

# AFGHANISTAN:

## Post-earthquake protection risks



Thematic Report  
09 November 2025

### OVERVIEW

On the evening of 31 August 2025, a magnitude-6 earthquake struck eastern Afghanistan, with the worst impacts in Kunar and Nangarhar provinces. Throughout September, magnitude-4.0–5.6 aftershocks compounded the damage and casualties (OCHA 09/10/2025; UN Women 15/09/2025). A 1–15 September Multi-Sector Rapid Assessment, covering 134 of the 411 most affected villages, identified nearly 2,000 deaths (52% women and girls), over 3,600 people injured (54% women and girls), at least 8,500 homes (belonging to around 56,000 people) damaged or destroyed, and 502,000 people affected (UNICEF 28/09/2025, 21/09/2025 and 03/11/2025). The Interim Taliban Authority (ITA) estimates a higher death toll at 2,200 (IFRC 13/10/2025).

**The earthquake has aggravated existing protection risks and created new ones in eastern Afghanistan.** These include gender-based violence (GBV), child protection risks, discrimination and denial of access to services and assistance, the risk of triggering mines and explosive ordnance (EO), and displacement and forced eviction. The earthquake and associated displacement have also aggravated existing, harmful gender norms that limit women's mobility, decision-making, and access to resources, heightening protection risks for women and girls, particularly women heads of households, single or widowed women, and separated girls.

### ABOUT THIS REPORT

#### Aim

This report analyses the earthquake's impact on the protection situation in Kunar and Nangarhar provinces, identifying key risks and threats to monitor and address following the response's emergency phase. It follows the ACAPS Afghanistan Analysis Hub's precrisis profiles of earthquake-affected Kunar and Nangarhar provinces, which provide broader information on the earthquake's humanitarian impact and the provinces' pre-existing needs (ACAPS 07/09/2025 and 08/09/2025).

This analysis was made possible with the support and coordination of the Afghanistan Protection Cluster and its members.

#### Methodology

This report is based on a review of secondary data, the Protection Cluster's Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA), and eight key information interviews with 12 experts and humanitarian responders working on protection, GBV, child protection, and mine action. It also draws on a September 2025 IOM assessment of 659 households in 42 earthquake-affected locations in Chawkay, Dara-e-Nur, Khas Kunar, Kuz Kunar, and Nurgal districts (IOM 22/10/2025).

#### Limitations

Displacement patterns, needs, and the humanitarian response in earthquake-affected communities are evolving rapidly. This analysis may not capture the most up-to-date facts and figures, instead emphasising general trends and risks.

**There are notable information gaps** on several protection risks, including GBV, access to civil documentation, and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) needs, which are noted in relevant sections throughout the report. While affected returnees, people with disabilities and older people face specific protection risks, there is limited information available on their post-earthquake protection needs. There is also limited information on the situation of earthquake-affected people living in the most remote, affected villages, outside of collective displacement sites.

## BACKGROUND: THE EARTHQUAKE'S HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

**Earthquake-displaced people are sheltering in collective displacement sites and remote villages with limited infrastructure, access to assistance, and protection from winter weather.** By 1 November, humanitarian responders had assessed eight collective sites across Kunar province where over 55,000 earthquake-displaced people (sex and age disaggregation not available) were sheltering: Alaqsa, Dimangakal, Mazar Dara/Satarwal, Patan, and Zeri Baba in Nurgal district; Khas Kunar Usmani in Khas Kunar district; and Undarlachak and Chawkay Zoor Kely in Chawkay district (Written communication 01/11/2025; OCHA 09/10/2025; UNICEF 28/09/2025). Earthquake-affected people are also sheltering in the open or with friends and relatives in nearby villages or within their own villages, particularly in Dara-e-Nur district, Nangarhar province (IOM 22/10/2025; Protection Cluster accessed 24/10/2025). An unknown number of families have moved to district capitals, particularly Asadabad and Nangarhar, where most were staying with relatives by mid-October (KII 09/10/2025 a).

**The earthquake damaged and destroyed 8,500 homes, along with healthcare facilities, schools, roads, WASH facilities, and other critical infrastructure.** It destroyed an estimated 130 water points, along with many latrines, forcing 84% of affected communities to practise open defecation (UNICEF 11/10/2025). Access to WASH is particularly constrained for earthquake-affected women, girls, and people with disabilities, discussed further in the following section. Lack of adequate access to WASH facilities in displacement sites and affected villages has increased reported cases of acute watery diarrhoea, respiratory infections, dehydration, and skin rashes. The earthquake also damaged 21 health facilities, one of which was still nonfunctional by 6 October. The remaining 67 fully functional facilities faced staff shortages and weak referral pathways, affecting responders' ability to provide timely and adequate care (WHO 06/10/2025). By 8 October, road and infrastructure repair had begun but was proceeding slowly, leaving many communities isolated from functioning services and assistance (OCHA 09/10/2025).

**The earthquake had severe livelihood impacts** on a community primarily engaged in livestock rearing and farming, killing over 7,000 livestock and destroying over 365 hectares of farmland, 1,900 orchard trees, and 90% of Kunar province's grain stores (UNICEF 28/09/2025). Affected communities already had few resources available to cope with shocks; market monitoring data indicates that the minimum expenditure basket (MEB) in Kunar province cost 2.6–2.8 times more than the province's average household income in June – one of the worst ratios in Afghanistan (REACH 08/10/2025). The MEB cost will likely increase further given the earthquake's impacts on food production and livelihoods, contributing to increased food insecurity. If no immediate measures are undertaken to address livelihood needs, earthquake-affected people will likely resort to coping mechanisms with potentially harmful consequences.

**The earthquake occurred shortly before winter, with average minimum temperatures dropping below 5° C and as low as –20° C in Kunar's and Nangarhar's mountainous villages between November–February.** Precipitation also increases starting in November, peaking from January–March (WB accessed 21/10/2025; IR 07/10/2025). Earthquake-affected families residing in the open, in damaged buildings, or in tents lack adequate shelter and the cold-weather NFIs required to keep warm and dry in these conditions (IOM 15/10/2025). This may increase health risks from respiratory infections and coping strategies with harmful consequences, such as burning plastic and rubbish to keep warm (FEWS NET 06/10/2025; OCHA 19/12/2024). Winter also coincides with the lean season, which is likely to further aggravate food security in earthquake-affected communities where people have already lost their livelihoods and subsistence farms (FEWS NET 06/10/2025). Population groups already experiencing heightened needs, including women, children, older people, and people with disabilities, will likely experience more difficulty accessing sufficient assistance to meet all their winter needs. The isolation and limited access to resources, including protection services, that come with harsh winters can expose women and children to heightened risks of GBV and child labour (OCHA 19/12/2024).

## POST-EARTHQUAKE PROTECTION RISKS

The six risks discussed below were selected based on a review of post-earthquake assessment data, secondary data on precrisis vulnerabilities, and input from experts and humanitarian responders working in earthquake-affected communities. A Protection Cluster predictive analysis identified GBV and the presence of mines and other EO as two of the protection risks that earthquake-affected people were most likely to face, assuming that areas experiencing the highest severity for those risks pre-earthquake would experience heavy protection-related earthquake impacts (Protection Cluster 04/09/2025). Trauma and mental distress were the most referenced protection risks identified during the Protection Cluster's Protection RNA (Protection Cluster accessed 24/10/2025). Secondary data and interviewees consistently identified several child protection risks as priorities post-earthquake, along with discrimination and denial of access to services and assistance affecting women, girls, and people with disabilities in particular.

## Risk 1: Gender-based violence

**Conditions in earthquake-affected communities increase the risk of GBV, including intimate partner violence, which was already common before the earthquake** (Expert interview 09/10/2025 b). Because of restrictive gender norms and ITA decrees and directives restricting women's freedom of movement, women and girls in identified displacement sites spend most of their time inside tents. Many of these single-family tents house extended families, leading to overcrowding and a lack of privacy, both of which aggravate protection risks for women and girls. Overcrowding is reported to be particularly severe in Khas Kunar Usmani displacement site, with up to eight people per tent (KII 13/10/2025, KII 15/10/2025; UN Women 15/09/2025, KII 12/09/2025).

The combination of increased stressors and women's and girls' confinement to overcrowded tents may contribute to increasing intimate partner and family violence risks (UN Women 11/09/2025). In a September 2025 IOM assessment, 23% (32) of 138 female respondents reported violence or abuse within their household following the earthquake, while in the Protection Cluster's RNA, 15% of respondents reported that women avoid their homes because they feel unsafe there (APC accessed 23/10/2025; IOM 22/10/2025). Actual rates of violence and fear are likely higher, as stigma and women's limited participation in assessments contribute to underreporting.

**Women and girls also face heightened GBV risks outside tents and in public places** (UN Women 12/09/2025). In the Protection Cluster's RNA, 46% of respondents reported that women avoid certain areas because they feel unsafe, including 24% who reported that women avoid latrines and bathing facilities, 15% who reported that women avoid water points, and 12% who reported that women avoid markets (Protection Cluster accessed 23/10/2025). By 1 November, only one displacement site – Patan camp – had lighting systems in communal areas, including WASH facilities, and one expert noted that some displacement sites still lacked gender-segregated WASH facilities (KII 09/10/2025 b; Written communication received 01/11/2025). The remaining sites' tents had only solar lighting systems, which struggle to produce sufficient electricity on cloudy days (KII 12/10/2025, KII 09/10/2025 b, KII 15/10/2025; Written communication received 01/11/2025). Access to WASH facilities, shelter, and electricity are particularly limited or non-existent for earthquake-affected women and girls living outside collective displacement sites, in remote villages (IOM 22/10/2025). This increases GBV risks for women and girls who do not have tents or who leave their tents at night, including to access WASH facilities, particularly as daylight hours decrease with the onset of winter (KII 13/10/2025).

There remains insufficient information regarding types of GBV outside the home, although harassment can be assumed to increase in overcrowded conditions and incidents of harassment and GBV are likely underreported. There also remains insufficient information about coping strategies women and girls are employing to mitigate GBV exposure.

Although there are women-friendly areas available in several displacement sites, they lack sufficient space and resources. Two interviewees noted no reports of men preventing women family members from attending these spaces, although this dynamic may not be reported to or observed by humanitarian responders (KII 15/10/2025). Even prior to the earthquake, there were insufficient GBV services in the affected provinces, partly because of bans on female NGO workers and the Mahram requirement, making it difficult for mobile GBV teams to travel to more remote villages in the east (KII 15/10/2025, KII 09/10/2025 b). This means earthquake-affected women who have previously survived GBV may have particularly high support needs.

## Risk 2: Discrimination, denial of services, and access to humanitarian assistance

**Insufficient funding and constrained humanitarian access, particularly to more remote, earthquake-affected villages, continue to limit access to services and assistance.**

Earthquake-affected families outside identified displacement sites, particularly those in remote villages in northern Nurgal and Chawkey districts, generally have less access to services and humanitarian assistance, which are more available in displacement sites (KII 09/10/2025 b; IOM 22/10/2025; HO 10/2025). That said, IOM's September 2025 assessment found that access to latrines, handwashing facilities, and showers remains below 55% even in major displacement sites and surrounding villages (IOM 22/10/2025). Urban centres provide better access to services such as healthcare than the more remote, earthquake-affected areas, although cost may pose a barrier to using these services (KII 09/10/2025 b).

**Women and girls, particularly women heads of households, have faced especially high barriers to accessing services and humanitarian assistance following the earthquake** (KII 15/10/2025). Restrictive gender norms and movement restrictions on women and girls mean that men and boys typically collect humanitarian assistance and distribute it to family members, potentially creating barriers to access for women-headed households (KII 15/10/2025). By mid-September, assessments had identified 463 women-headed households in affected communities, most of which (280) were in Nurgal district, Kunar province (UN Women 15/09/2025). In men-headed households, women and girls may be deprioritised for assistance, particularly single women and separated girls living in extended families (KII 09/10/2025 b, KII 09/10/2025 a, KII 15/10/2025; UN Women 05/12/2023). According to one interviewee, even before the earthquake, some families in the east denied scarce resources – including clothes, food, and healthcare – to girls in favour of their male siblings, because of both sociocultural preferences for male children and ITA restrictions on girls' access to services (KII 09/10/2025 a).

**An ongoing lack of female humanitarian and healthcare workers also limits women's and girls' access to assistance and services.** While discrimination against women humanitarian responders was reportedly minimal during search and rescue operations, there were few women responders available because of the pre-existing ban on women NGO workers and other restrictions, such as the Mahram requirement (HO 10/2025). In the Protection Cluster RNA, nearly 40% of respondents reported that women face barriers to accessing assistance because there are no female staff available (Protection Cluster accessed 12/10/2025). In addition, an estimated 90% of healthcare professionals available immediately after the earthquake were men (UN Women 12/09/2025). By mid-October, although the number of women healthcare personnel had increased since the earthquake, there remained gaps in the availability of women specialists and maternal healthcare providers, with some women being referred to male specialists (KII 15/10/2025; UN Women 15/09/2025; WHO 06/10/2025). There were also insufficient numbers of women physiotherapists to treat women with disabilities and women injured by the earthquake (KII 22/10/2025). Some women and/or their families are unwilling to receive treatment from male healthcare professionals, posing an access barrier to healthcare (KII 22/10/2025; UN Women 12/09/2025).

**Many women also lack access to information on humanitarian assistance,** as most do not own phones (UN Women 15/09/2025). Women-headed households are at a particularly high risk of exclusion from information; in the 2025 Whole of Afghanistan Assessment, only 34% of assessed women-headed households in eastern provinces reported knowing how to access humanitarian aid. This is aggravated by restrictive gender norms and movement restrictions, which keep women inside their shelters and limit their interaction with others who may share information with them (UN Women 12/09/2025). Knowledge of how to access assistance is likely lower among women who only recently became household heads after losing their husband or male relatives to the earthquake.

**People with disabilities face significant barriers to accessing services and assistance after the earthquake,** particularly those still living in remote, earthquake-affected villages. Many have lost assistive devices, preventing them from travelling to distribution sites, healthcare facilities, WASH facilities, and other places to access assistance and services. Movement restrictions for women and girls compound the isolation of women and girls with disabilities (KII 22/10/2025; HO 10/2025). Much of the post-earthquake literature remains disability-blind, and there is insufficient information about older people's specific needs and the barriers they face, likely affecting responders' capacities to design an inclusive response.

**Lack of civil documentation in Kunar and Nangarhar further undermines access to essential services and assistance, including healthcare and education.** Many families have lost their identity documents in damaged or destroyed homes, with women and children more affected, as they are less likely than men to have had their documents in

their possession when the earthquake struck (KII 13/10/2025, KII 09/10/2025 b, KII 07/10/2025). In the Protection Cluster RNA, missing documents were reported by 59% of assessed households in Chawkay, 56% in Khas Kunar, 45% in Kuz Kunar, and 63% in Nurgal districts, Kunar province, and 52% in Dara-e-Nur district, Nangarhar province (Unpublished dataset received 06/11/2025). A lack of identity documents has hampered efforts to verify which households had been affected by the earthquake (HO 10/2025). Access to documentation in Kunar and Nangarhar was already constrained before the earthquake (REACH 27/04/2025; Protection Cluster 07/02/2025). Women and girls were less likely to possess documentation, as families frequently decide that it is unnecessary and too costly to obtain, both because of sociocultural norms and ITA restrictions on women's life outside the home and girls' school attendance (KII 07/10/2025). Returnees also have limited access to documentation (Protection Cluster 07/02/2025; KII 09/10/2025 a; ADSP/Samuel Hall 05/10/2024).

### Risk 3: Child protection

**According to an IOM-led Multi-Sector Rapid Assessment, children account for over 50% (263,000) of earthquake-affected people** (UNICEF 28/09/2025 and 21/09/2025; KII 13/10/2025). By the beginning of November, this included 16 unaccompanied and separated children and more than 271 children orphaned by the earthquake, most in the care of relatives by the end of September (UNICEF 12/09/2025, 28/09/2025 and 03/11/2025; STC 03/10/2025; KII 13/10/2025).

**By October, there were reports of earthquake-displaced children, particularly boys, engaging in child labour in dangerous or hazardous conditions,** which was already common in both Kunar and Nangarhar even before the earthquake. Boys displaced to district capitals such as Asadabad, Chawkay, Jalalabad, and Khas Kunar have been observed selling wares or begging on the street, with some reports of girls begging as well (KII 09/10/2025 a; KII 09/10/2025 b). Boys in displacement sites have been observed collecting and selling firewood or collecting and redistributing heavy humanitarian assistance items, including on behalf of people outside their family (KII 09/10/2025 a; KII 07/10/2025; KII 08/10/2025).

Particularly in households where adult male relatives were killed or injured, **children may be more likely to work to support their families in the coming months,** as earthquake damage to livelihoods and schools has left families without income and children (girls below sixth grade and all boys) without the protective element that access to education provides. Previous protection assessments in eastern provinces have found that children engaging in child labour, including collecting and selling leaves in the forest or rubbish on the streets, face a higher risk of violence, including sexual abuse (ADSP/Samuel Hall 05/10/2024). Collecting firewood and foraging in mountainous areas also increases children's exposure to mines and EO (KII 23/10/2025).

**There have been reports of forced early marriage since the earthquake, particularly of girls who lost one or both parents in the earthquake** (KII 07/10/2025). Two interviewees reported that, to deal with overcrowding in displacement sites, some families have arranged forced marriages of underage girls to obtain additional tents because newly married couples receive a new tent (KII 15/10/2025). Cases of forced early marriage are likely underreported, and the practice was already common before the earthquake, affecting girls as young as 13 (KII 15/10/2025, KII 09/10/2025 a, KII 09/10/2025 b, KII 08/10/2025). In a February–March 2025 assessment, 38% of assessed communities in Nurgal district, where three large displacement sites are located, and 28% in Watapur reported the forced marriage of girls or boys under the age of 17 in their communities (REACH 27/04/2025).

**Physical violence and the emotional maltreatment of children**, both of which were commonly used under the guise of discipline before the earthquake, may have increased because of heightened stress. Restrictive gender norms and movement restrictions mean that girls are less able to escape violence at home. Separated children in the care of relatives or community members are at a particularly high risk of experiencing physical violence and emotional maltreatment, as stress, unfamiliarity, and a lack of resources fuel tension within extended households (KII 09/10/2025 a). Children’s safety is also at risk outside their shelters; in the Protection Cluster’s RNA of earthquake-affected communities, 44% of respondents reported that children avoid certain areas because they feel unsafe, with 22% reporting that children avoid latrines and bathing facilities and 12% reporting that children avoid markets (Protection Cluster accessed 23/10/2025).

By mid-October 2025, 32 child-friendly spaces and 200 temporary learning spaces had been established in five displacement sites, although barriers to attendance for some children – especially girls – remain despite efforts to hold separate sessions for boys and girls. This is because of gender norms limiting girls’ and boys’ interactions and girls’ engagement in social activities outside the home, as well as limited facilities, especially in Patan camp. That said, UNICEF reports that some girls are able to attend school for the first time in the temporary learning spaces (KII 09/10/2025 a; KII 15/10/2025; UNICEF 11/10/2025; KII 09/10/2025 b).

#### **Risk 4: Mental health and psychosocial distress**

**Trauma and mental distress were the most frequently cited protection risks in the Protection Cluster’s RNA** (Protection Cluster accessed 12/10/2025). In a post-earthquake study based on key informant interviews, over 20 local residents and representatives mentioned widespread psychological shock and anxiety in earthquake-affected communities (HO 10/2025). This includes among children, who have displayed a range of symptoms of distress, including fear, distraction, frequent crying, unwillingness to play or socialise, and aggression (KII 09/10/2025 a).

**Women may also experience heightened stress from increased caring responsibilities**, with extended families residing in single tents or in the open, insufficient supplies and space for cleaning and cooking, and a lack of access to social spaces (UN Women 12/09/2025). Following the earthquake, women lack access to places where, before the earthquake, it was possible to socialise without men, such as secluded areas of rivers and streams where they would commonly gather to wash clothes (KII 13/10/2025). Many women and girls in eastern communities were involved in caring for livestock and farming prior to the earthquake and will likely also suffer from the loss of purpose and socialisation these livelihood activities provided (KII 15/10/2025; UN Women 12/09/2025). By mid-October, there were limited bathing facilities and insufficient dignity kits available for earthquake-displaced women, which may compound feelings of stress and shame among women and girls (KII 13/10/2025; KII 09/10/2025 b).

**Men are also experiencing heightened stress** because of the loss of livelihoods and their limited ability to provide for their families following the earthquake. This can result in increased violence against female household members (as discussed above) (KII 10/09/2025 b).

By the beginning of October, there **remained significant gaps in MHPSS service** provision, particularly when it comes to longer-term support (HO 10/2025; WHO 06/10/2025).

#### **Risk 5: Presence of mines and other explosive ordnance**

**There remains a high risk of exposure to mines and EO in earthquake-affected areas in Kunar and Nangarhar**, both of which were among the provinces with the highest reported casualties from mines and EO in 2024 (OCHA 19/12/2024 a; KII 23/10/2025). Contamination is particularly high in Mazar Dari and Wadir, Nurgal district, primarily in remote, earthquake-affected villages – not in the collective displacement sites themselves, which have been cleared (KII 23/10/2025). In the Protection Cluster’s RNA, over 70% of respondents reported knowledge of previous mine and EO casualties, while only 33% had knowledge of relevant reporting channels (Protection Cluster accessed 12/10/2025).

**Children in remote villages are at particularly high risk of mine accidents**, along with women, because of their lack of mine awareness and because they are more likely to work and, in the case of children, play in contaminated mountainous areas. Earthquake-affected children who engage in child labour in dangerous or hazardous conditions, including by collecting scrap metal, may face increased risks of mine accidents in coming months (KII 15/10/2025 b; OCHA 19/12/2024).

Despite heavy contamination and high needs for mine action, **the number of mine action teams declined** by one-third between July 2024 and July 2025, from 282 to 188, because of funding gaps (UNSC 05/09/2025; WVI 14/07/2025).

## Risk 6: Forced eviction

In IOM's September 2025 assessment, 78% of respondents displaced to another village and 74% of those displaced within their own village reported their intention to remain in their current displacement site through winter, with very few planning to return to their original location. 66% of these displaced households cited financial constraints and 29% cited service availability as a reason to remain in their current location. Women respondents were more likely than men to cite cost and a lack of information on how or where to relocate as barriers to moving (IOM 22/10/2025). Some displaced households from the most remote villages affected by the earthquake have expressed reluctance to return in the longer term because of the lack of services and resources available in these villages before the earthquake and the loss of their livelihoods following the earthquake (KII 13/10/2025, KII 15/10/2025).

**Households that remain in collective displacement sites or on land in other villages or their own village may risk forced eviction by landowners or the ITA** (KII 07/10/2025, KII 13/10/2025). One expert noted that earthquake-affected households who do not want to return to their communities of origin may be forced to move again (KII 13/10/2025). Households who decide to rent homes in urban centres may also risk forced eviction because of limited livelihood opportunities and the inability to pay rent. In 2024, Nangarhar province saw high rates of forced eviction, largely attributed to poverty and unemployment leading to nonpayment of rent (ADSP/Samuel Hall 05/10/2024).

### Returns from Pakistan

While recent returnees from Pakistan have settled more in the urban areas of Nangarhar and Kunar than in the rural areas most affected by the earthquake, one source estimates that 20-30% of those affected by the earthquake were returnees. It is unclear whether this estimate refers to recent returnees (since September 2023) (KII 09/10/2025 b; IOM accessed 03/10/2025; HO 10/2025). Earthquake-affected returnees will likely face heightened needs in coming months, as many returnees have little or no assets, savings, or access to employment, services, and community support. All returnees may face increasing competition for resources with host communities and IDPs, including those recently displaced by the earthquake (UN Women 05/12/2023; IOM 11/09/2025; UNHCR 28/08/2025). Rural-to-urban movement as a result of the earthquake will increase the strain on resources, services, and the humanitarian response in the face of a continuing returnee influx; 220,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan in September 2025 alone, with Kunar and Nangarhar hosting one quarter of all returnees (UNHCR 16/10/2025). Recent conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan may increase the rate of returns if Afghans in Pakistan are subject to increased arrests, detention, harassment, other protection risks (ECHO 16/10/2025 and 14/10/2025).