



Briefing Note

Protection Response following the Earthquake in Eastern Afghanistan

10 September 2025

This Briefing Note was drafted by the Afghanistan Protection Cluster in response to the devastating earthquakes that struck Nangarhar and Kunar provinces in eastern Afghanistan. The consequences are not only physical, but also deeply protection-related, as pre-existing protection risks are compounding the harm, and driving urgent humanitarian needs.

On 31 August 2025, a magnitude 6.0 earthquake hit Nangarhar, followed by three significant aftershocks across Kunar province. These multiple shocks caused widespread destruction of homes, infrastructure and livelihoods. According to latest reports, 42,000 people have been directly affected. More than 6,700 homes have been destroyed, while the human toll has been severe, with 2,200 people confirmed dead (including 731 children) and over 3,640 injured. Informal settlements in Shalt and Ziri Baba villages in Nurgal District of Kunar Province are hosting an estimated 792 families displaced from quake-affected areas.

A [predictive analysis](#) from the Global Protection Cluster indicates that of the 2.1 million people exposed to significant shaking, approximately 1.2 million people (nearly 60%) are also exposed to heightened protection risks. The most acute risks include contamination from landmines and explosive remnants of war (43%), the spread of disinformation (26%), and gender-based violence (13%). These risks intersect with other critical concerns such as lack of legal identity and documentation, psychosocial distress and displacement-related vulnerabilities including separation of families resulting in unaccompanied and separated children leaving them most vulnerable to other forms of abuse, violence and exploitation.

Shifting soil and debris have displaced landmines and other explosive remnants of war, heightening the danger for communities on the move. In the absence of reliable communication channels, affected families struggle to access accurate information about assistance and safety, leaving them vulnerable to disinformation and exploitation. Women and children, particularly those now residing in overcrowded informal settlements, face increased risks of violence, abuse, and other forms of gender-based violence. In addition, many of the hardest-hit communities include Afghan returnees from neighbouring countries, for whom the lack of legal documentation and identity papers is creating critical barriers to accessing aid and essential services. Access constraints in mountainous districts (e.g., blocked routes, remote locations) will likely delay assistance, further amplifying risks.

Protection rapid needs assessments are underway to better understand the evolving protection risks and inform the response. As outlined in the [Afghanistan Earthquake Response Plan \(Sep 2025 — Dec 2025\)](#), immediate priorities include scaled-up mine risk education, provision of case management services for vulnerable children and families, psychological first aid and referral to MHPSS specialized services, expanded GBV services, safe and accurate dissemination of information, legal aid and documentation support to ensure access to assistance.

Protection actors are actively responding to the most urgent needs of those affected by the earthquake. Life-saving services are being delivered, including the reunification of 34 unaccompanied and separated children, psychosocial first aid and psychosocial support provided to 2,506 children (1,285 girls, 1,221 boys) through 9 Child Friendly Spaces in 7 IDP camps, the provision of GBV services and risk mitigation, cash for protection and case management. Agencies with operational capacity in affected rural areas are also supporting debris clearance and carcass removal helping restore safe access to land and community infrastructure. However, protection risks linked to the loss of livelihoods and agricultural assets remain under-addressed. Many affected families—particularly women-headed households and smallholder farmers—have lost access to land, tools, livestock, home based production and income-generating activities. Without targeted support, these groups face heightened risks of food insecurity, economic exploitation, and negative coping strategies such as child labor or early marriage. The destruction of home-based agricultural systems has also disproportionately impacted women, who rely on these for both nutrition and income. Protection-sensitive livelihood recovery must be prioritized, including safe access to agricultural inputs, gender-responsive cash assistance, and inclusive grant mechanisms to ensure no one is left behind, avoiding exclusion and exposing women to further harm.

To maintain outreach despite access restrictions, agencies with physical presence in affected areas should adapt their modalities to safely engage women and vulnerable groups—through field-level offices, mobile teams, and community-based networks. All agencies included in earthquake response can play a critical supporting role by leveraging their operational access to facilitate safe entry points for protection actors, share localized data, and integrate protection principles into sectoral programming, thereby reinforcing the reach and effectiveness of mandated protection agencies. Key considerations include:

- Ensuring that women, children, older persons, people with disabilities, and other at-risk groups are placed at the forefront of all interventions.
- Scaling-up protection services rapidly, including community-led mechanisms, and integrating protection across all sectors of the response.
- Increasing direct funding to local and national protection actors who are on the frontlines of the response.
- Ensuring that assistance is delivered safely, equitably, and in line with protection principles (age, gender and disability inclusion) as well as AAP and PSEA commitments.