



► Strengthening community resilience and women's economic inclusion in Herat

46%

of the population affected
by unemployment and
poverty nationally¹

2.9 million

returnees in 2025 placed
increased demand on
resources²

60%

of casualties in 2023
Herat earthquake were
women³

The 2021 political transition in Afghanistan significantly deepened the multi-dimensional crisis of political instability, recurrent disasters and socio-economic challenges. Leading to widespread job losses, reduced development aid, and escalating humanitarian needs, over half the population now requires assistance. **Restrictions on women's access to work and public life have intensified poverty and increased child labour**, while the return of nearly two million people from neighbouring countries have strained community resources and labour markets, heightening social tensions.

The Herat Province reflects the urgency of these crises. The October 2023 earthquakes killed around 1,500 people, injured more than 2,000, destroyed or severely damaged tens of thousands of homes and key infrastructure such as roads and water systems, and devastated local livelihoods, particularly agriculture and small trade, leaving over 100,000 people in urgent need of shelter and humanitarian assistance.⁴ The province now faces urgent employment and infrastructure needs, further straining the social fabric of affected communities. Building long-term resilience requires investing in both sustainable livelihoods and infrastructure recovery, with a focus on inclusive employment that rehabilitates and strengthens community assets.

The UN Delivering as One (DaO) programme in Herat⁵, initiated in response to the earthquakes, offers a unified platform for joint recovery within which the ILO supports livelihood restoration and essential infrastructure rehabilitation. The current project complements earlier activities implemented through the DaO coordination mechanism in Herat.

1_ <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-december-2024>

2_ <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/2025-afghan-returns-one-year-recap>

3_ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/spotlights/afghanistan-earthquakes-extend-cycle-of-conflict-and-disaster-displacement/>

4_ [Afghanistan: Herat Earthquake Response Situation Report No. 2 - As of 2 November 2023](#) | OCHA

5_ [Herat Earthquakes 2023 Post-Disaster Needs Assessment](#) | United Nations in Afghanistan

The project in a nutshell



PROJECT NAME

Promoting Women-Centred Employment and Decent Work through Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in Crisis-Affected Afghanistan

TIMEFRAME

July 2025 – February 2026

BUDGET

USD 500,000

PRIORITY GROUPS

Women entrepreneurs, earthquake-affected households, internally displaced persons, returnees, youth and women-supportive local Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

POLICY AREAS

- Employment Intensive Investment Programmes (EIIP)
- Skills
- Enterprises
- Peace
- Social cohesion
- HDP Nexus

KEY PARTNERS

Employers' organizations

Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI)
Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI)

Workers' organizations

National Union of Afghanistan Workers and Employees (NUAWE)

UN partners

UN Country Team, including IOM, UNDP

Project summary

The project contributes to community resilience by employing [Employment-Intensive Investment](#) approaches to the rehabilitation of selected community infrastructure alongside targeted support for women-owned MSMEs. In partnership with workers' and employers' organizations, the intervention prioritizes awareness of and compliance with fundamental principles and rights at work, such as non-discrimination, social dialogue, the elimination of child and forced labour, and occupational safety

The project supports community resilience through infrastructure rehabilitation and support to women-owned enterprises, while promoting fundamental principles and rights at work to enable inclusive recovery and access to decent work.

and health, to support inclusive local recovery and improve access to decent work in target communities. It departs from and complements the UN DaO programme in Herat.



The Theory of Change below sums up the approach:

UN Delivering as One in Herat

OUTPUT

Priority **community infrastructure** damaged or destroyed is **rehabilitated**, maintained and **rebuilt** by **ILO social partners, communities** and stakeholders, strengthening resilience to disasters.

Immediate decent jobs are **created** for crisis-affected people, with organizations equipped to deliver employment-intensive community and public works.

Entrepreneurs and **enterprises** in the **construction**, value chain and allied sectors strengthen their business skills and practical **understanding of fundamental principles and rights at work (FPRW)**.

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

Community **infrastructure** is **rehabilitated**, and households benefit from **temporary decent employment** opportunities.

Private sector actors begin to **mainstream** employment-intensive investment programme (**EIIP**) approaches in infrastructure development and rehabilitation.

Employers' and Business Membership Organizations, together with trade unions and workers' organizations, **promote fundamental principles and rights at work (FPRW)** and employment-intensive approaches.

Entrepreneurs (women and men) and enterprises benefit from **training** and rehabilitated infrastructure, and introduce growth-oriented practices and FPRW in their businesses.

LONGER-TERM OUTCOMES

Household well-being improves, and local economic activity strengthens as families **gain income** from businesses and decent, inclusive employment.

Rehabilitated and **resilient infrastructure** enables renewed agricultural and **trade opportunities**.

I M P A C T

Strengthened household resilience in target communities.

ILO

Afghanistan Chamber
of Commerce &
Investment (ACCI)

National Union of
Afghanistan Workers' &
Employees (NUAWE)

UNDP
IOM

KEY PARTNERS

Expected results



Through infrastructure rehabilitation activities, the project generates 370 decent jobs, equivalent to 5,600 workdays, targeting the most vulnerable groups—including women, youth, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, and returnees. These opportunities are designed not only to provide short-term income, but also to restore dignity, skills, and a sense of stability within the community.

Building on this, 25 aspiring female entrepreneurs will receive start-up support to establish or expand their businesses, and 25 micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises will be supported to improve their practices in line with the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. This includes eliminating child labour, ensuring occupational safety and health, promoting non-discrimination, and adopting ethical business practices.

Through these efforts, the project restores access to essential services for 3,000 crisis-affected people, prioritizing those in the highest vulnerability categories, who will make up 80 percent of beneficiaries. This includes a 250-meter protection wall Khwaja Gulbied village, along with a culvert and bridge, which help prevent flooding and protect community assets. In Ayubi village, a social centre will be renovated to serve both as a community hub and as a learning facility for children, creating a shared space that fosters social cohesion and development.

Translating the HDP Nexus into practice

DW4P: Operationalizing the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus through Decent Work

COORDINATION: The ILO and social partners work closely with national systems, UN actors, and other stakeholders to integrate decent work principles into crisis response, recovery, and reconstruction.

PROGRAMMING: Through local employment creation, enterprise and skills development, capacity building and social dialogue, DW4P initiatives deliver immediate livelihoods that contribute to long-term recovery, advancing inclusion, gender equality, and social cohesion in fragile settings. Community focus group discussions (separate groups for women and men) ensure the participation of community members in the planning and monitoring of the project.

FINANCING: DW4P entails seed funding for a demonstration project to inform, sustain and expand resource mobilization efforts. It is strategically used to achieve multi-year and flexible financing arrangements that strengthen nationally owned systems and resilient livelihoods, ensuring that recovery and peacebuilding efforts are grounded in decent work and sustainability.

The Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus refers to a collaborative and integrated approach that seeks to strengthen the complementarity between humanitarian response, long-term development, and peacebuilding efforts. It aims to reduce need, risk, and vulnerability over time by fostering coherence and comprehensiveness of support delivered by the UN, leveraging the comparative advantages of different agencies. The HDP Nexus approach is built on three mutually reinforcing principles: coordination, programming, and financing. These principles ensure that humanitarian, development, and peace actors work in a coherent way toward shared outcomes. They are used here to underline how the DW4P initiatives apply and reinforce the Nexus approach.



COORDINATION

Collective action for long-term recovery in Afghanistan

The project is implemented in close coordination with the [One UN earthquake response in Herat](#), funded through the [Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan \(STFA\)](#) of which the ILO is a partner. As such, the project builds on existing national and UN frameworks, including the [UN Strategic Framework for Afghanistan](#) and the [Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan](#). In this crisis response scenario, the ILO complements efforts of humanitarian actors, such as UNHCR and IOM, and development actors with a different mandate, such as UNDP, UNOPS, UN-Habitat focusing on interventions that address immediate livelihood needs and employment deficits.

As an example, the identification of priority infrastructure to be rehabilitated by this project was informed by earlier work undertaken through the One UN earthquake response programme, under which the IOM facilitated the Community Action Plans (CAPs) through participatory focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and wider community consultations and the ILO conducted the technical assessment of priority infrastructure.

The two infrastructure projects selected for the DG Crisis Response were jointly identified and endorsed by the One UN programme, and their feasibility and suitability were further confirmed through the ILO's EIIP Project Selection Criteria, ensuring they align with employment-intensive implementation standards.

Strategic Alignment

The project builds on and contributes to needs assessments and key strategic priorities and frameworks developed jointly by UN agencies and other stakeholders in Afghanistan, to ensure coherence with national and international efforts to promote resilience, decent work, and peace in crisis-affected areas:

- Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP)
- [UN Common Country Analysis \(UNCCA\)](#)
- [Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan \(HNRP\)](#)
- [UN Strategic Framework for Afghanistan \(UNSF 2023-2025\)](#)
- [Herat Post-Disaster Needs Assessment \(PDNA\)](#)

The project is also being implemented in **close collaboration and strategic partnership with social partners**, particularly the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI), Afghanistan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI), and the National Union of Afghanistan Workers' and Employees (NUAWE), and their provincial chapters in Herat. Social partners play an active role in the governance and implementation of the project through their

participation in the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) and Community Engagement Councils (CEC). They are also singularly important for the sustainability of project results, as key actors to promote the realization of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.



PROGRAMMING

Localized and inclusive, with people at the centre

The project is squarely situated in the ILO's mandate. It combines immediate job creation through infrastructure rehabilitation and skills development, with longer-term entrepreneurship development and sustainable business practices, thereby bridging immediate relief and sustainable development.

The approach is localized:

In addition to the context-sensitive strategy mentioned above, the project strengthens local business capacities and the capacity of private sector actors and organizations to promote employment-intensive approaches in infrastructure and Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work more broadly. These changes in combination with rehabilitated community infrastructure are expected to enable decent work linked to increased agricultural and trade activities and opportunities, which in turn, and with time, will contribute to local economic development, social cohesion and community resilience.

The approach is people-centred:

It departs from needs assessments informed by community focus group discussions (different groups for women and men) to ensure that rehabilitation of community infrastructure restores access to essential services and strengthen resilient local systems also for the most vulnerable. Focus group discussions is also used to assess the effects of the project. To ensure inclusion in a context characterized by restrictions on women's involvement in social and economic spheres, the project implements a context-sensitive strategy that prioritizes women's engagement in the private sector and home-based enterprises, where women's participation is still possible.

Promoting women's economic participation in restrictive contexts

1

Women-led delivery: Female mobilizers and trainers provide skills training in women-only spaces.

2

Community engagement: Male leaders act as gender champions to build acceptance.

3

Sustained impact: Locally grounded approaches foster women's economic inclusion and resilience.



FINANCING

Financing: From seed funding to peace-responsive recovery at scale

The project is implemented under the ILO Initiative on Decent Work for Peace, which leverages ILO internal resources as strategic seed funding for innovative interventions. This ILO-internal resource contribution is intended to attract additional investments from other donors. It aims to showcase the approach and inform new joint programmes aligned with priorities set by the DOHA working groups and by key recovery partners such as Islamic Development Bank and JICA. The aim is to mainstream EIIP and enterprise development as strategic tools for addressing employment challenges, economic recovery, and resilience through infrastructure development.

Funding discussions are ongoing with UN sister agencies, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. Further joint resource mobilisation efforts for continuation and scaling will be done in partnership with other UN agencies.

Zooming in on peace and inclusion

The project strengthens social cohesion and peace by creating inclusive employment opportunities and promoting dialogue among diverse community groups in Herat. By engaging returnees, internally displaced persons, women, youth, and host communities in shared recovery activities, such as infrastructure rehabilitation and local enterprise development, the intervention helps rebuild trust, reduce tensions, and foster collective ownership of community assets. Participation through Community Engagement Councils (CEC) and Project Advisory Committees (PAC) reinforces cooperation, transparency, and local problem-solving, which are key to sustaining peace and community resilience.

Informed by the [Peace and Conflict Analysis Guidance Note](#) and the [HDPN & Conflict Sensitivity Checklist](#) (Annex 7), the project systematically addresses local tensions and integrates conflict-sensitive practices across its activities.

Gender equality is central to the project's design and implementation. In a context where women's access to public life and employment remains severely restricted, the project applies a pragmatic, context-sensitive strategy to ensure that women continue to benefit from economic opportunities. Support for women-owned and home-based enterprises, alongside entrepreneurship and skills development, enables women to generate income, contribute to local recovery, and strengthen their agency within families and communities. Through collaboration with the Afghanistan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI) and other social partners, the project ensures women's representation in social dialogue and local decision-making. By integrating gender equality with social dialogue and decent work principles, the initiative promotes inclusive recovery as a pathway to peace, stability, and lasting community resilience in Afghanistan.

**Inclusive employment**

opportunities: The project creates jobs that bring together diverse community groups, supporting social cohesion and peace.

**Community dialogue and**

trust: Engagement through shared recovery activities helps rebuild trust, reduce tensions and strengthen collective ownership.

**Participatory governance**

mechanisms: Community Engagement Councils and Project Advisory Committees enhance cooperation, transparency and local problem-solving.

**Women's economic**

empowerment: Support to women-led enterprises and skills development enables income generation and promotes inclusive recovery.

DW4P projects serve to demonstrate the importance of ILO contributions to post-crisis recovery and reconstruction. To support the strengthened position of the ILO in this context, DW4P in Afghanistan places strong emphasis on monitoring and evidence generation, including baseline and endline studies. The project uses tools such as focus group discussions and surveys to capture results and demonstrate ILO effectiveness.



International
Labour
Organization

ILO Office for Afghanistan

UNOCA Compound, PD 9, Kabul -
Jalalabad Road, Kabul, Afghanistan
T: +93(0)798296177 | E: abul@ilo.org

**ILO Priority Action Programme
on Decent Work in Crisis and Post-Crisis
Situations (AP/CRISIS)**

4 Route des Morillons 4 CH-1211
Geneva 22 - Switzerland
T: +41 22 799 61 11 | E: crisis@ilo.org