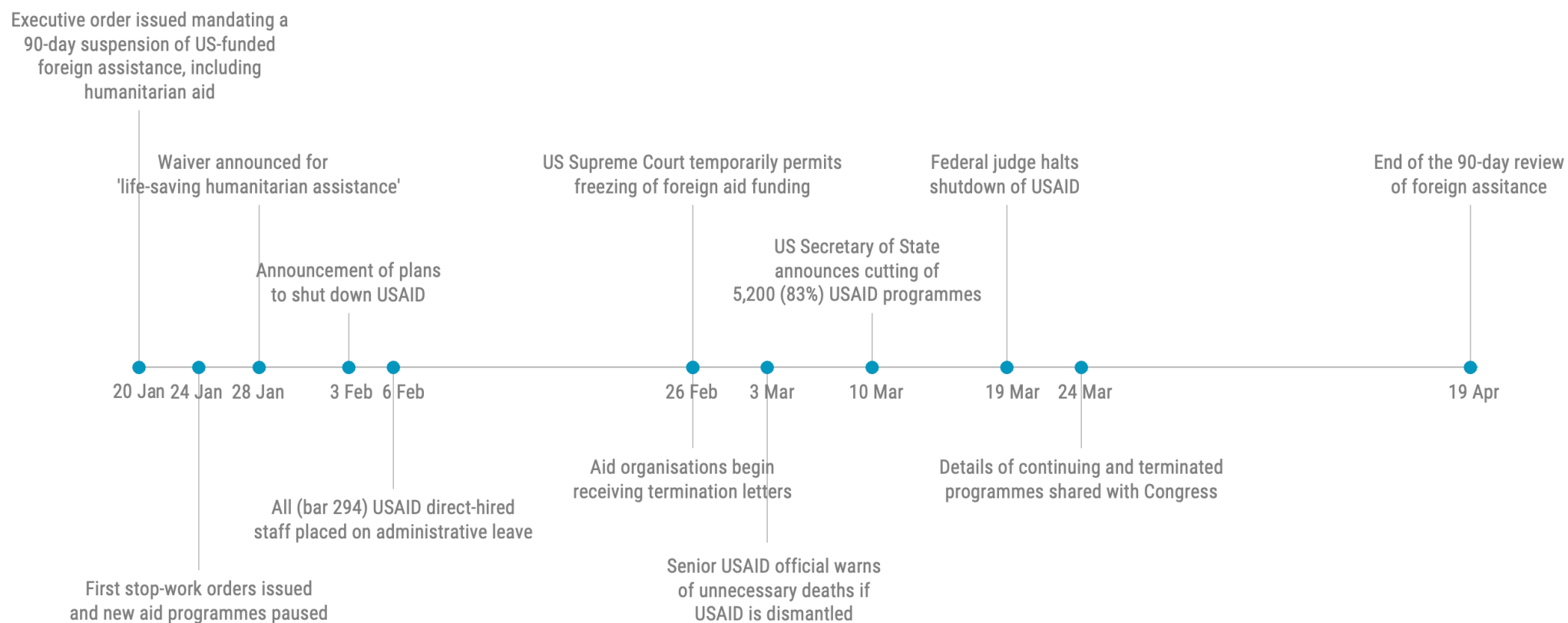
On 17 March, a leaked memo indicated the planned dissolution of USAID by 30 September and the creation of a new US Agency for International Humanitarian Assistance under the State Department, focusing on humanitarian assistance, disaster response, global health, and food security (Robert Nichols LinkedIn 19/03/2025; Devex 17/03/2025). The memo suggests a heavy emphasis on results-driven programming, particularly around life-saving humanitarian aid. Programmes focused on democracy, religious freedom, women’s empowerment, civil society, and conflict prevention or stabilisation will be integrated into State Department bureaus and offices (Robert Nichols LinkedIn 19/03/2025). According to an updated list of terminated and retained awards shared with US Congress, 36% of US funding to Afghanistan has been cut (including humanitarian, private companies, and USAID costs themselves) (CGD 26/03/2025). ACAPS’ own review of the data suggests that nearly half (47%) of all humanitarian funding from the US Government has been cut. That said, it is not clear if the list is up-to-date because some organisations’ funding cuts are not reflected in the document.

The US has played a major role in funding humanitarian response in Afghanistan, making up 43.9% of all reported humanitarian funding in the country (OCHA accessed 30/01/2025). This is complemented by substantive support for development and security (more than USD 657 million since 2022) (SIGAR 30/01/2025). The sudden and disruptive nature of the US aid freeze and subsequent cuts means considerable gaps in funding for Afghanistan. Although the potential long-term impacts of the funding cuts are not yet clear, if alternative sources of funding are not found, there is likely to be an increase in humanitarian needs alongside reduced access to vital services and the rolling back of hard-earned development gains to reduce aid dependency.

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Figure 1. Timeline of events



Sources: ACAPS using data from WH (20/01/2025); The Guardian (24/01/2025, 28/01/2025, and 27/02/2025); Reuters (03/02/2025 and 19/03/2025); The Times (03/02/2025); Devex (26/02/2025); NBC (28/02/2025); Marco Rubio X (10/03/2025); NYT (26/03/2025).

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report builds on ACAPS' briefing note on what the US aid freeze means to Afghanistan, published on 7 February 2025. It aims to provide a more comprehensive overview of the implications of the US aid freeze and subsequent cuts on humanitarian programming in the country, with a focus on how this affects humanitarian response capacity and Afghans.

Methodology

This report is based on a review of reports and briefs from humanitarian responders and international and Afghan media. It also draws from four Joint Analysis Sessions (JASes) held with donors, coordination actors, international NGOs (INGOs), and national NGOs (NNGOs) to discuss the individual and collective implications of the freeze. At least 41 people from 34 organisations participated in the JASes. Two key information interviews (KIIs) were also conducted with humanitarian and security experts for additional depth.

Limitations

This report relies primarily on secondary data, complemented by information gathered through the JASes and KIIs. The report is thus limited by the fragmented and incomplete existing data on the financial, operational, and programmatic impact of the US foreign aid freeze and cuts; there is still no publicly available comprehensive gap analysis outlining which projects have been affected and where, as well as which programming gaps may be covered by other grants or new funding. This report was produced between February–March 2025, while the situation was still rapidly evolving and humanitarian responders were still collecting and analysing data on the impact of the freeze and subsequent cuts, some of which still had not been shared at the time of publication.

KEY FINDINGS

- The funding freeze and any subsequent cuts are expected to have both immediate and longer-term effects on the Afghan economy. The afghani has appreciated by 12% after a USD 100 million injection from Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) since the announcement of the US aid freeze. Such a drastic economic measures and reduced support for food security, agriculture, and livelihoods will likely result in an increase in commodity prices for Afghans and a decrease in food quality and availability.
- The funding freeze and subsequent cuts will likely result in an enormous increase in humanitarian needs, especially regarding livelihoods, food security, health, and nutrition. The need to prioritise life-saving aid could undermine the already-limited progress made on durable solutions, resulting in a heightened risk of increasing aid dependence in the future.
- Humanitarian organisations are struggling to maintain comprehensive operations, and some have had to reduce their operational footprint, limiting their capacity to respond to new crises, including the current crisis involving returnees from Pakistan and their anticipated mass influx.
- The funding freeze and subsequent cuts have resulted in some immediate disruptions to humanitarian coordination, including the elimination of subnational coordinator positions and closure of reporting platforms, with more disruptions expected. Gaps in coordination and information-sharing will affect the quality and timeliness of humanitarian response at a time when coordination is more needed than ever to cover critical gaps and ensure effective prioritisation of remaining resources.
- Two months after the announcement of the funding freeze, there remains no comprehensive, publicly available breakdown of the most affected clusters and regions. There continues to be a lack of clarity about exactly how many programmes have been affected and how the funding cuts affect communities receiving aid, making it difficult for both donors and aid providers to respond to these impacts.

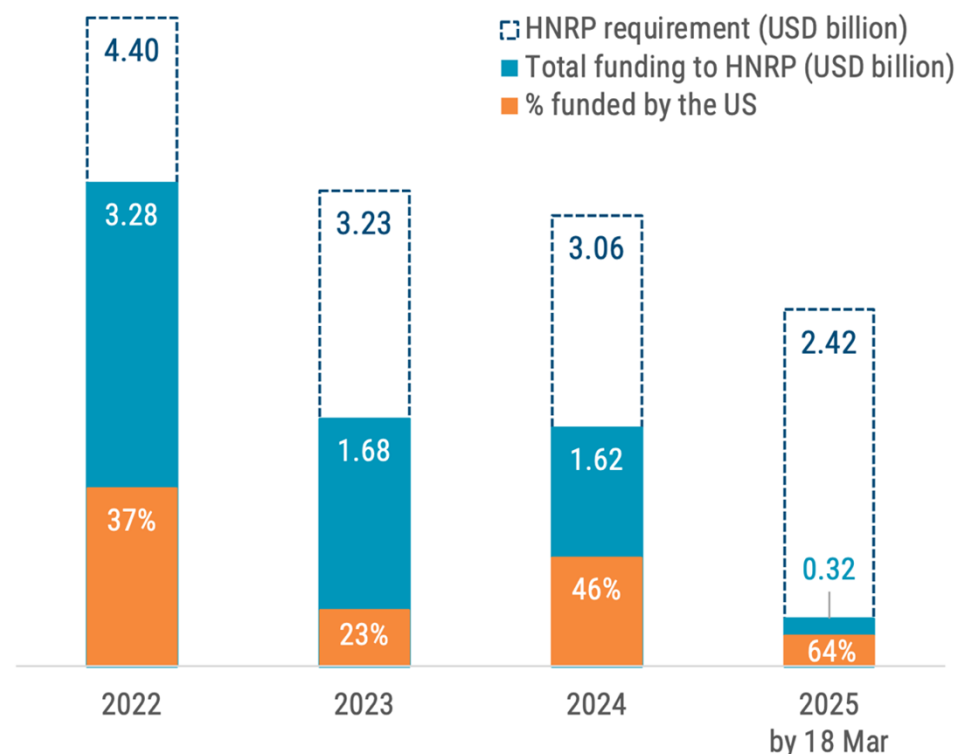
IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN AND BASIC HUMAN NEEDS FUNDING

After the Taliban returned to power on 15 August 2021, establishing the Interim Taliban Authority (ITA), development funding ceased, DAB assets were frozen, and sanctions were placed on the ITA (BBC 25/08/2021; SIGAR 31/01/2024; ICG 14/08/2024). Afghanistan's economic isolation worsened, resulting in a massive influx of humanitarian aid entering the country to stave off further disaster and stabilise the economy (CSIS 13/06/2024; SIGAR 31/01/2024). The ITA also established limited development support and trade agreements with some neighbouring countries (ICG 14/08/2024). That said, the stability achieved remained tenuous, and between 2021–2023, the Afghan economy – buttressed by foreign aid and highly vulnerable to shock – stagnated (WB 03/10/2023; CSIS 13/06/2024; ICG 14/08/2024).

The UN Transitional Engagement Framework for Afghanistan 2022–2025 provides humanitarian responders with three strategic priority areas to channel aid in the absence of an internationally recognised government authority and disruption to development work. The three priority areas are providing life-saving assistance, sustaining essential services, and preserving social investments and community-level systems (UN 01/2022). The latter two, which also include some humanitarian programming, such as for health, nutrition, protection, education, and WASH, are covered as 'basic human needs' in the UN Strategic Framework for Afghanistan, while the first is covered by the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) (UN 16/10/2024).

The US funding freeze and subsequent cuts have inflicted a shock on the Afghan economy. In 2024, the US funded 43% of all humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and 47% of the HNRP (OCHA 07/03/2025). In 2025, the US was expected to provide at least USD 234 million in humanitarian financing (around 10% of the country's 2025 HNRP) (USAID 17/01/2025; OCHA accessed 03/02/2025). By 18 March, only 13% of the HNRP had been funded, with the US contributing 64% of that amount (OCHA accessed 18/03/2025 a; USAID 17/01/2025; OCHA accessed 03/02/2025). Although this may be because other donors plan to fund Afghanistan later in the year, the US funding freeze has meant that a sizeable proportion of current funding pledges had been suspended and potentially terminated (NYT 12/02/2025).

Figure 2. US contribution to overall HNRP funding, 2022–2025 (by 18 March 2025)



Source: ACAPS using OCHA (accessed 18/03/2025 a)

One JAS participant suggested that HNRP funding for 2025 may fall as low as 25%, leaving a 75% gap (JAS 25/02/2025 a). In 2024, the HNRP was only 53% funded (OCHA accessed 18/03/2025 b). In 2025, if the same level of funding from other donors can be expected but without US funding, it may be funded at 36% (OCHA accessed 18/03/2025 a). That said, most other institutional donors have also announced planned funding cuts, further undermining the possibility of substantial gap coverage by other donors (OCHA accessed 11/03/2025; Chatham House 05/03/2025). The funding cuts will thus have a drastic impact on the response's capacity to meet life-saving humanitarian needs.



Cuts in US-funded development assistance accompany the cuts to humanitarian assistance. According to the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, since 2022, nearly USD 557.78 million, or 15% of the total US assistance to Afghanistan, has gone to development programmes, including committed and obligated funding during the first quarter of 2025 (SIGAR 30/01/2025). Although US contributions to development aid were less than to humanitarian assistance, it can be assumed that prioritisation efforts to address life-saving gaps may reduce future investments in basic human needs. It is also unclear how much of US development funding went to basic human needs programming or to other activities. According to one JAS participant, the US contributed 12% of all basic human needs funding (JAS 25/02/2025 b). Funding for the two latter outcome areas of basic human needs programming – which should complement humanitarian assistance – may have to be redirected to life-saving humanitarian assistance, especially after disasters or in the face of the expected mass return of Afghan refugees currently residing in Pakistan and Iran (UN 02/07/2023; UN 16/10/2024).

Without a publicly available and comprehensive gap analysis, it is still unclear which sectors will be most affected by the funding freeze and any subsequent cuts. That said, in late February, JAS participants suggested that protection (including mine action associated with non-technical survey), camp management and camp coordination, multipurpose cash assistance, shelter, and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services are among the most affected (JAS 24/02/2025 b). According to the Financial Tracking Service, in 2024, the US contributed more than half of all humanitarian funding to the Emergency Shelter and NFI, Food Security and Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health Clusters, along with multi-cluster funding. It can then be assumed that these will be among the areas most affected by any funding cuts.

Table 1. US contribution to humanitarian sectors in 2024 and 2025

SECTOR	US CONTRIBUTION IN 2024 (IN USD)	US % OF TOTAL FUNDING IN 2024	ACTUAL US CONTRIBUTION IN 2025 (USD)	US % OF TOTAL OR INCOMING FUNDING IN 2025
Aviation	21,000,000	62%	0	0%
Common services	4,310,911	25%	0	0%
Education	0	0%	0	0%
Emergency shelter and NFIs	42,727,989	61%	0	0%
Food security and agriculture	384,998,916	56%	0	0%
Health	43,901,842	31%	955,500	8%
Multipurpose cash assistance	37,190,910	-	0	0%
Nutrition	71,095,498	53%	0	0%
Protection	37,242,659	31%	409,500	2%
WASH	42,018,119	61%	6,974,549	83%
Multiple field clusters (shared)	37,493,175	67%	198,446,504	92%

Source: OCHA (accessed 16/03/2025)

IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

There is currently no openly accessible information about how many US-funded humanitarian programmes have been allowed to continue and where (AP 10/03/2025). According to a global survey conducted by OCHA, 68% of humanitarian response partners in Afghanistan have had to reduce their targets, 45% have reduced geographic coverage, and 42% have reduced staff (OCHA 07/03/2025). The most affected sectors are expected to be agriculture, WASH, protection, and education (ICVA 03/2025; JAS 25/02/2025 b). That said, the funding freeze and any subsequent cuts are likely to affect all clusters and coordination mechanisms and have a profound impact on Afghanistan's humanitarian response environment. As a result, humanitarian responders are reprioritising according to the 2025 HNRP, focusing on the highest severity areas and reducing their planned targets and geographic coverage (OCHA 07/03/2025).

Despite there being no comprehensive publicly available analysis of which humanitarian responders or programmes the funding cuts have affected, in late February, JAS participants noted that the freeze had affected most humanitarian responders and that disruption to critical services would affect operational continuity (JAS 24/02/2025 b; JAS 25/02/2025 a). Some JAS participants also noted challenges with liquidity, affecting organisations' abilities to pay staff salaries and maintain non-US-funded projects (JAS 24/02/2025 b).

In February 2025, the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR) conducted a survey among 50 of its member NGOs (29 INGOs and 21 NNGOs) to assess the initial effects of the US funding suspension. The freeze and subsequent cuts had affected nearly half (46%) of all responding organisations, leading to a loss of nearly USD 37 million in ongoing projects and another USD 58.5 million in frozen pipeline funding. At the time of the survey, only six NGOs had received written exemptions from USAID for emergency response in WASH, protection, food assistance, shelter and settlement, health and nutrition, and MHPSS. Nearly half (48%) of all respondents were unable to reach the communities they had previously supported, even with funding reallocation or alternative donor-funded projects, and only 26% said they were still able to provide support to communities using alternative funding sources (ACBAR unpublished).

According to JAS participants, organisations working on civil society support, governance, media, and women-led organisations are most likely to be affected as their activities are not covered in the HNRP and they are less likely to be able to secure alternate funding (JAS 25/02/2025 b).

Staffing

In late February, JAS participants told ACAPS that NGOs had been forced to make significant staffing cuts as a direct consequence of the funding freeze, resulting in some staff – especially coordination staff – being required to double- or triple-hat (JAS 24/02/2025 a; OCHA 07/03/2025). Large-scale projects focused on strengthening local organisations' capacities were also among those halted, with little prospect of resumption (JAS 24/02/2025 a). In an ACBAR survey of 50 NGOs, 42% of respondents said the SWOs had directly affected their staff, mostly through direct contract termination or temporary suspension (ACBAR unpublished). JAS participants flagged that staff cuts at the regional and global levels also affected country-level staff because they limited the level and amount of technical support available. At the same time, the challenge of addressing shared or pooled staff is extremely pressing because they need to continue operating other grants and programmes (JAS 24/02/2025 b).

It is important to note that terminated staff may not have many other career opportunities. A JAS participant highlighted the risk associated with mass layoffs, observing that terminated staff risk experiencing poverty and needing humanitarian assistance that can no longer be delivered as they typically come from the communities they serve (JAS 24/02/2025 b). A reduction in female humanitarian staff – who tend to occupy lower-level positions and are more vulnerable to the cuts – will have a direct impact on women's and girls' access to services, with most services affected by the freeze and likely cuts also benefitting women and girls (including gender-based violence (GBV) mitigation and case management) (JAS 25/02/2025 a; JAS 25/02/2025 b; APC 07/02/2025).

Emergency preparedness and response capacity

By 26 February 2025, some critical food, health, nutrition, shelter, and WASH supplies were at high risk of pipeline breaks because of general funding gaps. The pipeline break for emergency shelter repair toolkits was specifically linked to the funding freeze, as was the provision of wheat (OCHA 26/02/2025).

As one JAS participant said, “We risk no longer being able to support or address the needs of people most in need.”

Expected gaps in overall funding to the HNRP will require ruthless prioritisation of which geographic areas and population groups receive humanitarian assistance along with the rescaling of humanitarian structural footprint and the volume of activities (JAS 25/02/2025 a).

With an anticipated influx of returnees from Pakistan and Iran, emergency preparedness and response are of major concern for humanitarian responders (JAS 24/02/2025 b; JAS 25/02/2025 b). On 7 March 2025, the Pakistani Government announced that all undocumented foreigners, including Afghan nationals with temporary legal status, must leave voluntarily by 31 March or risk deportation from 1 April. This will likely lead to a sharp increase in new arrivals, necessitating a scale-up in assistance by responders (Arab News 14/03/2025). In 2024 alone, nearly 3.5 million Afghans returned to Afghanistan from Iran, Pakistan, and Türkiye, overstressing the country's already limited resources and resulting in an increase in social tension as people compete to meet their basic needs. Of these returnees, 59% were children, and half were women and girls (APC 07/02/2025).

According to JAS participants, the funding freeze and subsequent cuts have affected the ability of organisations to conduct rapid assessments and rapid response. In late February, organisations had already started decreasing their fleets.

As one responder said, “The biggest concern is that we are put in a position where we will be less able to adapt to emergency response when another emergency occurs.” (JAS 24/02/2025 b)

In addition to the influx of returnees, upcoming seasonal shocks could also further strain humanitarian emergency response capacities, especially if the shocks reach a similar intensity and scale as in previous years (OCHA 19/12/2024). Although the leaked memo indicates that disaster response will continue under the new US Agency for International Humanitarian Assistance, it is unclear when and how this will be operationalised (Robert Nichols LinkedIn 19/03/2025). In the meantime, existing systems for responding are likely to be scaled down.

Coordination and information-sharing

The US funding freeze and subsequent funding cuts have raised concerns about future coordination and information management. JAS participants noted that now, more than ever, a unified approach is needed (JAS 24/02/2025 a). According to OCHA, 65% of coordination positions – both national and subnational – have been affected (OCHA 07/03/2025). Discussions on alternative coordination mechanisms, including potential restructuring at the UN level, are underway because current stopgap measures are unsustainable (JAS 25/02/2025 b).

The closure of ReportHub has strained coordinated information management across multiple clusters, with some shifting to alternative systems (WASH Cluster unpublished; JAS 25/02/2025 b). The MHPSS Technical Working Group's dashboard has also been suspended, and the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster's monthly dashboard does not show updates for 2025 (MHPSS TWG unpublished; FSC accessed 20/03/2025).

JAS participants highlighted a need for more information-sharing between both humanitarian responders and donors around who is funding which organisations with what type of programming. There is some concern that without this information-sharing, some organisations or areas of focus working in sectors that are expected to be deprioritised by the US going forward – such as sexual and reproductive health and climate change – will see a surge in support, while others offering critical life-saving assistance to marginalised groups could be overlooked (JAS 25/02/2025 a). JAS participants expressed frustration about the lack of coordination regarding data collection on the impact of the funding freeze; some said that although they had been contacted for feedback, they were not fully aware of how the information collected would be used and noted the absence of clear and coordinated advocacy efforts (JAS 24/02/2025 a; JAS 24/02/2025 b).

Data collection and informed humanitarian response

The biggest barrier to comprehensive data collection on humanitarian needs and programming impacts remains the ITA's restrictions on such activities, particularly in terms of collecting data from women and girls (JAS 25/02/2025 a). That said, the funding freeze and subsequent cuts, along with the operational challenges experienced by many humanitarian responders, are likely to affect their ability to conduct necessary data-related activities, with JAS participants mentioning that in late February, the freeze had already suspended at least two research and evaluation projects (JAS 24/02/2025 a). Any subsequent funding cuts are also likely to increase the need for up-to-date needs assessments and analysis so that the response has a clear, evidence-based understanding of developing needs in affected communities. This is especially critical for principled and data-driven prioritisation of life-saving aid and impactful redirection of funds, particularly regarding the needs and vulnerabilities of different population groups.

Communication and community engagement

During the funding freeze, JAS participants noted that it had been very challenging to know how to communicate the suspension of operations to community members because of the ambiguity of the SWOs and waivers and because of a lack of clarification from USAID (JAS 25/02/2025 b). Frequent calls asking about the timeline for the resumption of humanitarian programming were reported by one operational responder who spoke with ACAPS (KII 17/03/2025). Other humanitarian responders flagged that the inability to physically reach communities or provide services would affect their credibility over time and weaken communities' trust in organisations, especially frontline grassroots providers (JAS 24/02/2025 a; JAS 24/02/2025 b). Concerns were raised about communicating with hard-to-reach communities. Some communities apparently learnt about the funding freeze through radio, community discussions, and communication with aid workers, while others, especially those from rural areas, were not – at least at the time of the JAS – fully aware of

the freeze and were asking local responders why it was happening (UNFPA/UNOPS 20/02/2025; JAS 24/02/2025 a). Uncertainty around when and if aid would resume was causing anxiety among community members (UNFPA/UNOPS 20/02/2025). It is currently unclear the extent to which JAS participants' fears about the impact of the freeze on community relations have been realised. That said, the freeze and any subsequent cuts have heightened the need for clear and regular communication with affected communities to reduce uncertainty and ensure full transparency and accountability.

Localisation

Although the funding freeze and subsequent cuts have affected organisations of all sizes, the effects are expected to be greatest for those with limited core funds, a heavy prior reliance on US funding, and reduced access to diversified funding. JAS participants noted that NNGOs are at increased risk of falling into this category, especially because they have limited core funds. JAS participants noted that programmes on capacity strengthening for local organisations – including support on writing proposals, policies, and procedures – were 'stopped' without indications of project resumption (JAS 24/02/2025 a). This will impede their ability to replace lost funding in an increasingly tight funding environment.

By 23 March, comprehensive data on specific impacts on national and subnational responders was unavailable. That said, an ACBAR survey found that at least seven NGOs had already ceased working with grassroots implementing partners because of the SWOs (ACBAR unpublished). OCHA also found that NNGOs have been the most affected (OCHA 07/03/2025). The funding freeze and any subsequent cuts will also compound existing restrictions and challenges for women-led organisations and NNGOs focusing on supporting women and girls, leading to an increase in anxiety and distress among female humanitarian staff (JAS 25/02/2025 b; APC 07/02/2025).

As one JAS participant noted, "With the announcement from the US, we forget the announcements that came before, like the ban on women becoming nurses, doctors, and midwives. The medium-term impacts are coming very fast." (JAS 25/02/2025 a)

Relationship between humanitarians and the ITA

To date, most humanitarian responders have reported understanding engagement with the ITA, noting that, for the most part, the ITA understands the current situation and the implications of the aid freeze (JAS 24/02/2025 a; JAS 24/02/2025 b). On 25 January 2025, the ITA

issued a statement condemning the funding freeze as a violation of international rights and has called on the international community to work with the ITA, especially on the economy (TOLOnews 25/01/2025; MOEC 11/02/2025). That said, one JAS participant noted that when they informed the ITA about a project suspension, the ITA official consulted said the funding freeze was not of their concern and implied that the organisation still had to deliver. Some responders are nervous about the potential longer-term impact on the ITA's relationship with NNGOs and INGOs, saying the situation may contribute to a deterioration of trust between the ITA and humanitarian responders, especially if more than one of their projects is shut down (JAS 24/02/2025 a).

One responder expressed a fear that the ITA might use the funding challenges as an opportunity to expel NGOs, saying, "I want to highlight the risk of a ban on NGOs/INGOs because they are [seen as] not as useful and because the humanitarian system is [viewed as] weak."

Another asserted a similar fear, saying the ITA might refuse humanitarian aid and demand development funding instead (JAS 25/02/2025 a). At the time of writing, these fears had not been realised, and the ITA's Deputy Minister of Economy shared on X that Afghanistan continues to welcome international aid (Abdul Latif Nazari X 04/03/2025).

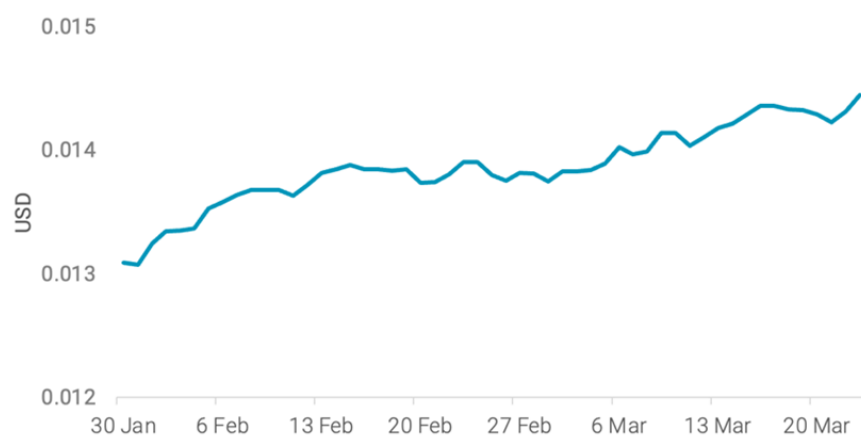
The humanitarian reset

There is no denying the severity of the funding freeze and cuts or their current and future implications on both Afghans and humanitarian aid providers. That said, some responders who participated in the JASes highlighted the importance of using this massive disruption as an opportunity to think about things differently. One suggestion was that a strategic rethink might force humanitarian responders to evaluate what kinds of programmes are increasing exposure to aid dependency and to look for more sustainable solutions. JAS participants also noted that responders may be forced to review funding inefficiencies and increase reliance on local expertise (JAS 24/02/2025 b). One participant emphasised that there remains a need for a collective, coordinated response, and that the freeze and any subsequent cuts may force humanitarian responders to collaborate and develop cost-effective and coordinated systems. There was also a suggestion that this might be the push needed for effective localisation (JAS 25/02/2025 a).

ANTICIPATED ECONOMIC IMPACT

The abrupt nature of the funding freeze and any subsequent funding cuts will likely have a significant impact on Afghanistan's economy, resulting in market volatility, currency devaluation, and increased inflation. The ITA relies on the inflow of foreign exchange to help manage the exchange rate, while humanitarian and basic human needs programming provides vital support to food security, livelihoods, health, and protection activities (The Interpreter 27/09/2023). Since the freeze, the afghani has appreciated by about 12% because DAB injected USD 100 million to maintain currency stability (AMU 29/01/2025; Bakhtar News Agency 17/02/2025; JAS 24/02/2025 a). Maintaining a strong currency is a priority for the ITA, and such measures will likely place a significant strain on an already fragile economy.

Figure 3. Value of the Aghani against the US dollar since the announcement of the US funding freeze



Source: OANDA (accessed 20/03/2025)

Commodity prices have increased slightly following the announcement of the widespread cuts to US funding – likely because of exchange rate fluctuations resulting from the freeze combined with adverse crop conditions and reduced supplies from Russia and Southeast Asia – increasing pressure on Afghans to meet their basic needs (WFP 10/03/2025). The prices of key food items, such as flour, cooking oil, salt, rice, and potatoes, have increased, along with the cost of fuel (WFP 21/02/2025; NPR 03/02/2025). Costs were already increasing prior to Trump's return to office, but in February, Afghan traders observed that the current uncertainty because of the aid freeze was keeping them high. As a result, Afghans – many who were already struggling even before the current increase in commodity prices – experienced difficulty meeting all their needs (NPR 03/02/2025).

Humanitarian organisations are also a significant source of employment. Humanitarian staff – many of whom face termination – will go from providing aid to needing it, increasing the number of people in need and the burden on humanitarian aid providers.

As one JAS participant said, "USAID provided a lot of employment – direct and indirect – in the country. There's an enormous problem with unemployed youth, and the additional effects may include significant out-migration to neighbouring countries as well as more people seeking to go to the US."

Women – who were more likely to be employed in junior positions – are more likely to be affected by staff cuts and less likely to be able to find other employment (JAS 24/02/2025 a). The increase in unemployment may also increase the drive for migration – both within the region and to Europe and North America. Those returning from Pakistan expecting support will likely have to move again when they realise they cannot access the resources and services they need (JAS 24/02/2025 a; JAS 25/02/2025 a). They are also less likely to be able to migrate for work or to seek other opportunities.

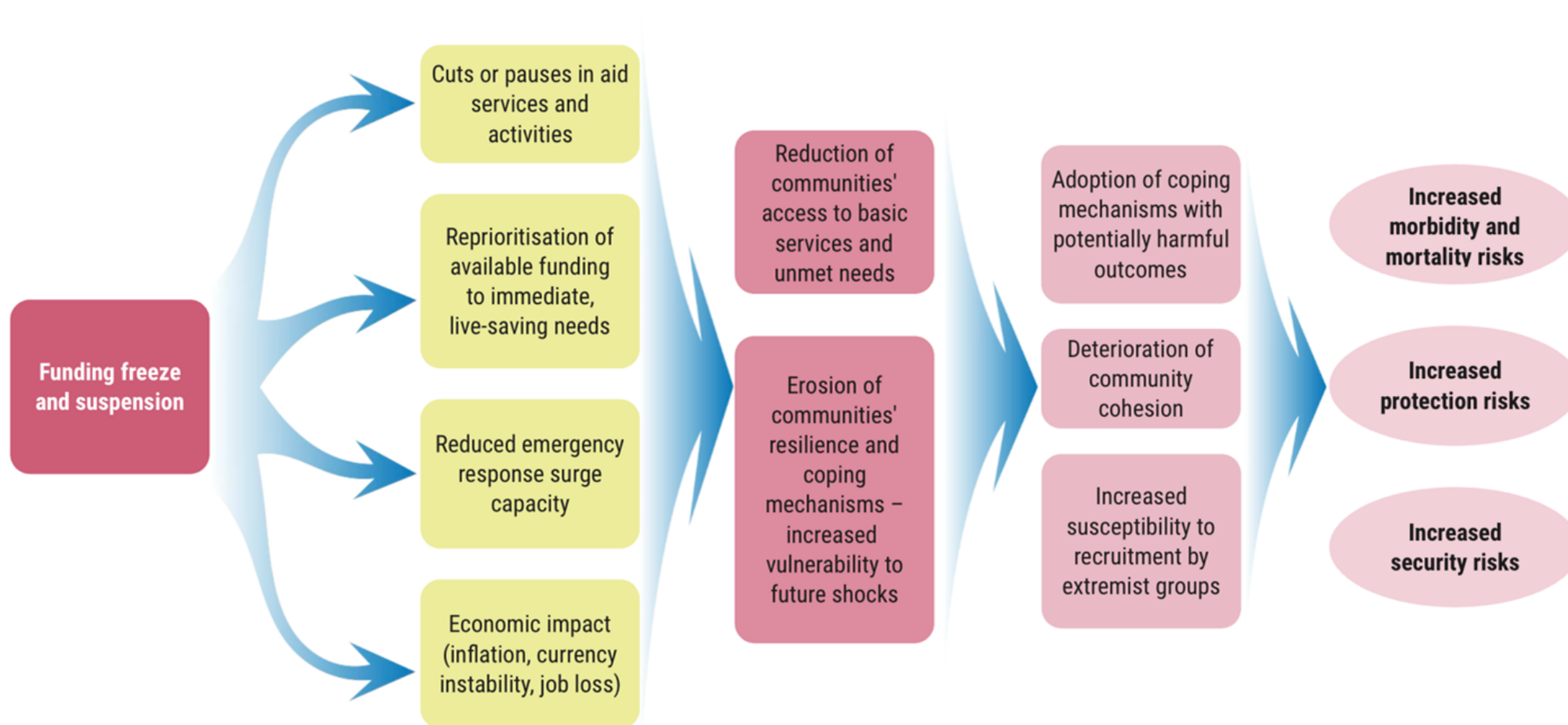
IMPLICATIONS FOR AFFECTED COMMUNITIES PER SECTOR

The effects of the funding freeze and any subsequent cuts – on the economy, essential services (including healthcare), livelihoods, and protection – will affect everyone. According to JAS participants, Afghans across all geographic regions will be affected (JAS 24/02/2025 b). Nearly half the population lives below the poverty line, the country's health system is crumbling, the agricultural sector needs significant continuous support, and climatic and geological hazards are common (OCHA 19/12/2024; JAS 24/02/2025 a). A large proportion of the population is therefore vulnerable to any reductions in already overstretched humanitarian and basic human needs programming.

The effects of the funding freeze and subsequent potential cuts are likely to be multifaceted, affecting different aspects of Afghans' lives (See Figure 4). For example, increased competition following the funding freeze and cuts could result in potential issues regarding natural resource management, such as over water irrigation intervals, and may result in conflict (JAS 24/02/2025 a). The funding freeze and cuts will also affect the availability of and access to assistance in areas of return, potentially increasing out-migration as returnees find there are no longer services available to help them.

As one JAS participant put it, "There will be an increasing and cyclical level of suffering among people." (JAS 25/02/2025 b)

Figure 4. Potential effects of the US funding suspension in Afghanistan if funding gaps are not significantly filled



Preliminary qualitative data, collected by UNFPA and UNOPS, indicates that Afghans are already reporting widespread distress along with rising hardship and insecurity, especially women, children, and IDPs. People's primary concerns appear to be access to food, healthcare, and livelihood activities. Confusion and lack of clear information about if or when aid will resume further add to this sense of distress (UNFPA/UNOPS 20/02/2025). Gender-based restrictions and regulatory interference by the ITA, compounded by the funding freeze and any subsequent cuts, could lead to inequitable humanitarian support along gender lines if this is not sufficiently accounted for in prioritisation exercises, especially for women-headed households, who are already more vulnerable to being denied access to services and who account for more than 10% of all Afghan households (APC 07/02/2025).

The implications of the US funding freeze and any subsequent cuts are likely to be broad and wide-reaching. The interaction between cuts to humanitarian assistance, basic human needs programming, and longer-term development initiatives need to be considered together when considering their effects on communities' humanitarian needs and cannot be viewed in silos. Key concerns – including food insecurity, healthcare, and WASH – are likely to worsen because of the US aid cuts.

Food security, agriculture, and livelihoods

In 2025, the US planned to provide USD 170 million to the WFP to provide emergency food assistance in the form of cash transfers, food vouchers, nutrition support, and in-kind food assistance (USAID 17/01/2025). With funds committed to the sector for 2025 but none allocated by mid-March, the freeze and any subsequent cuts are likely to cause significant disruption in the delivery of assistance to communities in need (OCHA accessed 16/03/2025). By 26 February, the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster was already facing a USD 105.2 million gap to meet stock requirements for the first three months of the year, with wheat flour at very high risk of stock pipeline break (OCHA 26/02/2025). This will have severe ramifications on Afghans; between November 2024 and March 2025, 14.8 million people were expected to experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse food insecurity, including 3.1 million facing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels (IPC 07/01/2025). Returnees, IDPs, and disaster-affected communities are expected to be the most affected; in August 2024, food (73%) and livelihoods (53%) were classified as the top priorities by people living in settlements (OCHA 19/12/2024; REACH 20/11/2024).

The US has been a major contributor to livelihood and agriculture support in Afghanistan. If gaps in funding are not addressed, small-scale farmers and herders will likely have reduced capacity to access animal feed during the winter season and agricultural inputs for the sowing season (JAS 24/02/2025 a). In some cases, even if some funding resumes, the support may simply be too late.

As one JAS participant explained, “We had agricultural inputs and seeds being vetted by [the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance] that were suspended. Although we scrambled to try to buy seeds from elsewhere, we were too late. We are missing the planting season, and it is too late to provide these inputs now, which will impact livelihoods and food security.” (JAS 24/02/2025 b)

In late February, JAS participants noted that the suspension of infrastructure and irrigation projects, which may not have secured waivers, might also affect food security and agriculture projects (JAS 24/02/2025 a). Participants explained that some organisations were trying to mitigate the potential effects of the SWOs by scaling up efforts to support small farmers and herders alongside World Bank and EU-funded projects. It is currently unclear how many US-funded agricultural projects, including irrigation, have since been terminated (JAS 24/02/2025 a; WB 27/02/2025; UNOPS 07/07/2024; FAO 2024). The scale of US support to food security and agriculture also means it is unlikely that any gaps can be covered entirely, possibly resulting in insufficient locally grown food and an accompanying increase in food imports from other countries, affecting food security, markets, and commodity prices (JAS 24/02/2025 a). The quality and quantity of wheat yields in 2025 may also be affected by below-average precipitation and above-average temperatures expected between April–June 2025, especially in the northeast, further affecting food security and livelihoods (University of California 07/03/2025; WMO accessed 13/03/2025; IRI accessed 13/03/2025).

By mid-February, less than a month into the freeze, families were already reducing meal portions, skipping meals, or sending children to work. Daily wage labourers and farmers reliant on cash-for-work projects also reported more difficulties finding work. Given the scale of the US funding cuts globally, it is likely that at least some food security funding has also been cut in Afghanistan, causing these challenges to continue. Although this will affect Afghans across the country, some groups are more at risk of food insecurity or reduced access to livelihoods than others. For example, women-headed households are likely to be more vulnerable to the food security impacts of the funding freeze and any subsequent funding cuts, with the ITA's restrictions on women's work and mobility already limiting their access to food and livelihood opportunities (UNFPA/UNOPS 20/02/2025). Any reductions in food security programming or increased food prices are also likely to heavily affect households headed by a person with a disability, which typically experience higher rates of unemployment, higher debt levels, and poorer food consumption scores than households headed by people without disabilities (APC 07/02/2025; OCHA 19/12/2024).

Health and nutrition

In 2025, about 14.3 million people are estimated to need health assistance. Even before the funding freeze was announced, Afghanistan's health system was already crumbling because of insufficient infrastructure, inadequate funding, and a shortage of healthcare professionals. Since the funding freeze and subsequent cuts, more than 200 health facilities have closed, preventing between 1.8 million to 2.4 million people from accessing primary healthcare (OCHA 07/03/2025; Afghanistan Health Cluster 20/03/2025 and 13/03/2025; WHO 17/03/2025; JAS 25/02/2025 b). The eastern and western regions will be among the most affected, with mobile health and nutrition teams being the most affected type of programming (Afghanistan Health Cluster 13/03/2025 and 20/03/2025; JAS 25/02/2025 b). Reproductive healthcare is also of concern, with pregnancy complications and unsafe abortions responsible for 64% of deaths among 15–19-year-old girls and 70% of deaths among 20–24-year-old women (OCHA 19/12/2024). Vaccination efforts have also been disrupted, including door-to-door measles and polio vaccination programmes for children (NPR 03/02/2025). In early March, Médecins Sans Frontières warned of an alarming surge in measles cases in Balkh, Herat, and Helmand (MSF 12/03/2025).

Although the World Bank has since pledged an additional USD 240 million to support Afghanistan's health sector until November 2026, and other donors have stepped in to support some health facilities, the immediate and longer-term effects are likely to be enormous (UNAMA 10/03/2025; AAN 10/02/2025).

As one JAS participant said, the scale of the issue is so big that it will be difficult for anyone to cover the gap: "We had integrated primary healthcare and ambulances to transfer critically ill patients to other areas. All this will now stop. We tried to communicate with as many organisations as possible, but everyone is in the same situation so they cannot take over, and the Government does not have the capacity to take over this number of facilities and hire as many doctors either."
(JAS 24/02/2025 b)

Losing access to healthcare was one of the most urgent concerns raised by communities consulted in February regarding the US funding freeze (UNFPA/UNOPS 20/02/2025). Similarly, in the JASes conducted in late February, participants noted that the closure of health facilities, suspension of mobile health teams, and disruption of maternal and reproductive health services are likely to force people – especially women – to travel longer distances for care, resulting in increased transportation costs and exposure to protection risks, especially for women and girls travelling without a Mahram. As it stands, a 2022 study found that only 10% of women in Afghanistan are able to meet their basic health needs (compared to 23% of men) (UN Women 20/08/2024; JAS 25/02/2025 b). Many women have expressed fears of losing

access to safe spaces and mental health support, while mothers have reported high levels of stress and anxiety over their children's health and nutrition (UNFPA/UNOPS 20/02/2025; AAN 10/02/2025).

Table 2. Highest number of people affected by the closure of health programmes, by region (according to the Afghanistan Health Cluster)

REGION	PROVINCES	NO. OF FACILITIES CLOSED OR SUSPENDED	ESTIMATED NO. OF AFFECTED PEOPLE
Capital	Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan	3	12,700
Central Highland	Bamyan, Daykundi	2	6,200
Eastern	Kunar, Laghman, Nangarhar, Nuristan	50	501,700
Northeastern	Badakhshan, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar	40	379,200
Northern	Balkh, Jowzjan, Saripul	12	115,100
Southeastern	Ghazni, Khost, Paktika, Paktia	32	217,100
Southern	Kandahar, Nimroz, Uruzgan, Zabul	21	216,300
Western	Badghis, Farah, Ghor, Herat	42	355,200
Total		206	1,803,500

Source: Afghanistan Health Cluster (25/03/2025)

Malnutrition rates also remain high across the country, especially in Helmand, Kandahar, Paktika, and Nuristan provinces. According to IPC projections, about 3.46 million children ages 6–59 months and 1.16 million pregnant or lactating women are likely to be suffering from acute malnutrition and needing treatment through May 2025 (IPC 07/01/2025). In 2024, the US funded 51% of nutrition programming in the HNRP, but by 16 March 2025, no US funding had been allocated for nutrition (OCHA accessed 13/03/2025). Since the funding freeze and subsequent funding cuts, more than 400 nutrition sites have had to close (OCHA 07/03/2025).

Nutrition providers told ACAPS it is "morally impossible" to ask mothers to take children admitted under critical care back home and said they were looking for other opportunities to continue their programming (JAS 24/02/2025 b).



WASH

The 2025 HNRP estimated that 21 million people in Afghanistan will need WASH support. In 2024, US funding to the WASH Cluster amounted to USD 42 million. By the time the SWOs were issued in 2025, USD 7 million had been allocated to WASH programming (OCHA accessed 16/03/2025). The funding freeze and any subsequent cuts come at a time of severe WASH needs driven by persistently insufficient WASH infrastructure, drought, economic shocks, and seasonal challenges, including floods and outbreaks of acute watery diarrhoea (AWD); the spread of AWD and cholera remains a significant threat, with children under five accounting for 55% of cases (OCHA 19/12/2024). 30,800 people targeted for hygiene promotion activities risk not receiving them with the funding cuts. Another 4,400 households in need of WASH NFIs may also not receive them (OCHA 07/03/2025). People with disabilities are particularly at risk from any pauses or cuts in WASH services, as they tend to rely on WASH assistance and face significant challenges in accessing aid and basic services (APC 07/02/2025; OCHA 19/12/2024).

In late February, JAS participants reported that they had initially been forced to stop their WASH activities as a result of the funding freeze, though some activities considered life-saving were later given permission to resume (JAS 24/02/2025 b; JAS 25/02/2025 b).

Participants also noted particular concern about abrupt disruptions to water network rehabilitation programmes, with one JAS participant giving an example: “The community had already been relying on temporary water solutions during construction... With the project halted, they have no access to water. From a do-no-harm perspective, the unfinished work poses additional risks, such as an exposed borehole that could pose a danger to children.” (JAS 24/02/2025 b) As per the 2025 HNRP, 22 water system rehabilitations were considered at risk (OCHA 19/12/2024).

Shelter and NFIs

In 2024, the US contributed 62% of all funding to the Emergency Shelter and NFI Cluster (OCHA accessed 16/03/2025). The US funding freeze and any subsequent cuts will result in nearly 11,200 people not receiving shelter repair support and 17,500 people not receiving NFIs for winter. The funding cuts will also affect transitional sheltering for 18,500 returnees and disaster-affected people, and 52,500 people are at risk of losing access to emergency disaster assistance (OCHA 07/03/2025). The funding freeze and any subsequent cuts have already resulted in pipeline interruptions and the cancellation of the dissemination of 10,145 emergency shelter kits, 19,947 repair toolkits, and 16,000 standard NFI kits (OCHA 26/02/2025).

Safe and adequate shelter is critical to safety and security, providing essential physical and mental health protections (ACAPS 16/08/2024). IDPs in need of reintegration support in their areas of origin may struggle to find safe and adequate shelter, escalating their risk of engaging in coping strategies with potentially harmful consequences. This may also result in fewer IDPs who are willing to return to their areas of origin because they will not receive adequate support (JAS 25/02/2025 b).

Protection

The 2025 HNRP estimated that 22.3 million Afghans (nearly half the total population) will need protection support (OCHA 19/12/2024). In 2024, protection assistance amounted to USD 8.6 million, representing over 70% of USAID’s emergency aid in Afghanistan (OIG 27/08/2024). Because of the funding freeze and subsequent cuts, an estimated 3.3 million people, including 1.6 million children, will no longer receive protection services, including case management, explosive ordnance risk education, cash interventions, psychological support, and emergency assistance (OCHA 07/03/2025). JAS participants also observed that most of the services affected by the funding freeze would have benefitted women and girls (JAS 25/02/2025 b). 115 GBV service delivery points reaching up to one million women survivors have been affected (OCHA 07/03/2025). The funding freeze and subsequent cuts reduce women and girls’ access to safe spaces and increase their risk of experiencing GBV.

The funding freeze and cuts have come at a time when the protection space in Afghanistan is already shrinking, disproportionately affecting women, girls, and returnees. In February 2025, the Protection Cluster observed that GBV in Afghanistan is worsening. Other notable protection concerns include an increase in stigmatisation and discrimination, the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance, restrictions on freedom of movement, threats of forced eviction, and impediments or restrictions to accessing legal identity and justice. Children also frequently endure physical punishment and sexual violence, along with early and forced marriage, which is believed to be on the rise (APC 07/02/2025). Increased economic hardship – a result of a potential economic downturn because of the freeze and cuts – may result in more families using marriage as a strategy to alleviate household financial burden and protect their children.

Any reduction in protection services will impede survivors’ recovery and safety and hinder preventive work. Where services are being suspended or closed, protection providers are struggling to transfer cases to other responders because so many are closing services (JAS 25/02/2025 b). As noted above, some case management services had already been suspended by March, including sensitive cases (OCHA 07/03/2025; JAS 25/02/2025 b). IDPs and returnees will also likely be affected as they already struggle with limited access to resources and challenges in meeting their basic needs. Many – especially those without civil documentation

– struggle to access essential services, and both groups struggle to meet their basic needs and have limited access to income-generating opportunities (APC 07/02/2025). Participants noted that donors are aware of the massive potentially detrimental impacts on the protection sector and are working with lead providers to try to mitigate these, but it remains unclear the extent to which gaps in essential programming will be filled (JAS 25/02/2025 a).

Education

Afghanistan has one of the world's youngest populations, with approximately 63% of all people under the age of 25, and 46% under the age of 15 (APC 07/02/2025). Although FTS suggests 0% reported Education funding in Afghanistan, the list of terminated programmes shared with US Congress indicates the termination of US-funded education programming.

In February when the JASs were conducted, current and planned education projects had already been suspended as a result of the US funding freeze; in one instance, a planned project in Badakshan that would have supported 23,800 children (both boys and girls) and rehabilitated 170 schools had been suspended, resulting in 1,100 teachers out of work (JAS 24/02/2025a). Online schools for girls and higher education were also reportedly closed, though it is not known if these projects have since been terminated (NPR 03/02/2025). JAS participants said they expected these cuts would have a long-term impact on Afghanistan's population, including medium- and long-term economic implications and protection risks (JAS 24/02/2025a). Even prior to the funding freeze, many Afghan families were resorting to coping strategies that reduced children's engagement in education and had potentially long-term negative consequences, including sending children to work (14%) – particularly affecting boys – and early and forced marriage of girls (APC 07/02/2025). Although the full implications of the freeze and any subsequent cuts on education remains unclear, it is likely to be substantial given the significant role education plays in child protection and ensuring individuals' future economic success and stability.

Potential security ramifications: A resurgence of the Islamic State – Khorasan Province?

Since the Taliban returned to power, there has been an improvement in humanitarian access and a reduction in violent conflict and conflict-related deaths and displacements. That said, anti-Taliban resistance, primarily from the Islamic State – Khorasan Province (IS-KP), has continued; between January–September 2024, IS-KP claimed responsibility for various attacks, often targeting Afghanistan's Shia population (APC 07/02/2025; ICG 14/08/2024). Between 3 February and 14 March 2025, at least three IS-KP attacks were identified (CIR 03/02/2025, 25/02/2025, and 14/03/2025). The ITA's brutal but effective crackdowns on IS-KP have led many in the West to consider the Taliban a bulwark against the group (ICG 14/08/2024). That said, one interviewee highlighted that if the ITA is required to spend money to stabilise the afghani or on humanitarian and development projects, that is money not being spent on anti-IS-KP operations. This could constrain the ITA's ability to conduct counterinsurgency operations (KII 05/02/2025).

The funding freeze and any subsequent cuts may also increase the risk of armed group recruitment for boys and young men, including into armed extremist organisations. Unemployment and economic precarity have previously played a role in recruitment and may continue to do so (Sharifi 06/02/2024). IS-KP has also previously capitalised off youth dissatisfaction and unemployment, aggravated by limited access to education (EUAA 08/2022; Saim and El-Muhammady 13/09/2024; Mohammad 06/2021; CIR 30/08/2023). That said, the extent to which recruitment is increasing remains unknown.

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