



Gender update #1: Earthquake in Paktika and Khost



23 June 2022

Photo: UN Women/SayedHabibBidel



Initial findings

On 22 June, at 01:30am, an earthquake of magnitude 5.9 has struck the southeastern provinces of Paktika and Khost (Central Region of Afghanistan), killing at least 770 people and injuring another 1500.¹ 1500 homes have reportedly been destroyed and damaged in Gayan² (Paktika Province).

According to OCHA³ and humanitarian teams delivering the response in the two provinces, immediate needs identified on the ground on 22 June include emergency trauma care, emergency shelter and non-food items, food assistance and WASH.

Additional reports have been received by GiHA WG and the WAG from women civil society actors in Paktika and Khost highlighting challenges faced by women, men, girls and boys in the face of the earthquake. They have in particular underlined the need for urgent temporary shelter which is adapted to women, girls and other at risk groups' safety. Non-Food Items (NFI), including clothes and dignity and hygiene kits were also seen as a priority. Regarding WASH, civil society actors reported the urgent need for women and girls to access washrooms and water points as a key concern. Finally, initial reports pointed out the lack of female humanitarian workers in the emergency response, which could induce challenges in reaching women and girls with humanitarian relief. Similarly, consultations with women Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and their direct participation in the response was highlighted as a critical entry point to reach women and girls.

¹OCHA Flash Update, Paktika and Khost Provinces Earthquake, 23 June 2022

²OCHA Flash Update, Paktika and Khost Provinces Earthquake, 23 June 2022

³OCHA Flash Update, Paktika and Khost Provinces Earthquake, 23 June 2022

Considering the many restrictions women and girls are already facing in Afghanistan, and the difficulties faced by humanitarian actors in reaching them, joint needs assessments carried out over the coming days by humanitarian actors in the Paktika and Khost provinces should consider the following issues to ensure humanitarian aid reaches women and girls and vulnerable groups victims of the earthquake.

Areas for attention

- **Women's participation in needs assessments and in the humanitarian response:** humanitarian actors have faced multiple challenges in reaching women and girls in the context of assessments carried out in Afghanistan. Since the De Facto Authorities (DFA) have seized power in August 2021, restrictions on women's movement have compounded already existing barriers to women's participation both at the household and community level. 64% of Afghan women surveyed in 2021 were not involved in community-level decision making⁴ and 59% of women and girls were not free to participate in fora and gatherings.⁵ The participation and leadership of women and girls in the assessment, planning and implementation of the humanitarian and early recovery response to the earthquake is crucial to ensuring the needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls are identified and addressed.
 - For women and girls to access essential services and distributions, it is essential that female humanitarian workers are part of the response in Paktika and Khost.
 - In order to map vulnerabilities and provide an inclusive response, Women CSOs and women leaders in Paktika and Khost provinces should be involved in all ongoing assessments and distributions, for their access to women and girls to be built upon, in order to reach all vulnerable and at-risk groups.
- **Information sharing:** as evacuations are ongoing and distributions are starting in Paktika and Khost, it is critical ensure that information on all evacuations and on all services is made available and accessible to all.
 - Information on services should be made accessible in local languages as well as in braille and sign language to ensure it reaches individuals with disabilities.
 - As rates of illiteracy are high, including among women, it is key that all information is made accessible also through other means such as announcements and radio messages.
- **Health:** the health response to the earthquake in Paktika and Khost requires the presence of female health workers in health facilities and hospitals, who can reach out and attend to women and girls injured in the earthquake. In Afghanistan, cultural norms around women's roles outside the home has meant that the number of women healthcare workers has been limited.⁶ Moreover, distance, the unavailability of health facilities in all areas, and costs of transport to access health facilities have previously been reported as barriers in accessing health care.⁷ In early 2022, assessments found that only 10% of women said that they could cover their basic health needs with the services available to them; compared with 23% of men⁸ as a number of women also reported not accessing health facilities due to the lack of female health workers available.
 - Women and girls' access to female health workers should be prioritized throughout the response to the earthquake. To better reach women and girls, mobile health clinics with female personnel could be set up.
- **Emergency Shelter:** according to current estimates, almost 1 500 homes have been destroyed by the earthquake in the Gayan district alone.⁹ Reports from women CSOs in both provinces have highlighted the urgent needs for tents for women and children.
 - As no information is available on the number of vulnerable households, special provisions should be made to identify and prioritize vulnerable households, including female headed households as well as individuals with special needs, such as elderly and disabled women, men, girls and boys and pregnant women.
 - Needs assessments pertaining to emergency shelter should also be carried out in an inclusive manner; to ensure that women, girls and at-risk individuals are consulted and can benefit from temporary accommodation that is adapted to their needs and takes into account their safety.
- **Food and Non-Food Items:** women CSOs reports highlight that delivery of aid has been delayed in Paktika and Khost due to roads' destructions and blockages. Food and non-food items are urgently needed by women and girls. This includes hygiene kits as well as other core-relief items.

⁴CARE, MSNA 2021

⁵UNICEF U 2021

⁶UN Women Gender Alert on COVID-19, April 2020: https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAsia/Docs/Publications/2020/04/2ndGender%20Alert%20on%20COVID-19_230420-1.pdf

⁷UNHCR 2021 Multi Sectoral Rapid Assessment Analysis, April 2022

⁸GTS, 2022 (forthcoming)

⁹OCHA Flash Update, Paktika and Khost Provinces Earthquake, 23 June 2022

- Distribution of NFIs should be inclusive and carried out by both male and female humanitarian workers in order to reach women and girls and those most vulnerable.
- Distribution sites should also be made accessible to women and girls who may be facing restrictions in their movement.
- Humanitarian actors should consider flexible distributions with potential “door-to-door” delivery of food and non-food items to women headed households
- **WASH:** latrines and water points for women are urgently needed according to reports from women in Paktika and Khost.
 - Access to segregated and safe toilet and washing facilities should be facilitated together with the distribution of sanitary items to women and girls in a safe manner, by female humanitarian workers.
 - Access to water points and washing facilities should be monitored to ensure women and girls are able to access them. This includes monitoring the requirements being put in place for women and girls to access these (such as the presence of a male guardian (mahram)) as well as the distance between water points and women and girls’ temporary accommodations.

Recommendations for all humanitarian actors:

- Ensure the adequate participation of female humanitarian workers in needs assessment, distributions and the overall response to the earthquake in order to reach women and girls
- Coordinate the delivery of aid with and build on the expertise and access of women CSOs and women leaders in Paktika and Khost and ensure they are included in all coordination mechanisms set up for the response. Women CSOs and WAG members are ready to be engaged in needs assessments and response by different clusters. Their details can be shared upon request.
- Identify and address the needs of vulnerable individuals such as female headed households, individuals with disabilities, older women and men; this includes ensuring that all assessment tools are gender-sensitive and that inputs from communities are sought in an inclusive manner, reaching out to women and girls through engagements with female humanitarian workers and women CSOs to find their most pressing needs

This update has been prepared by the GiHA Working Group, together with the Women Advisory Group (WAG) to the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)

For additional information or to receive details of women CSOs active in the Paktika and Khost province, please reach out to Zuhra Wardak (Zuhra.Wardak@rescue.org) and Anouk Heili (anouk.heili@unwomen.org)