

AFGHANISTAN

Localised vulnerability analysis: Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka districts, Baghlan province



Thematic report
08 March 2026

“Today, by the grace of God, there is no war in our country, but other problems have replaced it, such as poverty, unemployment, returnees, and migration, as well as homelessness because of floods, and people are in need of health centres and other services.” (FGD 15/12/2025)

OVERVIEW

Households in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka have faced steadily increasing challenges meeting basic needs in recent years, particularly the last 12 months, driven by recurrent and severe flooding, prolonged drought, and a large influx of returnees from abroad (EI 01/02/2026; EI 22/10/2026; EI 26/01/2026 a; EI 26/01/2026 b; EI 02/02/2026; EI 03/02/2026 b). Such returnees quintupled in 2025 alone across Baghlan province, from around 42,100 to 214,200, with Baghlan-e-Jadid hosting the ninth-highest number (49,860) across Afghanistan’s districts (IOM 24/02/2026 b). The expanding population significantly increases pressure on limited housing stock, overstretched basic services, and livelihood opportunities in these highly agricultural districts, which are also struggling to recover from prolonged drought and major flooding in 2024 and 2025, alongside the November 2025 earthquake.

In this increasingly pressured context, households in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka districts face significant unmet needs, with electricity, water, healthcare, and shelter needs cited as major challenges for all community members. Returnees were identified as experiencing particularly severe food and shelter needs, along with highly limited access to basic services. To cope with these unmet needs, households are increasingly employing coping strategies with potentially harmful consequences, which are linked with varied protection risks. While both men and women have adopted positive coping strategies with some success, mainly through livelihood diversification, this study identified significant reliance on coping strategies with potentially harmful consequences in the short, medium, and longer term.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is part of a series on localised vulnerability in Afghanistan, made possible with the support and coordination of the Afghanistan Protection Cluster and its members. The purpose of a localised approach is to identify location-specific causes and manifestations of vulnerability to unmet needs and better understand how people experience and mitigate them.

The series on localised vulnerability also includes districts in Herat, Samangan, and Nangarhar (forthcoming) provinces.

Aim

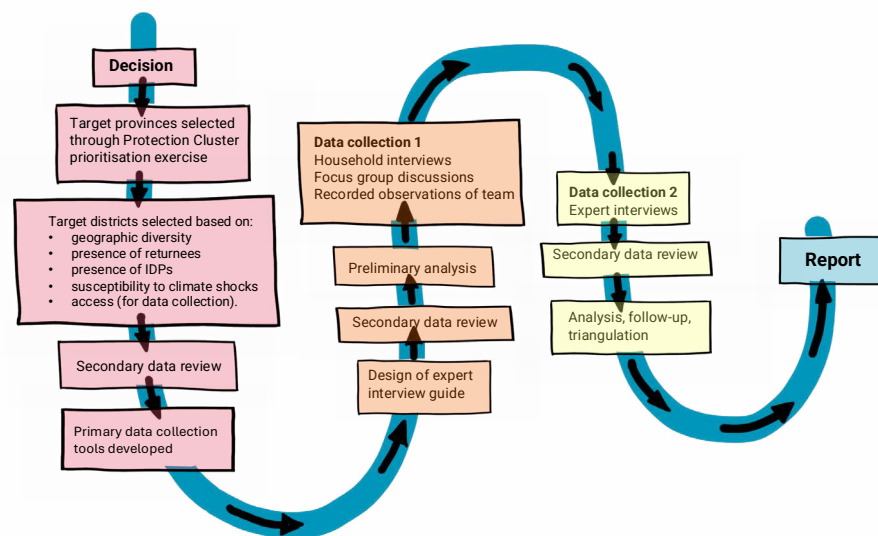
This report aims to support operational responders to identify programming priorities and potential entry points for improving the design and targeting of humanitarian activities by doing the following:

- providing insight into possible drivers of multi-dimensional vulnerability
- revealing context-specific perceptions of what makes certain people more vulnerable to unmet basic needs
- enhancing understanding of the different coping strategies that communities and households use to mitigate vulnerability.

Methodology and limitations

Data for this study was collected in the neighbouring Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka districts in Baghlan province, northeastern Afghanistan. The findings presented here are based on primary data collected by War Child Canada and ACAPS. Secondary data was used to inform the selection of localised vulnerability analysis locations, design the data collection tools, and triangulate and substantiate findings from interviews.

Figure 1. Research process



The themes and issues discussed are those that emerged from the primary data. Provinces were selected through a prioritisation exercise conducted with the Afghanistan Protection Cluster to identify which locations faced the highest protection needs and risks. ACAPS selected the districts within these provinces that presented features with the potential to drive vulnerability, namely: a presence of returnees and IDPs; heightened exposure to climate shocks; geographical diversity from one another; and where Protection Cluster partners had access to collect primary data.

Data collectors purposely selected households that met the general criteria likely to put them at risk of being unable to meet needs. The breakdown of households is shown below in Table 1.

Households were interviewed using a questionnaire containing a mix of open and closed questions. Preliminary analysis of the responses identified follow-up topics for ACAPS to explore in in-depth interviews with Afghan context experts, which added contextual details and explanations.

Table 1. Primary data summary

NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS INTERVIEWED	30
Number of women-headed households	9
Number of men-headed households	21
NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS WITH AFGHAN CONTEXT EXPERTS	8
Number of women experts*	1
Number of men experts	7
NUMBER OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGDS)	5 (WITH 10 PARTICIPANTS EACH)
FGD composition: 3 with women participants, 2 with men; including a mix of IDPs, returnees, older people, both employed and unemployed youth, and people with disabilities	

* It was challenging to find women context experts willing to be interviewed, partly because of the Interim Taliban Authority (ITA) restrictions on women's employment and engagement in public life.

Information from expert interviews, open-ended questions with households, field team observations, and FGDS are referenced in the text as shown in the table below.

Table 2. Primary data summary

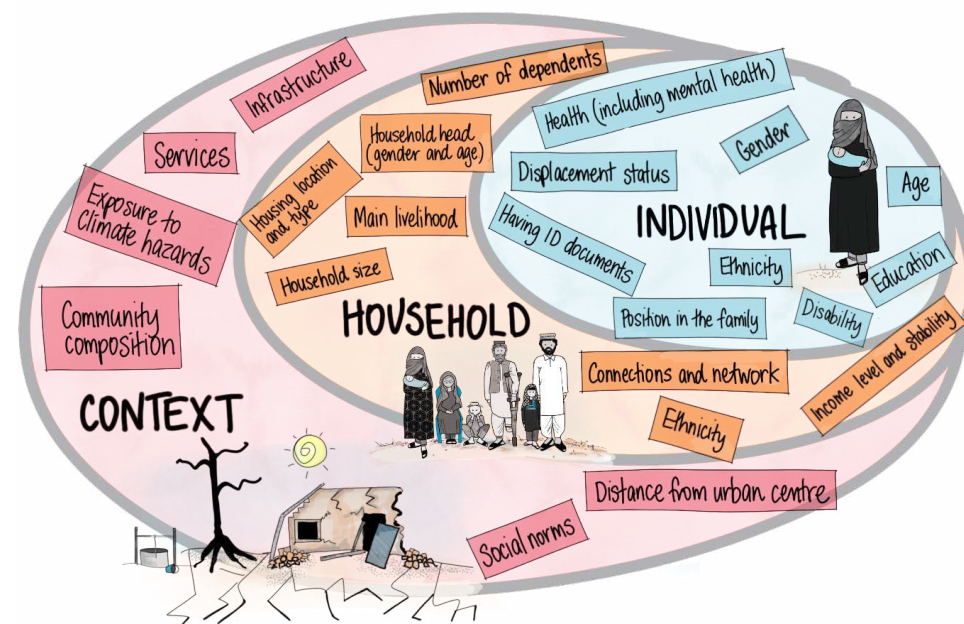
Expert interviews	EI dd/mm/yyyy
Household interviews	HH dd/mm/yyyy
Field team observations	FO dd/mm/yyyy
Focus group discussions	FGD dd/mm/yyyy

This is a qualitative study, and while all effort has been made to select experts carefully and acknowledge and consider potential biases and shortcomings in the analysis, the findings should be considered indicative of the lived experiences of the people in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka districts. The findings may be indicative for understanding other similar locations but are not generalisable.

Table 3. Key concepts

TERM	DEFINITION
Basic needs	The essential goods, utilities, services, or resources required to ensure survival and minimum living standards without resorting to potentially harmful coping strategies or compromising health, dignity, and safety (Okular Analytics/STC 03/09/2018).
Coping strategies	The different ways individuals, households, and communities meet their basic needs, especially in the face of shocks or times of crisis. Examples of coping strategies, including those with potentially harmful consequences, identified in previous ACAPS research in Afghanistan include internal mobility, sending children to work, and relying on humanitarian assistance (ACAPS 03/06/2024 and 16/06/2023).
Multidimensional vulnerability	The set of conditions determined by intersecting context-level, household, and individual factors that increase susceptibility to unmet basic needs, including protection needs.
Factors influencing vulnerability	<p>Context-level factors include social cohesion or fragmentation; discriminatory norms and practices; the strength or erosion of informal safety nets, social networks, and solidarity mechanisms; the presence of services and infrastructure; the displacement composition of the community; and exposure to climate and natural hazards.</p> <p>Household-level factors include the characteristics that influence the household's vulnerability to unmet needs, harm, or having its interests overlooked. These could include the gender and age of the household head, legal and displacement status, income sources within the household, and other characteristics, such as the number of dependents or health needs of members.</p> <p>Individual-level factors include the characteristics of an individual, such as gender, age, and disability, that influence the vulnerability of that individual (or others dependent on them) to unmet needs, harm, or having their interests overlooked.</p>

Figure 2. Factors influencing vulnerability



Source: ACAPS

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BACKGROUND: BAGHLAN-E-JADID AND BURKA DISTRICTS, BAGHLAN PROVINCE

Geography and demography

Baghlan province, in northeastern Afghanistan, is bordered by Bamyan, Kunduz, Panjshir, Parwan, Samangan, and Takhar provinces. Baghlan is divided into 15 districts. Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka are two neighbouring districts in the north of the province. By the end of 2025, Baghlan-e-Jadid's population was estimated at approximately 461,540 people divided across over 58,290 households (average of 7.9 people/household). Burka's population was estimated at approximately 201,140 people divided across 24,810 households (average of 8.1 people/household) (IOM accessed 26/02/2026). Baghlan's population is ethnically diverse, and includes Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Tatar, and Uzbeks (NPS accessed 27/02/2026).

Map 1. Location of Baghlan province and Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka districts



Source: ACAPS

Economy and livelihoods

Baghlan is an important rice-growing province and located within one of Afghanistan's most agriculturally productive regions. Most agriculture in this region is rainfed wheat, rice, and cotton; fruits and vegetables (e.g. grapes, melons, and nuts) are also grown at large scale. Keeping larger herds of livestock is also common (WB 31/10/2025).

IOM data collection at the end of 2025 found that 90% of assessed communities in Baghlan-e-Jadid and 100% of those in Burka were engaged in agriculture, primarily subsistence farming and livestock rearing, as compared to 93% across Baghlan and 92% nationwide (IOM accessed 26/02/2026).

Climate and natural hazards

With around 60% of the province consisting of mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain, and the remaining 40% classified as flat or semi-flat, Baghlan is vulnerable to floods, including flash flooding, and landslides (NPS accessed 27/02/2026; OCHA 19/12/2024). In Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka, this vulnerability is increased by the fact that nearly all the houses in both districts are traditional mud structures, increasing the risk of flood damage and destruction (IOM 20/03/2025; IOM accessed 03/03/2026).

Most of Baghlan's districts also face moderate, high, or very high drought risk. Burka is classified as facing very high drought risk and Baghlan-e-Jadid faces moderate drought risk (OCHA 30/12/2025; IWMI 13/12/2023). Baghlan is also located along Afghanistan's northeastern fault zone, heightening its exposure to earthquakes (IOM 24/02/2026 a).

CONTEXT-LEVEL SHOCKS AND STRESSES: BAGHLAN-E-JADID AND BURKA DISTRICTS

“The people of Baghlan, particularly those in rural areas, live in difficult conditions. They face unemployment, limited access to healthcare and education, and inadequate livelihoods. Agriculture in the province has been devastated by the [drought’s] impact on water [availability], the high number of returnees, and the scarcity of land and other economic resources. This has led to an increase in unemployment.” (EI 26/01/2026 a)

The perception of six of the eight context experts and 22 of the 30 households interviewed for this study was that living conditions **in both Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka districts had continued to deteriorate over the past year** (EI 01/02/2026; EI 22/10/2026; EI 26/01/2026 a; EI 26/01/2026 b; EI 02/02/2026, EI 03/02/2026 b). This deterioration has been driven by the varied shocks and chronic stresses described below, compounded by the impact of ITA decrees and directives across Afghanistan.

Frequent, severe flooding causes regular destruction and displacement in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka, compounded by continuing drought and the recent earthquake

Recurrent, severe flood events have displaced communities and damaged homes, infrastructure, and livelihoods in both Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka districts. A particularly severe flood event in Baghlan in May 2024 affected over 80,000 people across the province, killed over 400, displaced over 5,000, destroyed around 24,000 hectares of agricultural land and 12,000 homes, and killed around 14,000 livestock. Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka were among the districts worst affected (UNICEF 20/05/2024; GTS/UN Women 04/08/2025; STC 14/05/2024).

Floods continued to affect communities in Baghlan throughout 2025. IOM data indicates that Baghlan was among the provinces most affected by flood-related loss and damage, accounting for 2,105 (8%) of incidents reported nationwide, particularly incidents related to asset damage (including agricultural fields). **26–50% of communities reported flood-related loss and damage in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka in 2025** (IOM 24/02/2026 a).

Baghlan accounted for the second-highest rate of flood-related displacement nationwide in 2025, at 12% (IOM 24/02/2026 a). The overall number of IDPs (not only flood-related IDPs) quadrupled in Baghlan province between 2024–2025 alone, from around 15,340 to 60,920, indicating a significant strain on resources, services, and infrastructure (IOM 24/02/2026 b). Climate hazards also drove displacement out of the province. In 2025, Burka district accounted for the ninth-highest number (12,470) of climate-induced out-migrants of all 401 districts assessed by IOM in Afghanistan (IOM 24/02/2026 b). Recent ACAPS analysis of climate displacement found that community members who remain behind after climate and natural hazards often stay because displacement is unaffordable (ACAPS 14/08/2025). This indicates that non-displaced households in hazard-affected communities in Burka may have particularly low access to resources to cope with further shocks.

Baghlan is also among the northern provinces most affected by Afghanistan’s six years of hydrological and meteorological drought. **In 2025, 51–75% of communities in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka districts reported drought-related loss and damage** (IOM 24/02/2026 a; OCHA 30/12/2025 and 27/07/2025).

The November 2025 earthquake further drove vulnerabilities in Baghlan, compounding the impacts of recurrent flooding and prolonged drought. Although the earthquake’s epicentre was in neighbouring Samangan province, shaking in Baghlan injured 14 people (OCHA 10/11/2025; USGS 03/11/2025). This put Baghlan **among the five provinces with the highest rates of loss and damage from earthquakes**, at 9% (2,520) of incidents nationwide, in 2025, further compounding humanitarian needs in the province (IOM 24/02/2026 a). (EI 08/01/2026).

Climate IDPs, IDP returnees, and returnees from Iran and Pakistan have contributed to an expanded population, increasing demand for dwindling resources, particularly in Baghlan-e-Jadid

“Returnees have arrived from Pakistan and settled in Baghlan, their place of origin. They are in a vulnerable living situation as they do not have access to shelter, education, employment, or healthcare. A lack of skills [suited to the local labour market] and knowledge about Afghanistan makes it difficult for them to find daily work or long-term employment. Without educational documents, they are unable to access education. They also lack the financial means to pay for transport.” (EI 26/01/2026 a)

In 2025, **Baghlan-e-Jadid hosted the ninth-highest number of returnees from abroad (49,860) among 401 surveyed districts in Afghanistan.** The district also hosted particularly high numbers of IDP returnees, with Baghlan among the provinces hosting the highest proportion (8%) of IDP returnees nationwide (IOM 24/02/2026 a and 24/02/2026 b). The number of returnees from abroad quintupled in 2025 alone across Baghlan province, from around 42,100 to over 214,200 (IOM 24/02/2026 b). This indicates potentially severe levels of strain on available resources, employment, shelter, and assistance.

Experts interviewed for this study emphasised concerns about both returnees' ability to meet their basic needs and the impact of the growing population on scarce resources and services (EI 29/01/2026; EI 26/01/2026 a). FGD participants emphasised that **the local economy, services, and housing are unable to absorb the high numbers of people needing access to income, healthcare, and housing.** One FGD with host community members specifically attributed the majority of their challenges meeting basic needs to the returnee influx, as more people are competing over access to agricultural land, employment opportunities, housing, and basic services (FGD 15/12/2025; FGD 13/12/2025 c). While data collected for this study did not indicate significant hostility toward returnees among host communities, or tensions between these groups, such may be occurring.

"An increased population means that land is divided up, resulting in a very low income from agriculture." (EI 29/01/2026)

"The arrival of returnees led to a shortage of resources, causing the cost of goods to increase. It also caused rental costs to rise." (EI 26/01/2026 a)

Household interviews revealed that returnees are perceived as particularly vulnerable to challenges meeting their basic needs, second only to women-headed households. This perception is shared among returnee, IDP, and host community households, indicating that the heightened challenges faced by returnees are widely acknowledged. **Households specifically identified returnees as having highly constrained access to shelter, food, basic services, and documentation.**

VULNERABILITY TO UNMET NEEDS

Factors at the context, household, and individual levels intersect and aggravate each other to influence vulnerability to unmet needs in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka districts.

Vulnerability to unmet livelihood needs

Recurrent flooding and associated displacement have had long-term impacts on primarily agricultural livelihoods in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka. Restoring the productivity of flooded fields can take years, and many households lack the resources to replace livestock (GTS/UN Women 04/08/2025). FGD participants and interviewed experts emphasised that, following recent floods, communities in both districts have limited access to alternative income-generating activities outside of livestock and farming, which have been significantly affected (FGD 15/12/2025; FGD 13/12/2025 a; EI 22/01/2026; EI 26/02/2026 a). One context expert noted that the assistance provided to those affected by the 2024 floods was largely in the form of emergency shelter and food, not recovery and basic human needs assistance, leaving flood-affected communities unable to rebuild their homes and livelihoods (EI 22/01/2026). **Flood displacement has heightened vulnerability to unmet livelihood needs for some households,** many of whom live in informal settlements with minimal access to productive land (FO 13/12/2025).

"Floods, particularly in the Burka district, have severely affected people's livelihoods and access to basic needs." (EI 26/01/2026 a)

Gender has also affected vulnerability to unmet livelihood needs following flooding in Baghlan, where women are often responsible for the care of livestock, which many households have been unable to replace since the large-scale 2024 floods (GTS/UN Women 04/08/2025). As elsewhere in Afghanistan, women in Baghlan now have minimal access to alternative livelihood opportunities because of the ITA ban on women's employment in most sectors, with women teachers, government workers, and NGO staff losing their jobs in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka in recent years (EI 22/01/2026; EI 26/01/2026 b).

FGD participants in Burka also emphasised **the impact of drought occurring ‘almost every year’ on livelihoods, reducing agricultural yields, causing water shortages, and increasing poverty** (FGD 14/12/2025). Context experts noted the impact of drought on predominantly rainfed agriculture as a serious concern. This is consistent with reporting that farmers in Baghlan have severely reduced yields of wheat, rice, mung beans, and beans because of drought, leaving many barely able to meet their own household food needs and with nothing to sell (Rice News Today 10/09/2025).

“Previously, the higher income came from rainfed land, which is now being affected by severe drought” (EI 26/01/2026 a)

“Drought has caused a scarcity of income and agricultural products in many districts of Baghlan” (EI 22/01/2026)

These unmet livelihood needs contribute to most of the vulnerabilities to other unmet needs explored below, making it difficult or impossible for many households to afford food, other commodities, services, and transport.

Vulnerability to unmet electricity needs

All 30 interviewed households interviewed in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka reported having no access to electricity, with 27 citing the lack of electricity as the main challenge they faced. This is largely consistent with data from the IOM, which reported that only 39% of Baghlan settlements had access to electricity in early 2025, the lowest rates among northeastern provinces (IOM 20/03/2025). It is likely this 39% were more urban settlements in and around the provincial capital of Pul-e-Khumri. One interviewed expert noted that access is particularly poor in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka because they are primarily rural districts (EI 29/01/2026). FGD participants noted that a small proportion of households in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka could afford to pay for the setup of solar energy systems (FGD 13/12/2025 a; FGD 13/12/2025 b; FGD 14/12/2025; FGD 15/12/2025).

The most frequently cited impact of unmet electricity needs was access to water, discussed further below, which, without electricity, has to be carried or accessed using hand pumps (FGD 13/12/2025 a; FGD 13/12/2025 b; FGD 14/12/2025). While not noted in the data collected for this study, the lack of electricity and associated lack of water in much of Afghanistan also complicates healthcare provision, including response to health emergencies and child deliveries overnight, and medication and vaccine storage (UNFPA 08/09/2025 and 04/02/2025; UNICEF 16/01/2025).

Vulnerability to unmet WASH needs, especially drinking water

A lack of water for drinking and cooking was the second-most frequently cited challenge for households in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka, reported by 21 of 30 interviewed households. Households indicated that water for drinking and cooking was their main concern, rather than water for general use such as bathing and washing, which was only mentioned once. This emphasis on drinking water may be because consuming contaminated water has exposed communities in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka to waterborne diseases, including acute watery diarrhoea (EI 26/01/2026 a; WHO 13/05/2024; WHO accessed 03/03/2026). In 2025, WHO data indicated that Baghlan was among Afghanistan’s provinces experiencing higher rates of acute watery diarrhoea (WHO 13/12/2025).

The availability of clean water is a key driver of vulnerability, with experts observing that most people in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka rely on water from shared borewells or stored rainwater, which is often contaminated and, in the case of bore water, salty (EI 26/01/2026 a; EI 29/01/2026). This is consistent with REACH data from early 2025, which indicated that 100% of assessed communities in Burka reported that their water source was not clean, with poor taste, smell, and quality, while 76% of communities in Baghlan-e-Jadid reported insufficient water treatment and sanitation capacity (REACH 27/04/2025). Over-extraction and prolonged drought across Afghanistan are affecting groundwater quality and availability (Mercy Corps 08/10/2025).

“The water quality is poor. The main sources of water are borewells, stored rainwater, and rivers, and these sources are generally not clean.” (EI 26/01/2026 a)

Affordability is also closely tied to unmet water needs, with 22 of 30 households reporting that water is available but only nine stating they can afford it. An expert also linked unmet water needs to a lack of awareness about water storage and treatment methods as well as prolonged drought (EI 26/01/2026 a).

According to household interviews, **returnee households face slightly higher vulnerability to unmet water needs** than host community households, including less ability to afford water. This may reflect lower returnee access to income (Mercy Corps 08/10/2025).

Lack of access to sanitation is also a key challenge, with half of interviewed households reporting insufficient access to latrines or toilet facilities. Experts also reported this lack of access to latrines and toilets, as well as high observed rates of open defecation and a lack of handwashing and other hygiene facilities (EI 29/01/2026; EI 26/01/2026 a). **Women-headed households** reported this lack of access to latrines and toilet facilities as their second-highest need (after electricity), potentially because they are more likely to share a dwelling (see unmet shelter needs below), raising concerns for their privacy, dignity, and safety.

“There are no safe toilets or latrines. People dispose of human waste in the open, there are no handwashing facilities, and, traditionally, there is very little awareness about hygiene among the community.” (EI 26/01/2026 a)

Vulnerability to unmet health, mental health, and psychosocial support needs

None of the interviewed households were able to afford regular, recurrent medical expenses, including medications and treatment. 9 of 30 **could not afford any type of health services at all**, and the remainder could only afford primary care.

Access to medicine, medical supplies, and health facilities were the most frequently cited health needs, followed by maternal and child healthcare. Interviewed households reported these basic healthcare needs significantly more frequently than chronic illness or disability care and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) (reported by 2/30 and 1/30 households respectively). Instead of indicating that **MHPSS and disability care needs** are not significant in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka, this may suggest that households are unable to prioritise these needs when even the most basic health conditions remain unaddressed. FGD participants specifically raised the MHPSS needs of returnees, linked to high unemployment, and discussed the **mental health and psychosocial impact of earthquakes**, which contribute to significant, continued fear among affected communities (FGD 15/12/2025; FGD 14/12/2025).

FGD participants and context experts emphasised that **gaps in both the quality and availability of health facilities** – including insufficient supplies or staffing and the distance required to travel to the nearest health centre, particularly for anything more than primary care – increased household vulnerability to unmet health needs (FGD

15/12/2025; FGD 14/12/2025; FGD 13/12/2025 a; EI 26/01/2026 b; EI 26/01/2026 a; EI 29/01/2026). 13 of 30 interviewed households reported travelling long distances to access health facilities, with one expert observing that such distances led many people to only seek help for severe diseases, borrowing money from relatives to travel for treatment (EI 26/01/2026 a). Health facilities throughout Afghanistan, including mobile clinics, have been significantly affected by funding cuts, with 14 health facilities closing in Baghlan in 2025 following US funding cuts, affecting an estimated 101,400 people (Health Cluster 24/12/2025). In 2023, the ITA directed all mobile health clinics to become fixed and, although some do still operate, there are fewer services than previously (IASC 30/06/2023; STC 09/09/2025).

“The poor road conditions and the cost of fuel and transport mean that people who need emergency health support cannot get it. There were cases where pregnant women gave birth on the way or had to pay very high costs [to reach facilities].” (EI 29/01/2026)

Both FGD participants and interviewed experts mentioned the impact of gender on access to healthcare with regards to availability, distance, and movement restrictions. This is consistent with research on deteriorating access to healthcare for rural women in particular since the ITA takeover, as gendered restrictions on movement and women’s clothing, along with growing poverty and declining healthcare quality, compound the distance to health facilities for women in rural Afghanistan, including parts of Baghlan (AAN 18/03/2025). FGD participants emphasised that the Mahram requirement significantly limits women’s and girls’ ability to travel to access both health and mental health services, as households must account for the Mahram’s travel costs and time away from work (FGD 14/12/2025). 18 of 30 households reported that maternal and child healthcare was one of their main health needs. An interviewed expert emphasised the impact of distance on the availability of maternal care, with some pregnant women giving birth en route to health facilities (EI 29/01/2026).

Vulnerability to unmet shelter needs

28 of 30 interviewed households emphasised that **returnees from abroad are particularly likely to face unmet shelter needs**. As FGD participants explained, this is partly because there is insufficient housing for the number of people in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka, partly because of flood and earthquake damage and destruction, as elaborated below (FGD 15/12/2025; FGD 13/12/2025 c). Context experts

also emphasised that the number of returnees has affected the housing market, with increased demand resulting in high rents and overcrowding (EI 26/01/2026 a; EI 29/01/2026). Returnee households noted that they more likely to rent than host communities, consistent with national-level data on renting among returnees and associated exposure to insecure tenure (IOM 16/12/2025; UNHCR 30/12/2025).

FGD participants in Baghlan-e-Jadid reported that many families in their community host returnees from abroad (FGD 13/12/2025 b). Although a small subset of the sample, most of the returnee households interviewed (9 of 12) reported living in shared dwellings, as did nearly all (eight of nine) **women-headed households**. This may indicate **overcrowding and privacy concerns, particularly for women and girls**.

“They [returnees] live in a collective shelter with their relatives, extended family members, or people of the same ethnicity or tribe.” (EI 26/01/2026 b)

People affected by flooding and earthquakes also continue to live in damaged homes because they cannot afford repairs or to go elsewhere. In 2025, Baghlan accounted for the second-highest rates of shelter damage from flooding across Afghanistan (9% of damage nationwide) (IOM 24/02/2026 a). 14 of 30 interviewed households reported living in damaged or makeshift dwellings. An expert observed that many affected households could not afford to leave, instead staying in partially damaged homes and doing piecemeal repairs (EI 26/01/2026 a). FGD participants also reported cracked walls in their homes from the November 2025 earthquake (FGD 13/12/2025 c). Living in these partially damaged and makeshift structures increases households’ exposure to the elements and to potential safety and security risks.

Vulnerability to unmet education needs

Access to education was among households’ most reported challenges in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka. Only 24 of the 66 school-aged children in interviewed households are attending school.

While this assessment did not collect information on children according to gender, it is likely that girls accounted for a large number of the out-of-school children in assessed households because of ITA restrictions on girls’ education after sixth grade. Experts described the **severe consequences of girls’ impeded access to education**, including mental health and psychosocial problems and increased risk

of early marriage. Several experts observed that some households favour boys over girls when distributing food and other resources within the household, ensuring boys’ health and strength, as they have access to education and will ultimately be able to earn an income (EI 22/01/2026; EI 26/01/2026 b; EI 29/01/2026).

“Girls are now limited to houses, even though they are very interested in education, which causes mental health issues.” (EI 29/01/2026)

Availability of nearby schools constitutes a major driver of vulnerability to unmet education needs in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka, cited by 22 of 30 interviewed households, with one expert reporting children walking up to 5km to reach the nearest school (EI 26/01/2026 b). This is consistent with REACH data from late 2025, which reported that 100% of assessed communities in Baghlan cited school distance as a main barrier to children’s (grades 1–6) education (REACH accessed 01/03/2026). Damage to schools by recurrent flooding has likely aggravated this lack of availability, with the May 2024 floods alone damaging and destroying at least 23 public schools and 21 community-based education classes in Baghlan (OCHA 06/10/2024). Such destruction compounded the pre-existing issue of insufficient school buildings, as 209 schools in northern Baghlan lacked any buildings prior to the 2024 floods, resulting in 51,000 students attending classes in the open (PAN 13/03/2024).

Interviewed context experts noted that **lack of income also drives education vulnerabilities**, as many families are unable to pay the costs associated with education, including transport (EI 26/01/2026 a; EI 26/01/2026 b). As elsewhere in Afghanistan, returnee children may be at increased risk of missing out on schooling because many lack both the documentation required to enrol and the household income to meet education costs such as supplies and uniforms (EI 26/01/2026 b). **Children from households affected by recent climate and natural hazards** may also face documentation challenges; the UNHCR found that 13% of households affected by the 2024 floods had lost their legal documents (UNHCR 14/06/2024).

“Yes, the school is free, but the cost of transport, uniform, and stationery means that most children cannot afford to go, which prevents them from attending school.” (EI 26/01/2026 b)

Vulnerability to unmet food needs

Vulnerability to unmet food needs was identified as a particularly significant concern for returnees from abroad. 24 of 30 interviewed households (including host communities, returnees, and IDPs) identified returnees as those most likely to have unmet food needs. FGDs with both host communities and returnees echoed this concern, with many participants identifying food as the primary need for newly arrived returnees, alongside cash and health assistance (FGD 13/12/2025 b; FGD 13/12/2025 c; FGD 14/12/2025).

Experts linked returnees' low access to food to high rates of unemployment and little access to livelihood opportunities in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka (EI 29/01/2026; EI 26/01/2026 b). This is consistent with UNHCR post-return monitoring data from 2025, which found that nearly all returnee households attributed the need to miss meals primarily to their lack of income (UNHCR 30/12/2025).

The data collected for this study also identified unmet food needs among non-returnee households in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka, although these needs appeared to be less of a perceived priority, potentially because interviewed households and FGD participants compared their food needs to those of returnees. Expert and household interviews linked unmet food needs to a lack of water, both because of the impact on agricultural production and the constraints posed to cooking and drinking, which 21 households mentioned as their primary challenge (EI 26/01/2026 b). The most recent IPC projections indicate higher Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and above levels of food insecurity across Baghlan (45% from October 2025 to March 2026) than in urban Baghlan specifically (40%), suggesting high needs in rural areas reliant on agricultural production and experiencing unmet water needs, such as Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka (IPC 16/12/2025). REACH's Humanitarian Situation Monitoring dataset, from December 2025, found that unmet food needs may be increasingly widespread across many assessed communities of Baghlan, 60% of which reported most or almost all people having very insufficient food (REACH 17/02/2026). According to the data collected for this study, both the rapid influx of returnees and the impact of recurrent climate hazards on agricultural livelihoods likely contribute to this growing vulnerability.

"From the areas we surveyed, it is clear that people are struggling to access food, clean water, and shelter. These are the first priorities for survival." (EI 03/02/2026 b)

COPING STRATEGIES

Half of interviewed households in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka reported never receiving humanitarian assistance; the other half reported receiving it irregularly. One expert observed that assistance had decreased significantly over the past couple of years and is mostly available to people affected by recent flooding. There is a particular lack of longer-term livelihoods assistance (EI 29/01/2026).

Several experts noted that **access to humanitarian assistance depends on identity and how connected a household is to humanitarian organisations**. This means that women-headed households and returnees from abroad are at risk of exclusion because they are likely to lack both social networks and information, resulting from gendered restrictions on movement and engagement in public life or their recent arrival to Afghanistan respectively (EI 26/01/2026 a; EI 26/01/2026 b).

The coping strategies households use to meet needs can be loosely classified along the lines of reducing spending or increasing resources, although some strategies appear to achieve both aims. For example, removing children from school reduces household expenditure by eliminating education expenses from the household budget and can potentially increase earnings if children instead engage in labour; likewise, the early marriage of a daughter will both bring the household a dowry and reduce the number of its dependent members. These examples and other strategies, however, often have harmful consequences for affected people's safety, health, and wellbeing.

Several context experts shared examples of positive ways some households and individuals are attempting to increase their income to meet needs by diversifying the livelihoods they rely on, discussed below (EI 29/01/2026, EI 26/01/2026 a, EI 26/01/2026 b). That said, experts noted that households are increasingly exhausting all but the most short-term coping strategies and having to make difficult choices to address their most urgent needs with minimal resources (EI 26/01/2026 b; EI 29/01/2026).

"People cope differently. They select lower quality food and send their children out to work to earn money instead of sending them to school. For simple health issues, they skip attending the hospital or consultant, but for severe diseases, they travel to the centre of the province or other provinces, often borrowing money from relatives." (EI 26/01/2026 a)

Coping strategies to reduce or avoid spending

3 Households frequently reported using **food-based coping strategies**, mainly buying less expensive foods and acquiring food on credit. Households reported reducing their intake of red meat (all 30 households), fish (28/30), fruit (22/30), and cheese (15/30). Only a few households reported limiting portion sizes, prioritising children's food consumption over adults, or reducing the number of daily meals.

As detailed above, a WASH expert explained that households that **cannot afford to purchase safe drinking water use unsafe water for cooking and drinking**, such as untreated water from boreholes and surface water sources, exposing them to a range of waterborne diseases from contaminated water. This is especially concerning given the limited access to healthcare (EI 29/01/2026; EI 26/01/2026 a; WHO 13/05/2024; WHO accessed 03/03/2026).

Reduced spending on basic needs also includes **deferring the cost of healthcare**, with 17 of 30 interviewed households reporting that they delay medical care. The IOM Afghanistan Climate Vulnerability Assessment for March–April 2025 found that 26% of surveyed households in Baghlan had reduced health expenses (IOM 15/07/2025).

Coping strategies to increase resources

Community support

Interviewed experts did not report significant levels of community support for households experiencing unmet needs, which may reflect the extent of widespread needs affecting all community members. The main mode of support within communities is immediate, short-term assistance, such as food and temporary accommodation in response to shocks, and charity (zakat) during Ramadan (EI 22/01/2026; EI 29/01/2026; EI 26/01/2026 a). Several context experts noted that some communities in Baghlan do not receive any support from either the ITA or community groups (EI 29/01/2026; EI 26/01/2026 a; EI 26/01/2026 b).

“Yes, people have a sense of support during hard times, such as floods and landslides, but this kind of support is short-lived. More common examples include sharing houses in an emergency, sharing food, or providing non-food items rather than giving money. The main sources of such support are relatives, friends, and neighbours.” (EI 22/01/2026)

Diversifying livelihoods

Several context experts discussed ways households attempt to increase their access to resources through diversifying livelihoods. Examples (for men) include setting up a small business, such as street vending, or acquiring new skills to gain employment (EI 26/01/2026 a; EI 26/01/2026 b; EI 29/01/2026). Some men, particularly returnees and younger men, have taken up construction work, for which there is demand, or learning mechanical maintenance skills (EI 26/01/2026 b; EI 22/01/2026).

Context experts discussed examples of women starting home-based businesses, including poultry farming and producing dairy products, homemade pickles, or handicrafts for sale (EI 22/01/2026; EI 26/01/2026 b; EI 29/01/2026). One expert explained that these small women-led businesses can bolster household income quite effectively, but they can also be hampered by restrictive gender norms. For example, if there is a lack of community markets, the Mahram requirement means that extra costs must be incurred for women to travel to urban areas to obtain supplies for or sell their finished products (EI 22/01/2026).

Child labour

Several experts mentioned observing an uptick in child labour in the communities in which they work, in both Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka, over the last 12 months (EI 26/01/2026 b; EI 26/01/2026 a; EI 29/01/2026; EI 22/10/2026). This reflects national-level increases in child labour documented by humanitarian responders in 2025, with field reports between January–June 2025 indicating that one-third of Afghan children worked to support themselves or their households (Afghanistan Protection Cluster 31/10/2025). Data collected for this study indicates that in both districts, boys are typically involved in work outside the home, including hazardous labour, agricultural work, in workshops, and independent activities, such as begging, collecting rags and rubbish, and polishing shoes, exposing them to exploitation and violence (EI 26/01/2026 b; EI 29/01/2026; EI 22/01/2026). Girls are more expected to engage in domestic labour, including livestock and poultry care, within the household (EI 26/01/2026 b; EI 29/01/2026). Engaging in child labour impacts access to education; three FGDs discussed the need for boys to leave school early because of families' economic circumstances, with one specifying that boys left school to work, not just because of prohibitive education costs (FGD 13/12/2025 a; FGD 13/12/2025 b; FGD 14/12/2025).

Early marriage and the 'sale' of children

Two experts noted an increase in early marriage in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka in recent years (EI 26/01/2026 b; EI 22/01/2026). Mixed methods research that surveyed 289 women in Baghlan in 2024 found that 59% knew of a girl who was married at an inappropriate age in the preceding 12 months (ODI 21/02/2024). This is consistent with increases documented across Afghanistan since the ITA takeover, linked to growing economic hardship, fear of forced marriage to ITA members, and the ban on girls' education past sixth grade, as well as connected to shifting attitudes towards child marriage in some areas (Protection Cluster 07/02/2025; ODI 21/02/2024). As noted below, early marriage can also be linked with debt repayment.

One expert interviewed for this study said she knew of cases of infants being 'sold' to members of the extended family because the parents thought this would give the child a better chance of survival and the money would help the remaining household members (EI 22/01/2026). The scale and dynamics of the 'sale' of children are unclear, although prior research has identified varied reasons, including debt relief (STC 18/03/2022).

Taking on debt

Taking on debt is a coping strategy all 30 households reported using to meet healthcare needs, while 22 had also purchased food on credit, 12 had borrowed food, and 9 had gone into debt to reduce exposure to risk as a result of natural hazards and extreme weather events. Debt is a common coping strategy used in response to shocks in Baghlan; REACH's December 2025 Humanitarian Situation Monitoring found that 99% of respondents in Baghlan mentioned households in their settlements taking on debt as a result of economic shocks, 96% because of aid suspension, and 79% as a result of climate and environmental shocks (REACH accessed 01/03/2026).

Experts also observed that, given the lack of banks in the rural districts of Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka, people often take out loans from relatives (EI 22/10/2026; EI 26/01/2026 b; EI 26/01/2026 a; EI 29/01/2026). As elsewhere in Afghanistan, such debt involves significant risk, as people can be forced to sell productive assets, houses, and land to repay loans (EI 22/10/2026; EI 26/01/2026 a). Several experts mentioned increased risk of community tension, violence, and early marriage linked to the non-payment of loans (EI 29/01/2026; EI 26/01/2026 b).

"Sometimes the person in debt is forced to sell assets such as houses, cows, vehicles, and land at a very low price compared to the market value, or even has to marry off his daughter." (EI 22/10/2026)

"In Baghlan, people take out loans in difficult situations from relatives or people in the village. The majority of people take loans from relatives; very few people take loans from banks, which are only available in the city. Taking out a loan is very difficult as they are not always available, and there is a risk if they do not pay on time. Sometimes, it results in the sale of household assets to pay off the loan. This can include land, houses, and other assets, and sometimes these assets are sold at very low prices to pay off the loan." (EI 26/01/2026 a)

Labour migration and remittances

Taking According to several context experts, only a low proportion of households in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka receive remittances from family members abroad (EI 29/01/2026; EI 26/01/2026 b). For those who do receive this support, however, it makes a significant difference (EI 26/01/2026 a). When asked about the actions they had taken to reduce risk, 4 of 30 interviewed households reported sending family members abroad to work, and three households reported looking into this as an option.

"There are fewer Baghlani people abroad who send remittances to their families. Those people are in a very good situation, able to buy cars, houses, and other assets." (EI 26/01/2026 a)

"Because of the lack of work and the difficult situation, my two sons were recently sent to Iran to earn money." (HH 15/12/2025)

"I am a woman supporting my family. There is no suitable work available, and my husband has gone to Pakistan for income." (HH 15/12/2025)