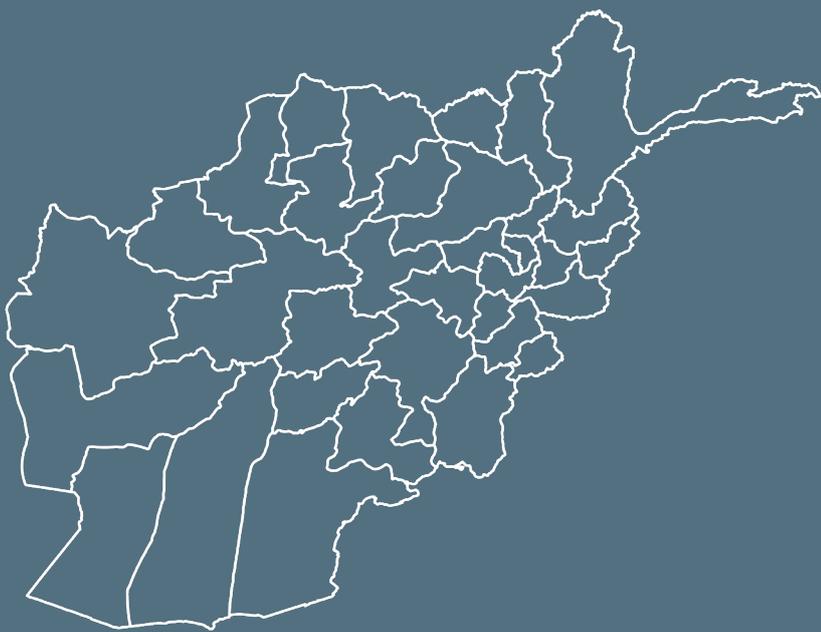


“We as women's groups
can find women in need
when organisations
can't.”

Engaging women in the humanitarian response in Afghanistan

Afghanistan • December 2023



GROUND TRUTH
SOLUTIONS

Salma:
consulting 

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We are grateful to the thousands of people in Afghanistan who spoke to us and shared their views.

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For more information about our work, please visit groundtruthsolutions.org and salmaconsulting.com. You can share your feedback about our report [here](#).

With funding from UN Women.



Executive summary¹

Since their takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, the de facto authorities have introduced several directives limiting women's access to education, employment, and public spaces.² In December 2022, the ban prohibiting Afghan women from working for NGOs – expanded to UN agencies in April 2023 – impeded access to aid and support for vulnerable women throughout the country.³ Although some NGOs and UN agencies navigated the decree through local exceptions and continued their operations, 2023 saw the introduction of new bans further reducing support for projects aiming to reach women and girls.⁴ In July 2023, the Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan was critically underfunded, with less than half the amount received as the same time in 2022.⁵ The World Food Programme had to cut food assistance to two million people.⁶

Against this backdrop, engaging with women and men is critical to ensuring the humanitarian response is tailored to their respective needs and priorities. To strengthen accountability to women and girls in Afghanistan, in September 2023, Ground Truth Solutions and Salma Consulting completed our third round of data collection with support from UN Women and the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group. Previous findings are published [here](#).

Main findings

- **Women feel safer accessing distributions, since the adoption of approaches to mitigate safety concerns.** People we spoke with highlight good practices, including prioritising women in distributions centres and having closed, gender-specific spaces for women at other aid sites. Women tell us that their concerns about engaging with men at distribution sites have reduced since the start of 2023 as such contact has increasingly become socially normalised and seen as a necessity for many women as they face rising needs. However, women remain concerned at the lack of women aid workers in the response and in distributions in locations far from their homes.
- **Selecting aid recipients through community leaders is seen as opaque and unfair.** A lack of transparency in selection processes remains. Unclear selection criteria are exacerbating community tensions. There is a sense that this could improve with the help of women who may be able to identify the most vulnerable women in their own communities. People want more community members involved in selecting aid recipients, instead of aid providers relying solely on community leaders. **That said, women still want aid organisations to seek permission from male community representatives, to reduce risks.** They ask that permission is granted from community leaders and their husbands before any engagement begins, to reduce protection concerns and increase their comfort in speaking openly.
- **Women rely on organic social networks to access and circulate information on aid,** and have limited access to information from formal sources. They are traditionally dependent on social networks, which they consider trusted, safe, and appropriate, and prefer to receive information face-to-face from local organisation staff, community or religious leaders, and family.⁷
- **Community-based women's groups offer valuable and grassroots entry points into communities, offering organisations safe and acceptable opportunities to engage with and understand the needs and priorities of women.** Women we interviewed say not enough opportunities exist to engage with humanitarian organisations on their priorities for aid, and over a quarter of them (29%) say they would like to participate in aid-related discussions via women's groups. Qualitative discussions with women's groups demonstrated their potential in supporting aid providers as interlocutors, conducting vulnerability assessments, facilitating information sessions, and establishing feedback mechanisms.

We surveyed **1,897** people face to face and spoke with **68** people in more depth, via 10 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 15 in-depth interviews (IDIs).

Gender

-  **880** (46%) women
-  **1,017** (54%) men

Age

-  **652** (34%) 18–34 years old
-  **544** (29%) 35–44 years old
-  **701** (37%) 45+ years old

Aid received

-  **1,025** (54%) yes
-  **872** (46%) no

Disability status

-  **319** (17%) persons with disabilities
-  **1,578** (83%) no disability

Status

-  **1,434** (77%) host community
-  **286** (16%) Internally displaced people (IDPs)
-  **56** (3%) refugees
-  **76** (4%) returnees

¹ For a more detailed contextual analysis, see our previous report, pages 8 and 9: Ground Truth Solutions. June 2023. "[Only a woman can understand another woman.](#)"

² Ibid.

³ Save the Children. February 2023. "[We need women to help women': Afghan women cut off from aid following Taliban ban on female NGO workers.](#)"

⁴ VOA News. February 2023. "[UN says its aid agencies will not quit Afghanistan despite Taliban restrictions.](#)"; AP News. July 2023. "[UN says the Taliban have further increased restrictions on Afghan women and girls.](#)"

⁵ UN OCHA. July 2023. "[Afghanistan critical funding gaps.](#)"

⁶ UN News. September 2023. "[Afghanistan: WFP forced to cut food aid for 2 million more.](#)"

⁷ Ground Truth Solutions. February 2023. "[Against the odds: Strengthening accountability to women and girls in Afghanistan.](#)"

- **Women favour broader coverage and longer-term support.** Across the board, aid is not meeting people's essential needs, especially during winter. Half of those we spoke to would prefer that humanitarian organisations reach more people, even if the individual quantities each household receives are smaller. This view was more prevalent among women, who would also prefer to receive smaller quantities of aid for a longer period. They believe this would allow them to manage resources more efficiently, reduce the need to share with extended family, and prevent food spoilage. Men, on the other hand, prefer larger quantities of aid for a shorter period or as one-off support, enabling them to reduce visits to distribution sites.
- **Households continue to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as early marriage and child labour when they have exhausted other options.** Marrying daughters earlier than planned has become a protection mechanism for many households, who believe girls have better livelihood outcomes by marrying into richer families.
- **People want aid providers to prioritise resilience and livelihoods.** Both men and women value food, non-food items, and cash distributions, but say they need long-term interventions, such as those that promote livelihoods. Urban women feel far less able to plan for the future than urban men and rural women, and request job opportunities. Although literacy does not seem to impact women's long-term outlooks, men in rural areas who can read and write claim they are better prepared to plan for the future than those who cannot.

Recommendations

Engage community members to strengthen transparency and accuracy in selection processes

Recommendation 1: Ensure greater transparency on how aid agencies select the most vulnerable households, and their processes to verify vulnerability, including through community members.

Many organisations currently use multiple vulnerability assessment practices to identify the most vulnerable households. Most people, however, are only aware of selections made by local authorities or community leaders. Organisations need to proactively highlight ways in which they measure vulnerability and how they identify the most vulnerable, considering challenges around biased selection. This should also include the transparent prioritisation of women-headed households and widows. Engaging in additional platforms with the general community can support greater transparency and better decision-making.

Engage women via their preferred methods

Recommendation 2: Map – and remain responsive to – the ways that women organically share and internalise information, rather than asking women to use mechanisms designed by aid organisations.

Women rely on and prefer face-to-face information, sourced through familiar networks. These are spaces where they feel most comfortable and face fewer risks. Aid actors should focus on engaging in these organic spaces, rather than asking women to adapt to spaces and mechanisms which are unfamiliar, poorly accessible, and can potentially cause safeguarding concerns.

Recommendation 3: Identify and engage with existing women's groups who can act as valuable interlocutors for aid agencies across the country, specifically in places where those agencies do not have exemptions for women staff.

Existing women's groups remain a safe and accessible entry point into communities, especially when NGOs cannot travel with women staff. Engaging with women's groups not only ensures a safe space to speak to and support women, but offers opportunities to build the capacity, skills, and resilience of members of these groups.

Recommendation 4: Prioritise engagement with women, but first check what permission is needed.

Women welcome opportunities to consult with aid agencies and provide feedback and recommendations, but they often only feel comfortable doing so if community leaders and husbands grant permission. Attempting to engage with women without the necessary permission can increase social risks for women and make them more reluctant to engage openly.

Improve the distribution experience

Recommendation 5: Ensure women have clear information about upcoming distributions, with sufficient time to plan their trips and make necessary arrangements.

Women generally feel less informed than men about when and where aid distributions are taking place, making it harder for them to access assistance. Ensuring women have enough time to make necessary arrangements, such as organising a mahram or making childcare arrangements, is crucial.

Recommendation 6: Continue to prioritise and design accessible solutions for women at distribution sites, to address health concerns and reduce the potential for sexual exploitation and abuse.

Women are often the most vulnerable people at distribution sites. They remain concerned about the lack of women aid workers and the distances they must travel. Distributions should continue to prioritise women (allow them to receive aid first), reducing the potential for safety risks, abuse, and travelling in the dark back to their communities. Commonly noted among men, but relevant to women, is that all distribution sites should include (gender-segregated) toilet facilities, shaded areas, drinking water, and protection from crowds in neighbouring communities who come to try and receive aid.

Prioritise programmes with a longer-term focus

Recommendation 7: Increase resilience activities, such as finding and supporting job opportunities, building skills, and providing resources for families to establish long-term sustainability. Safe and gender-appropriate livelihood activities are an opportunity to engage with women and build their resilience.

People continue to say that short-term aid (whether in-kind or cash) remains insufficient for them to cover their basic needs, and that once aid programmes end, they commonly resort to severe coping mechanisms. They want aid agencies to prioritise livelihood opportunities that align with contextually available resources, market opportunities, and are appropriate to gender, disability status, and literacy levels.

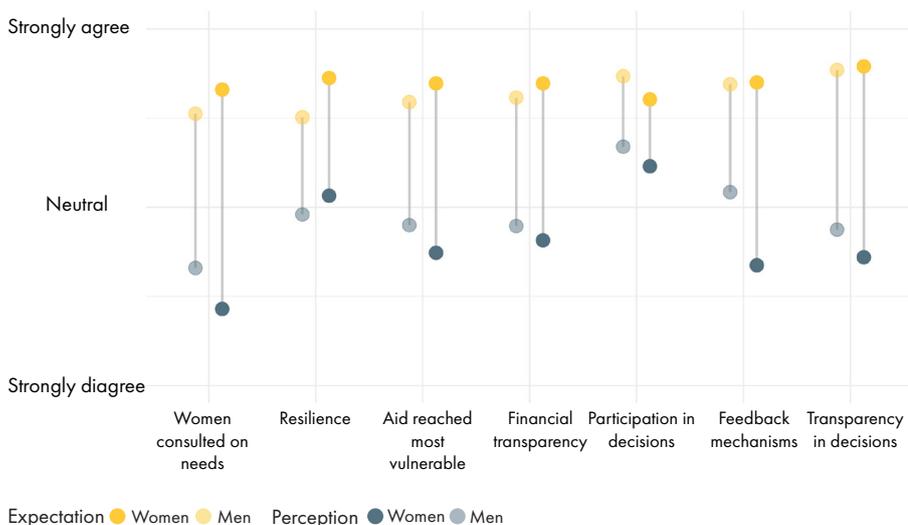
Recommendation 8: Keep prioritising social and behaviour change interventions, to decrease the normality of marrying girls early and sending children for labour.

Sending children into child labour or marrying girls off earlier than expected has become a more normalised practice that people do not consider severe or detrimental. As a result, the likelihood of such coping mechanisms increasing is significant. Efforts to change social behaviour are required to address these "norms" alerting families to the harm and potential abuse that children can suffer as a result of such practices.

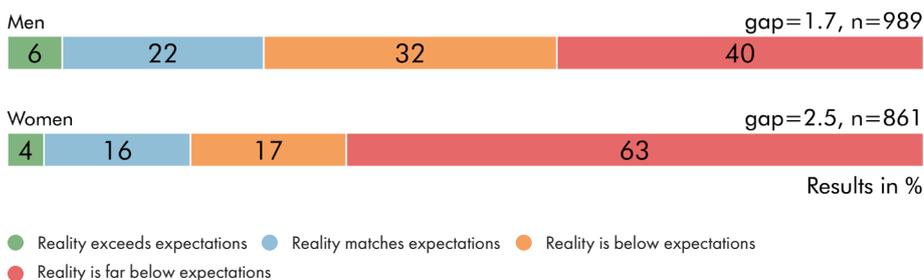
Expectations of aid are not met, and women are less satisfied with aid quality than men

A valuable step towards understanding satisfaction of services is to compare people's expectations with their perceptions and experiences. As highlighted in the image below, there is a clear disconnect between the population's expectations of aid and their experiences of actually receiving it.

People have high expectations of aid across the board. This includes high expectations around consulting women, long-term support, targeting the most vulnerable households, community participation in selection, and opportunities to provide feedback. These expectations do not reflect reality, resulting in a satisfaction gap, as seen below.



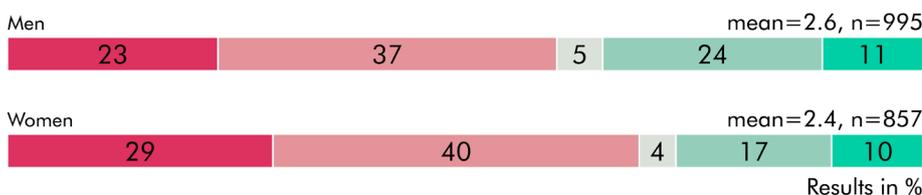
Do aid providers consult women directly in your community when deciding where, when, and how humanitarian aid and services are provided?



Selecting aid recipients through community leaders raises concerns around transparency and fairness

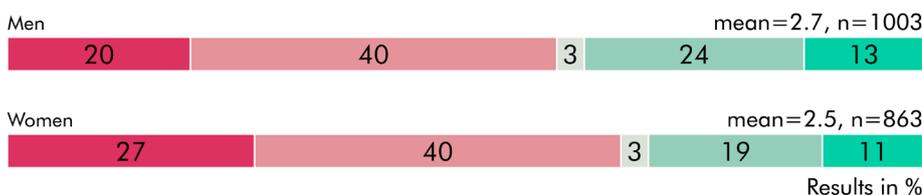
Men and women continue to feel that selection is unfair and does not target the most vulnerable people. Only around one-third (27% of women and 35% of men) feel aid selection is fair, while 37% and 30%, respectively, think aid goes to people most in need.

Are aid and services provided in a fair way in your community?



● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely

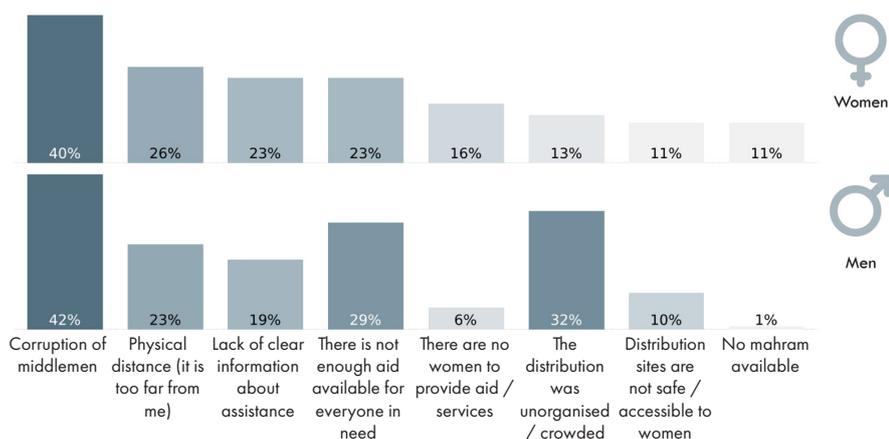
Do aid and services go to those who need them most?



● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely

When asked about the biggest barriers to accessing assistance, less than half of women (40%) and men (42%) mention corruption by middlemen – including community leaders or maliks – who support aid organisations in identifying aid recipients. Nepotism among community leaders is a key contributor to negative perceptions around fairness among nearly half of men (49%) and 60% of women. News about funding cuts and aid providers having to reduce the number of people they support seems to exacerbate feelings of unfairness. Around one-third of respondents link unfairness to the insufficiency of aid. People indicated in qualitative discussions that this sometimes leads to disputes, negatively impacting social cohesion.

What are the three biggest barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance? (n=1,897)



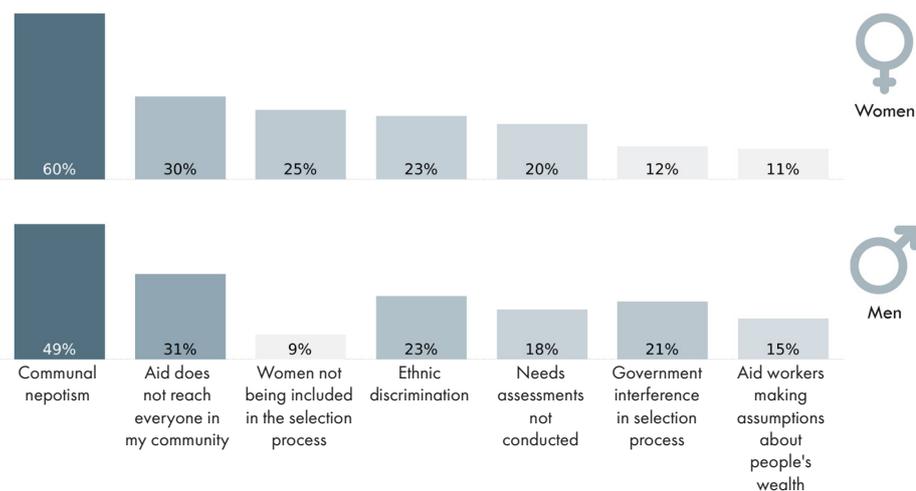
Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.



There are many rich people in the area who have jobs, and even their own small businesses. They are receiving aid because they are connected to corrupt local leaders.

– Women's group representative in Balkh

What are the three main reasons why aid and services cannot be provided in a fair way? (n=1,897)

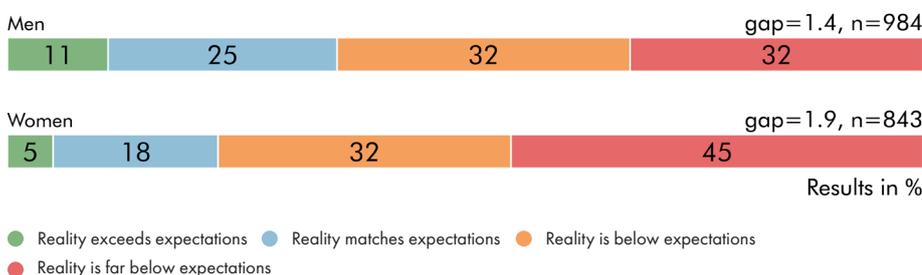


Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

People shared their insight into different ways corruption occurs in their communities. Across all provinces, people feel that community leaders abuse their decision-making power in identifying and selecting vulnerable households, and manipulate assistance lists to include relatives and people in their social networks. Some community leaders also reportedly ask households for a portion of their aid in exchange for inclusion on assistance lists. Ultimately this affects women more, as they are not as well positioned socially to engage and advocate for themselves, rather relying on men and community leaders to advocate for them.

When asked for possible solutions, opinions were mixed. Some people stressed the need for organisations to select aid recipients directly after conducting needs assessments. This would leave less room for corruption and more effectively identify those most in need. But others would not place their trust in humanitarian staff, feeling they too could be corrupt. One aid recipient in Kunduz said that a staff member had abused their power during a needs assessment by ensuring selection of their own contacts. Ultimately, multiple selection processes which enable triangulation of the status of potential recipients is the most feasible way to ensure transparency and filter out corrupt selection.

Do you know how aid providers decide who receives humanitarian aid and services and who does not?



People also felt that community members themselves should be involved in discussions of selection criteria and should be able to recommend vulnerable households likely to be excluded. Despite the ongoing risk of nepotism, engaging more community members in selection might help with the beforementioned triangulation.

“

Those with houses are receiving aid, but nobody is helping the neediest, such as our family. We feel very disappointed while witnessing such scenes, because we have corrupt local leaders.

– displaced woman in Kabul

“

I saw people coming to the distribution sites in their luxury cars, and they received aid because of connections with corrupt Shura members.

– man who received aid in Khost

“

Our local leaders can create problems for women because they are corrupt. They ask for a portion of the aid. They tell women they will receive aid if they give some to him.

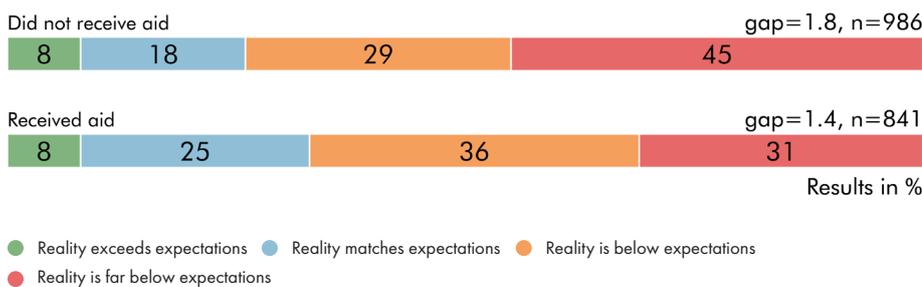
– women's group representative in Balkh

“

The selection process was much better and more realistic in the past because organisations would send surveyors to the area, and they worked hard to select the neediest people. We don't know anything about the selection process now because the local Shura is responsible for selecting people. They are corrupt and only think about their own family and relatives... We have no opportunity for discussions with the organisations: Shura members don't want organisations to hear our voices, because they [community elders] won't be able to control then.

– man in Khost, who received aid multiple times

Do you know how aid providers decide who receives humanitarian aid and services and who does not?

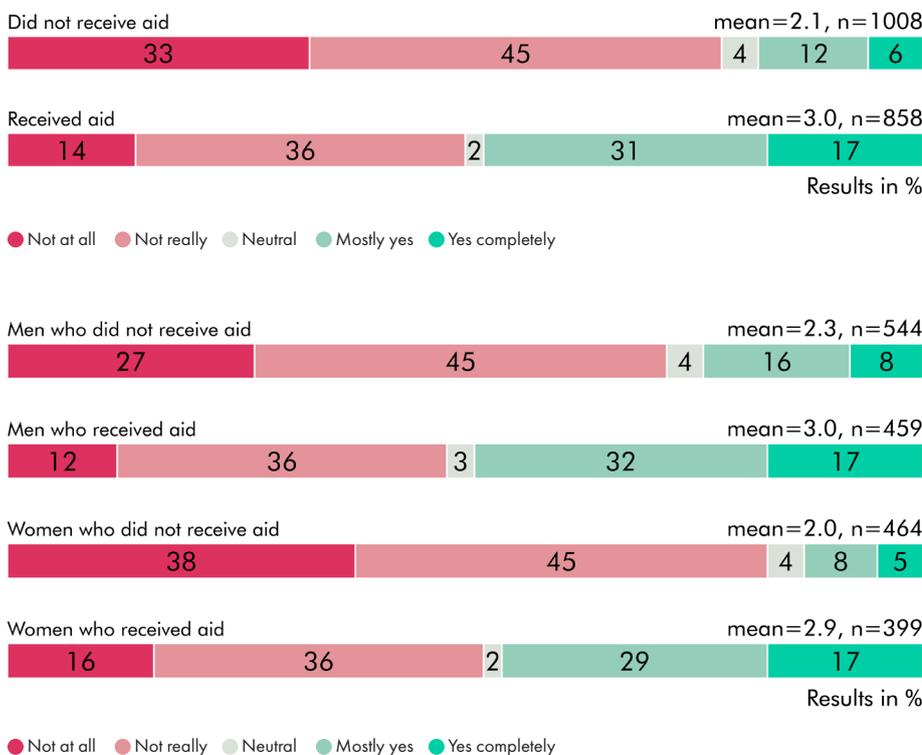


People do not readily report concerns of nepotism and corruption because they are normalised across all aspects of life. When asked if they reported instances of or concerns about corruption, most people suggested there was little point in making such claims. As long as aid providers continued to engage with community leaders and authorities, many felt there would always be inherent bias.

Transparency in selection processes could prevent claims of corruption

People stressed the value of holding open community discussions around targeting to improve perceptions around fairness and transparency. Whereas almost half (48%) of aid recipients feel aid goes to those in need, only 18% of non-recipients feel the same. This perception is similar for men (20%) and women (13%) who have not received aid, compared to men and women who have (49% and 46%). Similarly, few (16%) non-recipients say aid and services are provided fairly, compared to 46% of those who have received assistance, with no great difference between men and women. When asked why, both recipients and non-recipients mentioned nepotism and insufficient aid. Perhaps unsurprisingly, people who have not received assistance tend to believe selection is more arbitrary and not based on proper assessments (25%) than those who did receive aid (12%).

Do aid and services go to those who need it most?



In the first round the organisation came and distributed packages themselves. They searched and found deserving people. Everyone was happy. But problems began when the elders and Shura members got involved.

– man in Nangarhar



Unfortunately, some surveyors select their own relatives in place of people who were absent during the survey. I witnessed such an incident: a surveyor selected his own relatives after having them pretend to be another family that was absent on the day of the survey.

– woman in Kunduz, who received a one-off aid distribution



We are interested in taking part in discussions [with aid organisations] because we are members of the community and we can provide good advice about who needs aid. I'm sure we would get the best results if they spoke to the community.

– man in Jawzjan, who received aid multiple times



Though we are women and have many problems, we would be valuable in such meetings. If we participated, I am sure it would have a lot of positive impacts on the effectiveness of aid in the community.

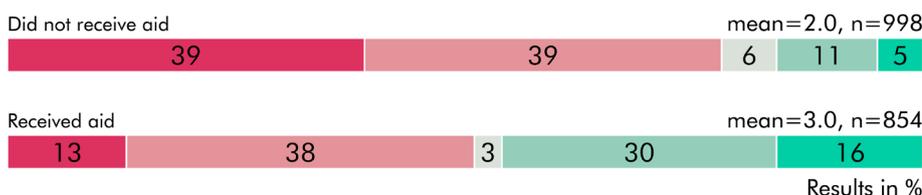
– woman in Kunduz, who received a one-off aid distribution



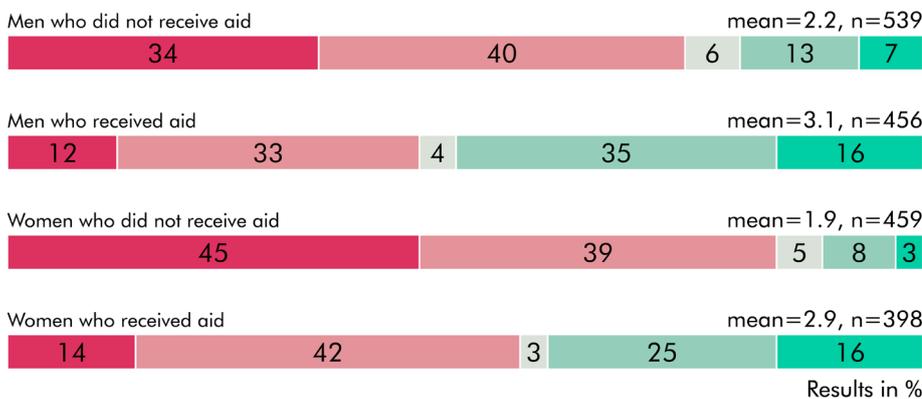
It doesn't matter if we tell anyone because no one can do anything about it [reports of corruption]. This is just the society we are in and we have no choice but to accept it.

– man in Khost, who received aid multiple times

Are aid and services provided in a fair way in your community?

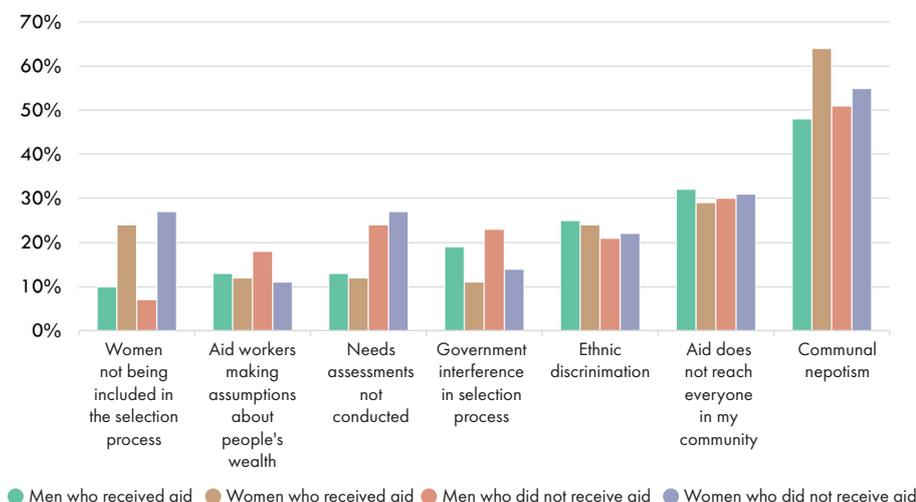


● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely



● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely

What are, in your opinion, the three main reasons why aid and services cannot be provided in a fair way? (n=1,897)



Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

Community leaders are put in precarious positions

Reports of corrupt practices in aid targeting emerged in our discussions in March 2023. We wanted to dig deeper, so we spoke to community leaders to gauge their perspectives. Views were mixed. Many admitted there are corrupt leaders who purposely select their family and friends for assistance. Yet others felt that community leaders are in a difficult position, as they too are part of the vulnerable population they are being asked to support.

Community leaders often reach their positions through kinship rather than selection by community members. As a result, many households doubt that community leaders identify aid recipients fairly. Community leaders acknowledged this as the reason they are blamed by households who are not selected.

Community leaders also mentioned that the number of people aid organisations can support is often much lower than the number of people in need. As a result, many households are missed, and community leaders take the blame. Most community leaders we spoke to felt concerns around nepotism were justified, given the vulnerability of their own families and friends. Although anecdotes about corruption by community leaders are yet to be verified, there is no doubt that widespread vulnerability, paired with a lack of transparency around targeting and reduced funding for aid, fuel people's negative perceptions of fairness.



Key findings: transparency in the selection process

- People name corruption of community leaders and nepotism as barriers to aid access, and stress that they lead to negative perceptions of fairness.
- People want more transparency, and more community members to be involved in the selection of aid recipients. Open community dialogue around targeting would also improve perceptions of fairness and transparency, especially given funding cuts and subsequent reductions in service coverage. Community leaders feel they are in a difficult position, having to support the identification of aid recipients when their own families are also vulnerable.
- Working more consistently with women's groups could help aid organisations identify and reach vulnerable women.

“

Of course, we have problems in the village because no one trusts local leaders. They think we are thieves, and they think we only select our families. Though it is sometimes true that we select our families, this is because we are trying to be responsible and help those in need. Our families are in need too sometimes. It has just become a habit for local people to criticise local leaders.

– man in Kunduz, community leader

“

I think it is very hard on us [local leaders] because people have lost their trust in us. There are always too many people who need help and we can't help everyone. I have been a local leader for 14 years, and no one has thanked me once.

– man in Kunduz, community leader

“

Each and every member of the community thinks we are thieves. I am a local leader and have poor relatives, such as my sister and uncle. My brother and sister suffer from hunger and poverty and I'm in a position to help them. If I don't help them, that is shameful for me; how can I choose others before I help my family?

– man in Balkh, community leader

“

Look, when aid is trying to cover only 200 families, we have the right to select our relatives because they also suffer from poverty. I think we have the right because we are local leaders, we have the right to do it. It is not a crime; my relatives are living in the same area.

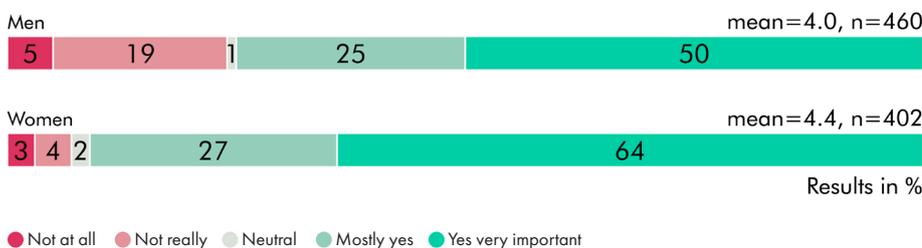
– man in Herat, community leader

Women rely on informal networks for information about available aid, reducing access

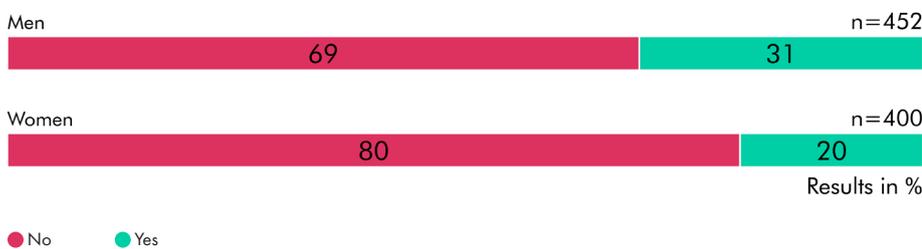
“We only get information from our local people and our neighbours. If they are talking about it, then we can find out.” – Woman in Nangarhar, who received a one-off aid distribution

Women in Afghanistan have high expectations when it comes to accessing reliable information about aid, even more so than men. For example, 91% of women who receive aid say it is important to know how long they will receive it, compared to 75% of men. This may be because women in most Afghan households are responsible for managing household finances and buying, stocking, and preparing food, and seek this information to plan ahead. But only 27% of women know how and where to register for humanitarian aid or services, compared to 47% of men, and women are less aware (20%) of how long aid will last than men (31%). This is concerning, especially for women-headed households who largely depend on aid.

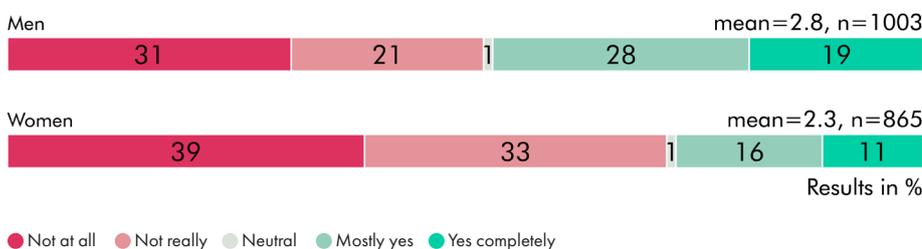
Is it important to you that you know how long your aid and services will last?



Do you know how long your aid and services will last?



Do you feel informed about how and where to register for humanitarian aid or services?



Qualitative discussions reflect the same reality. Women participants consistently mentioned feeling unable to directly access information about aid and having to rely on informal social networks. Women interviewed in Nangarhar, Kabul, Balkh, and Kunduz provinces said they rely on their husbands, immediate family members, or neighbours. Women in Nangarhar also said they rely on one another and their local community to identify opportunities to access aid. Women with no or limited access to such networks are more likely to be left out, including widows and women-headed households. One participant in Balkh said that being a widow means she is more isolated, and the only way to receive information about aid is through her brother.

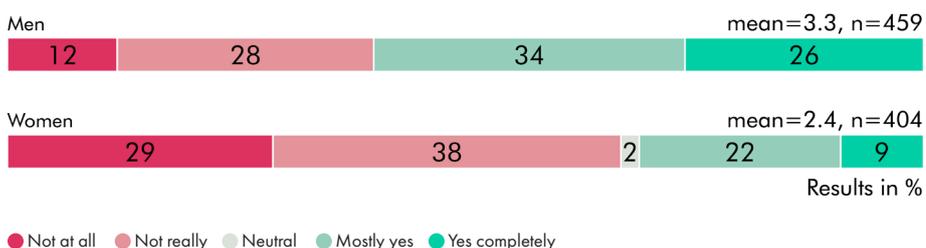
Although qualitative discussions show that men also rely on their social networks to get information about aid, men’s ability to inhabit more social spaces, such as mosques, or simply being able to meet other men in the street, increases their chances of hearing about such opportunities. The many restrictions imposed on women by the de facto authorities since 2021,⁸ confine most of them to domestic spaces occupied by their immediate networks.

Qualitative discussions also revealed other barriers. Most men and women interviewed in Kunduz and Nangarhar saw their community elders as the most knowledgeable figures in their community. However, some felt that elders do not always inform the population about available aid, so that they can prioritise people from their own networks.

Women selected for aid feel less informed about aid distribution processes

While women generally face more challenges finding out about available aid, women who have received aid are also far less aware of distribution schedules than men aid recipients. Only 31% of women aid recipients have this information, as opposed to 60% of men. In qualitative discussions, women shared that they rely on phone calls or text messages from aid providers, or on their community leaders informing them of when and where to collect their aid. Nearly one in four women (23%) say that the lack of clear information makes it difficult to get assistance. Going to a distribution centre is not straightforward, as it entails navigating several barriers, especially when required to be accompanied by a male guardian or a mahram when travelling distances over 72 km.⁹ Ensuring women have clear information about upcoming distributions, with sufficient time to plan their trips and make necessary arrangements, is critical to ensuring better access.

Do you feel informed about distribution dates and times?¹⁰



Women IDPs in both rural and urban areas fare better than other groups when it comes to information: 35% feel informed about how to register for available aid and services compared to 28% of women returnees and 25% of women living in host communities. Women IDPs who receive aid are also much more informed about distribution dates and times (55%) than those among host communities (27%) and returnees (14%). Discussions with aid organisations suggest that internally displaced women may indeed be better able to access information because they live in informal settlements where aid providers are more frequently present to share information and collect feedback. This does not suggest, however, that they receive aid more regularly.

“

We don’t have information, we need to wait for surveyors to visit our community. It is hard for us to find any information [on aid] by ourselves.

– woman in Kunduz, head of household

“

I ask my brother for help; he is the one who gives me information about where I can get help for my family. If my brother doesn’t know, I don’t know who else to ask.

– widowed woman in Balkh, head of household

“

There is no specific source to get information about aid. One of my friends told me about different types of aid available and some programmes I could join. But I don’t think I have clear and reliable information.

– man in Khost, who received a one-off aid distribution

“

Our local leaders do not provide such information, even if they know. They try to keep it for their own people and don’t want us to talk to aid organisations.

– woman in Nangarhar, who received a one-off aid distribution

“

Our local imam might know, but he might not tell us too much.

– displaced man in Nangarhar

⁸ GiHA. November 2022. “Afghanistan Inter-agency rapid gender analysis.”

⁹ France 24. December 2021. “No trips for Afghan women unless escorted by male relative: Taliban.”

¹⁰ We introduced this question in September 2023, in our third round of data collection.

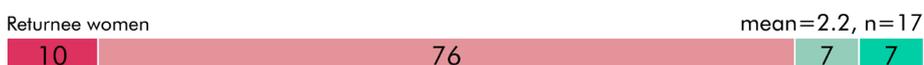
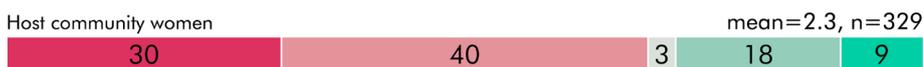
Do you feel informed about how and where to register for humanitarian aid or services?



Results in %

● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely

Do you feel informed about distribution dates and times?¹¹



Results in %

● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely



Key findings: information networks and needs

- Men and women rely heavily on social and familiar networks to source information around aid availability. They feel that community leaders are better informed, but ensure that only people in their circles are informed.
- Men have greater access to informal information because they inhabit more social spaces than women, such as mosques and in the street, where they can interact with other men. Women, however, rely on recommendations from other families or information from male family members. We can infer that women who are especially isolated, such as those heading a household, might be cut off from information sources altogether.
- Women and people with disabilities feel less informed about where, when and how to access aid, leaving them with little opportunity to plan.
- Women IDPs who are selected for aid are somewhat better informed about aid availability and distributions than those in host communities because they are often located in informal settlements, where aid providers conduct site management.

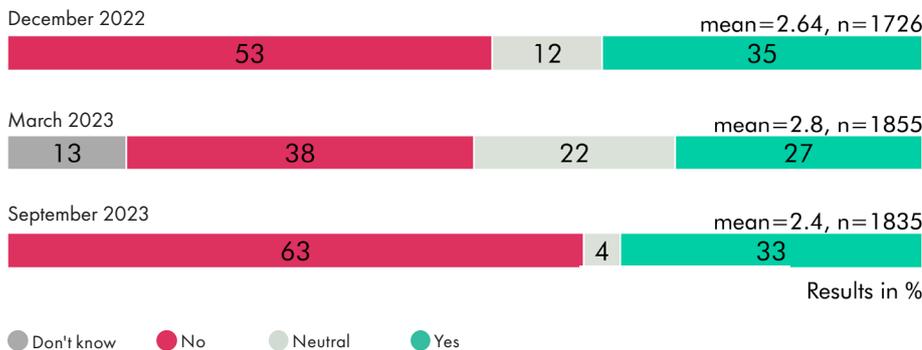
¹¹ We introduced this question in September 2023, in our third round of data collection.

Women struggle to find opportunities to participate

“Nobody spoke to us. We were just selected to get aid, then we followed their instructions.” – Woman in Balkh, who received a one-off distribution

People’s expectation to participate in aid-related decisions has been consistently high in Afghanistan.¹² Yet only one-third (33%) of our respondents say that humanitarian organisations consult them when making decisions about aid. Time-series analysis of data we collected in March shows that people’s perceptions of consultations have deteriorated, regardless of gender.

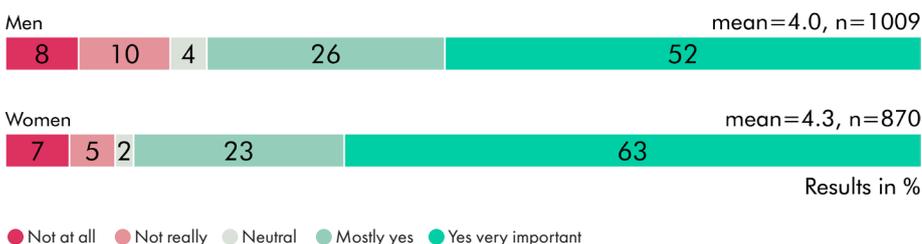
Do aid providers consult your community when deciding where, when, and how humanitarian assistance is provided?



When humanitarian needs are rising,¹³ ensuring meaningful participation from affected communities is crucial. In interviews, men and women were eager to be part of direct consultations with aid providers, especially when they concern targeting (as discussed above). Many also stated their desire to be involved in discussions about needs and appropriate types of aid, but were unsure of where and how discussions with aid providers are held.

Although gendered restrictions by the de facto authorities have made it more difficult for aid actors to include women in consultations, both men (78%) and women (86%) still expect humanitarians to consult women directly before deciding what, where, when, and how aid or services are provided. Consistent with our findings in December 2022 and March 2023, women feel more excluded than men from participating in aid discussions. Only 15% of women say they are still directly consulted by humanitarian organisations, compared with 30% of men. This was also reflected in our qualitative interviews: none of the women participants said they were ever consulted on needs in their community, who should be targeted, how aid should be distributed, or asked for feedback about how well humanitarians are doing.

Is it important for you that aid providers consult women directly in your community when deciding what, where, when, and how humanitarian aid or services are provided?



I am ready to take part in any discussion with them [aid providers]. Aid organisations must share information with us because we are unfamiliar with the area, and we don’t know where to find places to share our problems or seek different aid.

– woman in Kabul, displaced and living in an informal settlement

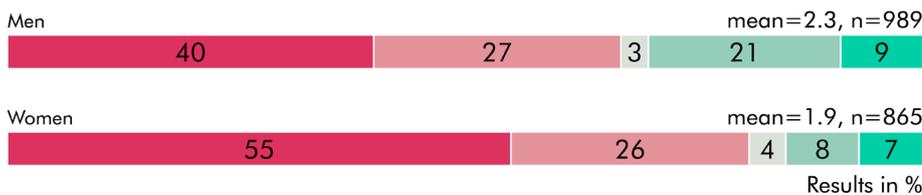


I think aid organisations must invite local people to take part in discussions. It is our right to decide the aid we need to receive.

– man in Jawzjan, who received aid multiple times

¹² Ground Truth Solutions. June 2023. “[Only a woman can understand another woman.](#)”
¹³ UNFPA. October 2023. “[Afghanistan situation report no 3.](#)”

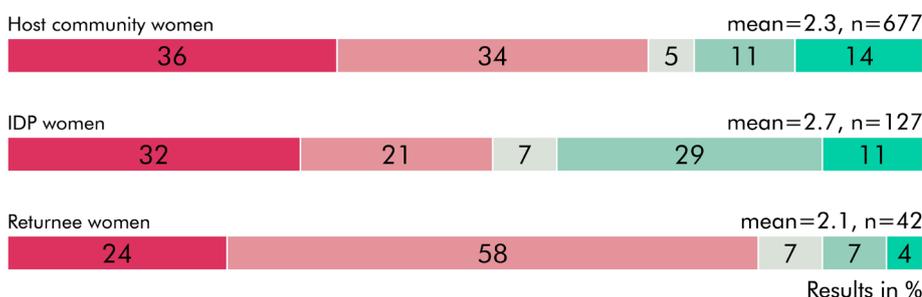
Do aid providers consult women directly in your community when deciding where, when, and how humanitarian aid or services are provided?



● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely

Internally displaced women feel more consulted (40%) than women in host communities (25%) and women returnees (11%). Again, this is likely because much humanitarian aid targets displaced communities, leading to more interaction with aid providers.

Do aid providers consult your community when deciding where, when, and how humanitarian assistance is provided?

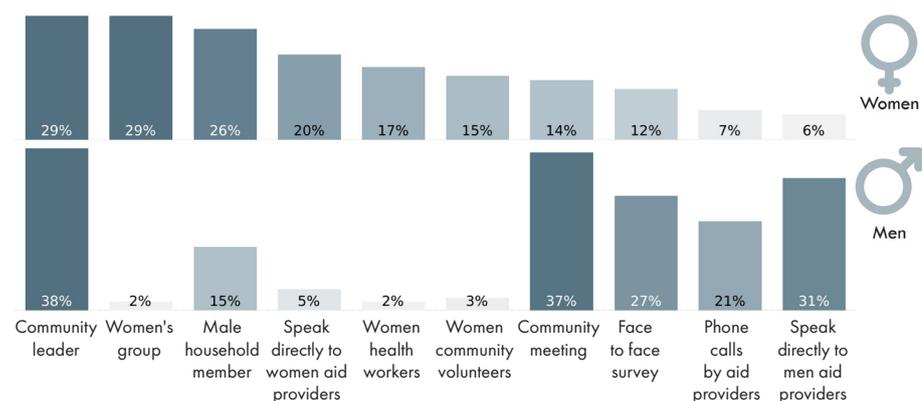


● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely

Women prefer participating in aid-related discussions through existing social and informal networks

Women and men have different preferences for how they would like to participate in aid-related discussions. While 29% of women would like to share their views through a community leader, others gave more gendered suggestions like participating through women’s groups (29%), via male family members (26%), and speaking directly with women aid providers (20%), women health workers (17%), or women community volunteers (15%). Men’s preferences were less diverse, with 38% mentioning community leaders, followed by community meetings (37%), and speaking with men aid providers directly (31%). Preference for face-to-face surveys and hotlines is higher among men (27% and 21%, respectively) than women (12% and 7%).

How would you like to participate in decisions, implementation, or monitoring of aid and services? (n=1,897)

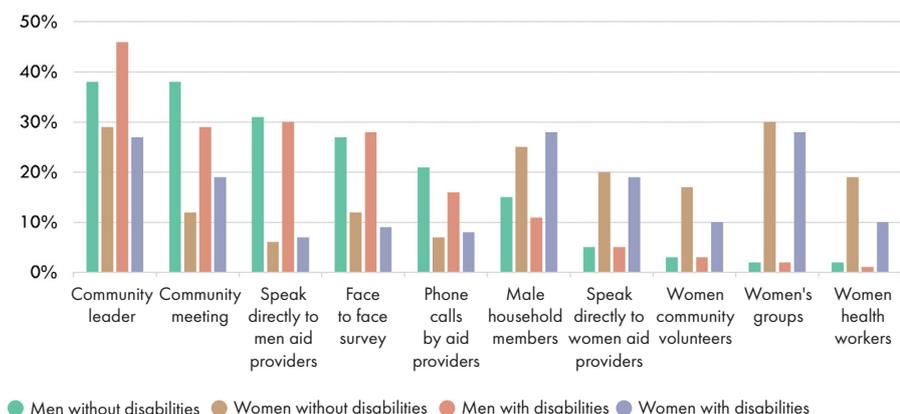


Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

Women’s preferences for engaging within their informal social networks reflect the broader social order, in which women largely depend on those familiar to them for information and advice. Women consider their immediate networks as trusted familiar spaces in which their engagement is socially accepted. Over the last two decades, international actors have consistently emphasised women’s absence from wider social spaces as a barrier to reaching and engaging with them. Instead of identifying spaces where women communicate, make decisions, and advocate for themselves, international actors may have inadvertently pushed women to engage in spaces outside their comfort zones.¹⁴ Setting up mechanisms that do not take the broader social order into account may hinder women’s ability to share open and honest feedback and undermine their use of more comfortable channels.

Women with disabilities have similar preferences to those without disabilities: they name participation through male family members (28%), women’s groups (28%), and community leaders (27%) as their preferred channels. Men with disabilities’ preferences are also somewhat consistent with those of men without disabilities, with just one discrepancy: men with disabilities have a slightly greater preference for speaking directly with community leaders (46%) over participating in community meetings (29%), compared to men without disabilities (38% for both).

How would you like to participate in decisions, implementation, or monitoring of aid and services? (n=1,897)



Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

“We are comfortable speaking to people in our community and in our family. If I have a problem I will speak to my neighbours or my brother. We know each other and will help each other.”

– displaced woman in Kabul

“I do not feel comfortable ... because it is very hard to talk to aid organisations; they don’t listen to our problems and they don’t understand us.”

– woman in Kunduz, head of household

“We are women, and we live in a traditional community. That’s why aid organisations need to visit existing Shuras, like women’s Shuras. Then we can speak properly and share information.”

– woman in Nangarhar, Shura member

¹⁴ Sultan Barakat and Gareth Wardel. October 2002. “Exploited by who? An alternative perspective on humanitarian assistance to Afghan women.”



Case study: women as interlocutors to access women

Women want women to be involved in aid targeting. One in four women respondents feel that aid is not provided fairly because women are not part of the selection process. In December 2022 and March 2023, we highlighted the need for alternative ways through which aid organisations could reach women when they could no longer send women staff to the community. Roundtable discussions with aid organisations revealed that some NGOs maintained their engagement with women through women's groups and women Shuras, or groups of elders and community representatives who acted as interlocutors between people and organisations. These mechanisms were used as entry points to access women in communities, collect information about their conditions, carry out vulnerability assessments, support aid distribution, and relay women's feedback to aid organisations.

In our recent qualitative discussions, we interviewed active women's groups in Nuristan, Nangarhar, and Balkh province. We identified these groups through national NGOs which have adopted local approaches to support vulnerable populations. These groups have been used as evidence for the following discussion.

What are women's community groups?

Women's groups or Shuras come into existence in different ways in different communities. In some locations, these groups are formed by community members themselves, while in others they are established with support from NGOs as part of their women's empowerment or livelihood interventions. The former is typically more sustainable. Groups formed by NGOs usually disband by the end of the intervention, although some choose to continue to operate in support of their communities. In qualitative interviews, women group leaders shared that they support women in their community either independently or through NGOs, in:

- vocational training (tailoring, weaving, cooking skills);
- support and management of community garden kitchens;
- information dissemination; and
- sessions about women's rights.

The women's group in a village in Balkh began as a farming collective. Members continue to train and support one another to earn an income, while also finding pathways to spread useful information to other women in the community.

The women's group in a village in Nangarhar is a Shura group for women established by the community. It identifies itself as a platform for different kinds of community support, including distribution of vaccines to children, literacy classes, and referrals to organisations providing vocational training.

The women's group in a village in Nuristan acts as a platform for women in the local community to provide advice, and hold smaller vocational training and women's rights sessions.

How do aid organisations use women's groups as interlocutors?

Some aid organisations rely on women's groups to access women in communities they are otherwise unable to reach. Group leaders told us that they support aid organisations in the identification and referral of women for certain interventions, given their ability to visit women in their homes and assess their conditions. Sometimes they also support the implementation of interventions.

Why use women's groups?

Although some aid organisations have managed to maintain their engagement with women through exemptions, many are unable to do so. Keeping abreast of women's needs and priorities is crucial and can still be done through women's groups, which was highlighted as one of the preferred participation channels for women earlier in this report. Engaging with and supporting women's groups offers a valuable opportunity to not only reach women through platforms they trust and within which they feel safe, but also build their capacity to take on leadership and decision-making roles. This may be more feasible in certain regions than others. Engaging with women's groups encourages community-led approaches to aid and development while ensuring support for women through safe and accessible pathways.



Key findings: participation in aid-related discussions

- Women feel less consulted than men. They want to provide input into who is selected for aid, what aid is provided, and how aid is distributed.
- People with disabilities feel equally excluded from consultations about aid, and also expect to be included.
- Women IDPs feel better consulted than women who are not IDPs. This is likely associated with the close oversight that aid providers have over informal settlements.
- Men and women still prefer informal and social platforms for communication. Women prefer sourcing and sharing information through their personal networks, which ensure greater security, trust, and accessibility. Men also rely on their social networks, but these tend to be greater than those of women and therefore increases men's access to information.



We worked with an organisation to help women with literacy classes. We selected and referred women from our community to participate in sessions.

– women's group lead in Nurtistan



We are women, and we can visit women's homes. They know us and we know their conditions. We have selected women in need because organisations cannot find them.

– women's group lead in Nuristan



An aid organisation wanted us to help women in our community. They wanted to get them Tazkiras [national ID cards], we helped them by informing the women, organising, and telling them about the importance of a Tazkira.

– women's group lead in Nangarhar



We have provided lots of assistance for organisations. We are women so we can visit women at home. We've made assessments and told organisations who needed aid. Aid agencies mostly focus on local leaders; they care less about women.

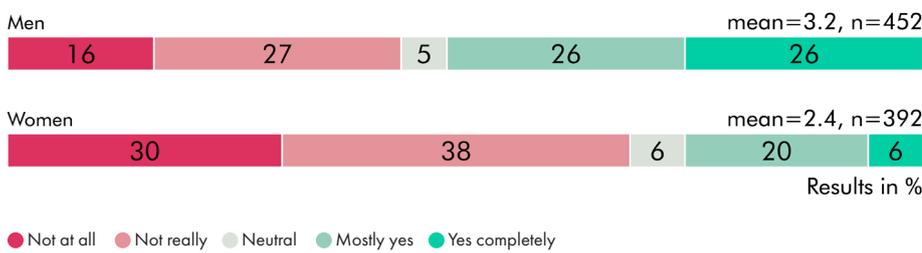
– women's group lead in Nangarhar

Women face risks when agencies ignore social norms

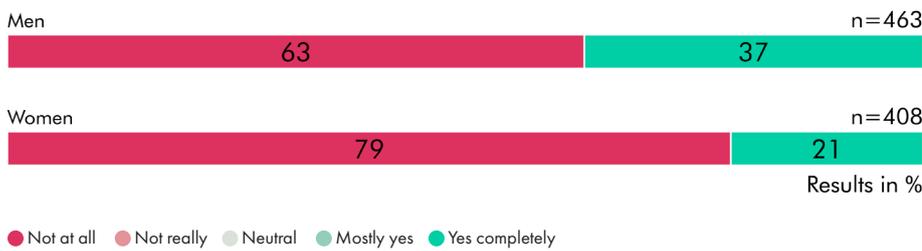
“First they [aid organisations] need to get local leaders’ permission, because women are not allowed to take part in such meetings. Participating in such discussions might create problems for women.”
 – Woman in Nangarhar, Shura member

Ensuring feedback mechanisms are accessible to women is crucial, especially since holding direct consultations with them is challenging. Despite existing channels, women are far less aware of how to give feedback about aid (26%) or how to report staff abuse or misconduct (19%) than men (52% and 34%, respectively). Women are also less likely to use aid agency mechanisms to share suggestions or concerns: only 21% have done so, in contrast to 37% of men.

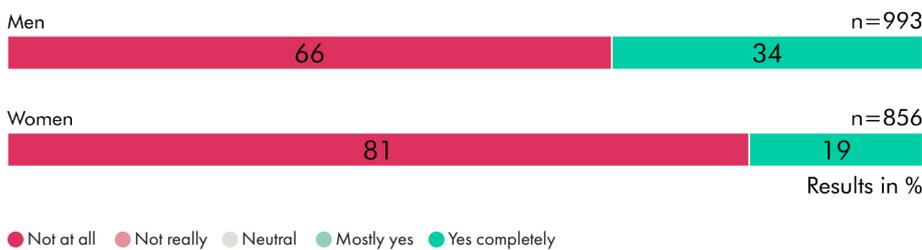
Do you know how to share suggestions or concerns with aid providers?



Have you shared a suggestion or concern about aid and services?



Do you know how to report instances of NGO staff misconduct or abuse?



While most of the population is struggling to navigate widespread food insecurity, unemployment, and loss of livelihoods, women do so under a highly patriarchal regime led by the de facto authorities, and deeply entrenched, strict gender norms. This leaves women and girls in vulnerable positions, limited in their mobility, decision-making, and overall autonomy. They face greater risk of physical and emotional abuse, whether at home or in public, and a constant need to behave in a certain socially acceptable way to avoid rumours that could lead to social or familial dishonour.

Women we spoke with shared that when aid organisations engage with them without seeking permission (and oversight) from their local community elders, this exposes them to several risks. For example, if a woman is seen interacting with men or with anyone from outside their local community, this risks bringing her dishonour and could result in her exclusion from social circles or retribution by family members in the form of physical or emotional domestic violence. These risks may also indirectly affect her family and children, who too can suffer from stigma and social exclusion.

Women's interactions in settings beyond their homes, expression of opinions, and participation in decision-making are all conditional on approval from male household or community leadership. Women's current conditions, especially those of rural women, are an extension of those women faced during the previous Taliban regime (1996–2001). Women and girls are controlled by restrictive codes of behaviour, such as gender segregation in public spaces, and the association of female virtue with family honour.¹⁵ While women do not necessarily agree with these restrictions or the rationale behind them, many fear for their own and their family's safety and must comply. In interviews, women said that aid providers should understand these conditions and take them into account when planning consultations. They said that seeking permission from local leaders would allow them to engage with aid organisations in a safer, less stressful manner. Qualitative interviews also showed that women were open to any form of participation, as long as permission or approval was granted by their local leaders and their husbands. This was consistent across locations, but most prominent among rural participants.



Key findings: feedback about aid

- Women welcome opportunities to speak with aid providers, but considerable safeguarding concerns remain if permission has not been requested from local leaders and their husbands. They say that their safety can be threatened when organisations attempt to communicate and consult with women without the permission of community elders and their husbands. They also speak of “inappropriate” social contact when travelling to distribution points when a mahram is unavailable; and when engaging with men at distribution sites.
- The majority of aid recipients, irrespective of gender, have limited awareness of where to and how to provide feedback. Men are more likely to have provided feedback than women.



Aid organisations need to consider our cultural values and beliefs. It would be better for women employees to come and talk to us in our community. They should not hold meetings in other locations, because we cannot travel there. If they want to speak to us, they need to come to us.

– woman in Nuristan, Shura member



Women face a lot of problems because this regime prevents us from doing many things. We want to support women but do not always feel safe doing so. If we have the support of community leaders, it will be much better.

– woman in Nangarhar



The most important thing these aid organisations can do is inform our local leaders about meeting with women, because this would make it much easier for women to participate. Our participation is very much needed and I believe it would positively impact the aid distribution process.

– woman in Kunduz, who received a one-off aid distribution

¹⁵ Valentine M Moghadam, Women's Studies International Forum. January-February 2002. “Patriarchy, the Taliban, and politics of public space in Afghanistan.”

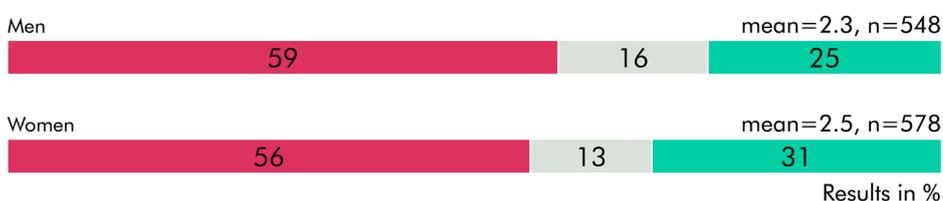
Lack of women aid workers causes safety concerns

“We are not comfortable receiving aid from men, but currently we have no choice. They were polite but it would be better to receive it from a woman.” – Woman in Kunduz, head of household

Only 26% of women and 29% of men find it easy to access humanitarian aid. This remains relatively unchanged since our first round of data collection in autumn 2022. Women feel safer when travelling to or at distribution sites compared to earlier in 2023, which is perhaps unsurprising given people generally feel more at ease during the summer months, and given that the relative stabilisation of the country has resulted in increased road safety. But the prohibition of women aid workers in the response remains the top safety concern for 40% of women, followed by distributions being held in locations far from their homes (37%).

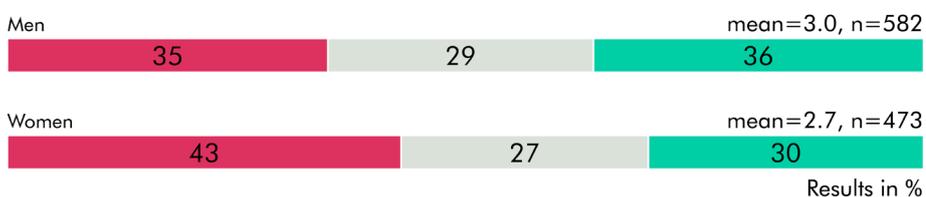
How easy or difficult do you find it to access humanitarian assistance?

December 2022



● Difficult ● Neutral ● Easy

March 2023



● Difficult ● Neutral ● Easy

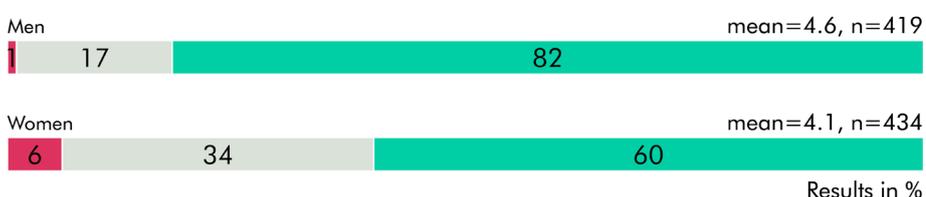
September 2023



● Difficult ● Neutral ● Easy

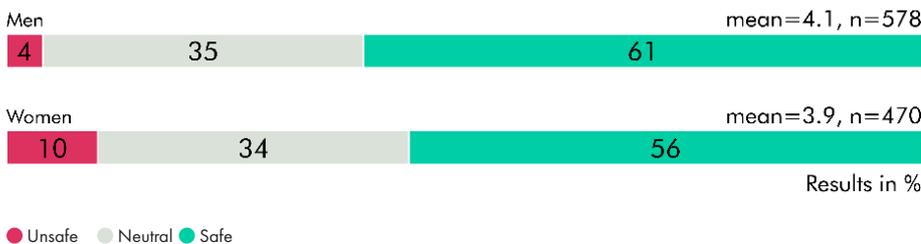
How safe do you feel accessing humanitarian assistance (travelling to, accessing distribution sites)?

December 2022

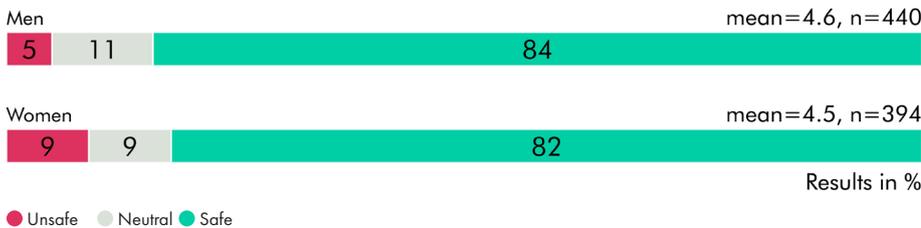


● Unsafe ● Neutral ● Safe

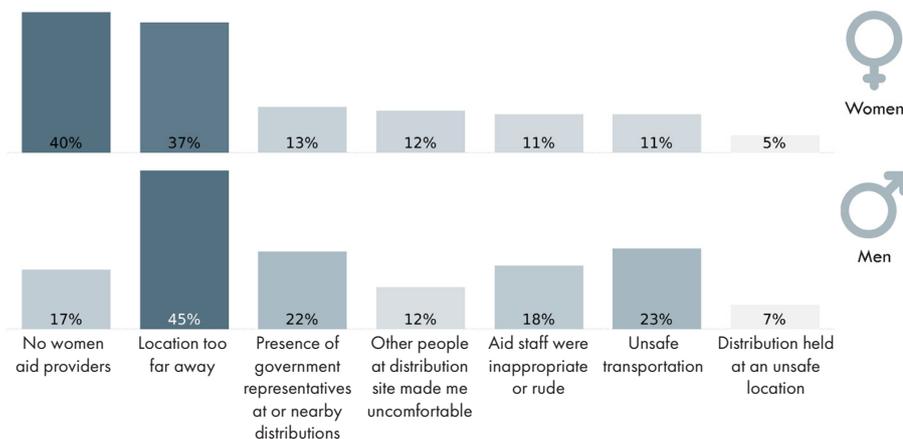
March 2023



September 2023



In your opinion what are the three main safety concerns when accessing humanitarian aid or services? (n=872)



Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

Women without mahrams face increased risks travelling to and accessing aid distribution points

Consistent with what women told us in March 2023, long distances to distribution points are a key barrier to women receiving aid. Since December 2021, women in Afghanistan have been required to be accompanied by a mahram when travelling distances greater than 72 km.¹⁶ Although most women can adhere to this requirement, those who do not have a mahram sometimes choose to travel alone, which causes considerable stress over potential harassment or abuse during the journey, particularly around check-points. Some women called for distributions to be held in nearby locations, so they can avoid having to worry about transportation availability or costs.

Concerns about engaging with men at distribution sites persist, but have reduced since the start of 2023

Women still voiced concerns at receiving aid from men aid providers, but less prominently than those we interviewed earlier this year. In March 2023, women were more openly and widely concerned about the potential consequences of interacting with men they did not know. Yet many this time said they faced no issues while collecting aid, and that their needs had been largely considered, despite the absence of women aid staff.

“

We have no access to transportation and the distribution site was located very far away. It is hard for a woman to travel that far alone. It would be better to have access to transportation; then we would have no problems going to the distribution.

– woman in Balkh, head of household

“

I think they [aid providers] need to select distribution sites which are accessible to the community. As women, traveling to faraway locations to collect aid is difficult and dangerous.

– woman in Balkh, who received aid multiple times

“

I didn't face any problems receiving aid. I went to collect it myself and it was fine, there was no issue.

– widowed woman in Balkh

“

I want to share an important negative point about distribution sites. There was no shade available and we were all suffering a lot from the hot weather.

– man who received aid in Jawzjan

¹⁶ France 24. December 2021. “No trips for Afghan women unless escorted by male relative: Taliban.”

For example, an organisation providing aid across eight provinces shared that despite the prohibition, they were able to adapt their procedures to allow women to receive aid before distributing to men. Aid providers also reported that they had started using more gender-segregated spaces for aid distribution, with curtains around exposed areas to ensure women's privacy and separation from the men waiting outside. This may also be a sign of women's resignation to food insecurity and various emergencies hitting the country, and their having had to accept being served by men humanitarian workers.

Disorganised and crowded distributions are access barriers for men

When asked about aid access barriers, 32% of men mention crowded or unorganised distribution sites, compared to 13% of women. Some men in qualitative interviews explained this is due to hot weather, which can lead to dehydration, especially for people in poor health, noting many distributions lack water and sanitation facilities.

Distributions occur during summer months when the average temperature is over 35 degrees. In most cases, men need to wait outside distribution centres before they can collect assistance, sometimes for several hours. This has led to heat stroke, dehydration, and sunburn. Some men interviewed in Jawzjan and Khost shared that these sites have no shaded areas, leaving them and their families in the sun all day.

Sites draw large crowds, which not only include those selected but also local community members hoping to get assistance. They say crowds and hot weather lead to frustration, and sometimes high tensions and violence.



Key findings: women's access to aid

- Access to humanitarian aid is still constrained for both men and women. Women report feeling safer than earlier in 2023, likely due to our discussions with them occurring during summer. But safety concerns persist, including the prohibition on women staff for NGOs, and long distances to distribution points.
- Women without mahrams face increased risks travelling to and accessing aid distribution points.
- Women still have concerns about interacting with men while receiving aid, however not as strongly as earlier in 2023.
- Women's safeguarding concerns at distribution sites have reduced as aid providers have introduced more gender-sensitive conditions, such as prioritising women in distributions and allocating closed gender-segregated spaces for women and men. These considerations cannot compensate for the absence of women staff. However, many women have accepted the status quo of being served by men staff at distribution centres because they need humanitarian aid and there are no other options.
- Unorganised or crowded distributions are key access barriers for men.



We were all very uncomfortable due to the hot weather and the lack of proper shade. It was very difficult to wait there. It would have been better for aid distributors to call fewer aid recipients for the day. It is very hard to wait in such a place when there is no food, shade or other facilities.

– man who received aid in Balkh



The aid distributors were very polite, and they ensured people took their turn, but the biggest issue was the excessive number of people and trying to control the crowd. It was very difficult.

– man in Khost, who received aid multiple times



We need different distribution sites to prevent the rush and crowds. The distribution area needs to be away from the road; then we would be much safer.

– man in Khost, who received a one-off aid distribution



There was a big problem during the aid distribution; we were unable to manage in the crowd. We struggled to reach the distribution point because people from the community were also trying to get aid. It was dangerous for people.

– Man in Jawzjan, who received aid multiple times



I really didn't feel good or comfortable at the distribution site. There was no bathroom, the weather was hot, and there were large crowds. But if we don't wait, we won't receive aid from them [aid providers]. So we have no choice but to wait.

– displaced man in Kabul

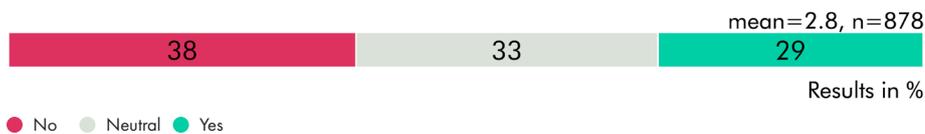
Women favour broader coverage and longer-term support

“Receiving a lot of aid at once is unhelpful, and most items will be wasted. Even if we receive a lot of aid at one time, my brothers will sell the items for their own pocket money.” – Woman in Kunduz, who received aid multiple times

Time-series analysis shows that people’s ability to meet their needs varies depending on the period. Only 9% of the people we surveyed in March 2023 were able to meet their critical needs with the aid they received, but 39% and 29% said the same in September 2023 and December 2022, respectively. March marks the peak of harsh winter conditions for people in Afghanistan, limiting their capacity to make ends meet. This is especially true for internally displaced people living in informal settlements. In qualitative interviews, people specifically mentioned shelter, cash, food, and clothes as their top unmet needs in winter. While many technical experts believe cash in itself is not a “need”, it reflects the multi-dimensional needs that households face. No household identifies just one single need, but rather a mix of needs that may be addressed through multi-purpose cash distribution. Women have also noted in previous qualitative discussions that their specific needs (e.g., menstrual pads, WASH-related needs) were often not met through distributions, which may explain their willingness to purchase these items on their own through by obtaining cash. Interviewees and focus group participants highlighted that families, when provided cash, allocated it to paying back debt, covering utilities, and preparing for winter months with coal, wood, clothes, food provisions, and health expenses.

Do the aid and services you receive meet your most important needs?

December 2022



March 2023

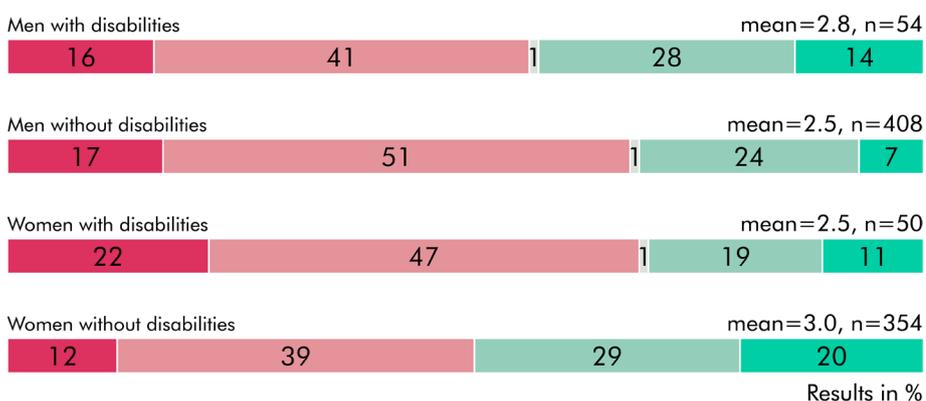


September 2023



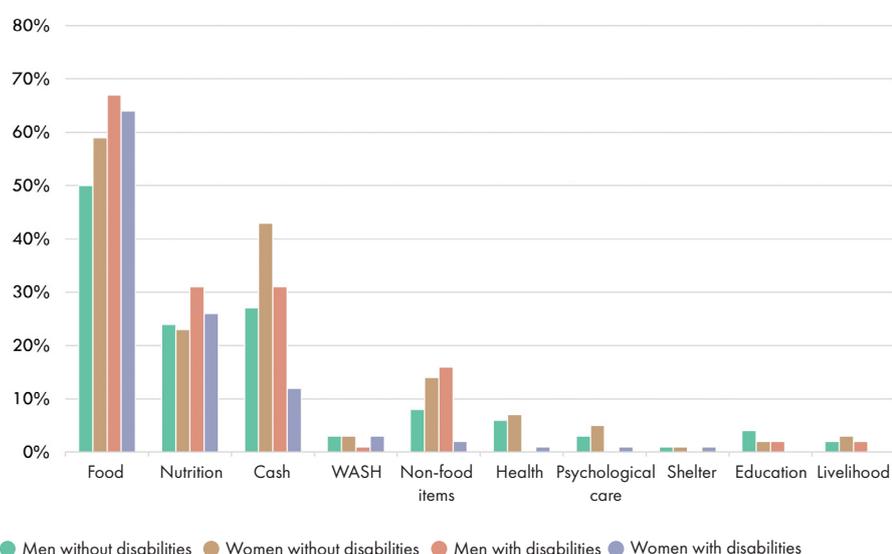
Fewer women with disabilities (30%) feel able to cover their most important needs than both men with disabilities (42%) and women without disabilities (49%). Food is the top unmet need for both women with disabilities (64%) and women without (59%). However, more women without disabilities mention cash (43%) as a top unmet need than women with disabilities (12%).

Do the aid and services you receive meet your most important needs?



● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely

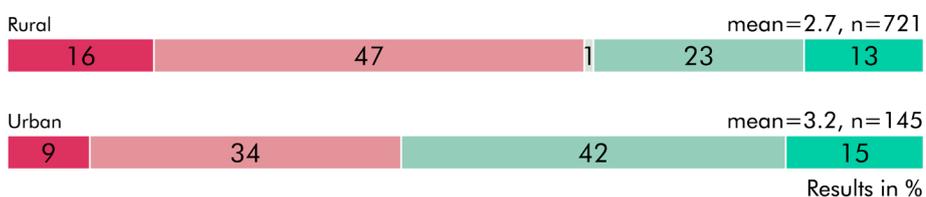
What are your three most important needs that are not currently met? (n=1,897)



Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

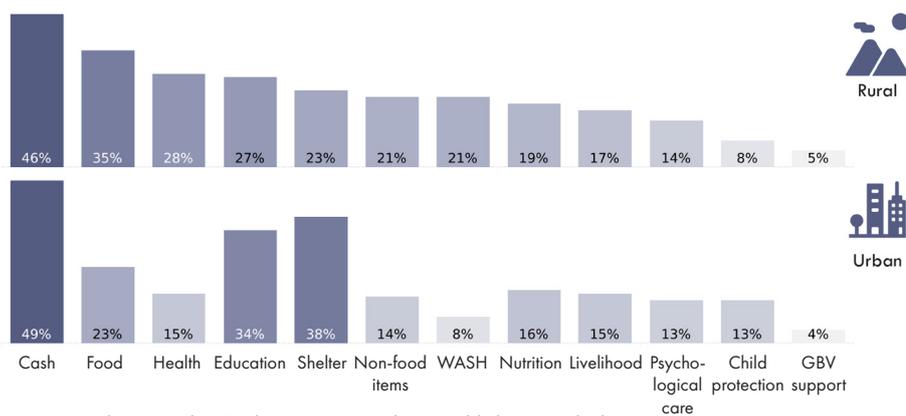
People in urban areas are generally better off, with two-thirds (67%) able to meet their needs compared to just one-third (36%) in rural areas. This may be somewhat explained by better access to labour markets and job opportunities in urban areas, as well as the presence of humanitarian actors in urban areas. Further, urban areas have better infrastructures including roads which facilitate the movement of food items from production areas in addition to having a higher concentration of markets which leads to more competition and lower prices. Both groups mention multipurpose cash as their preferred means of assistance (49% urban and 46% rural), but people in rural areas have more diverse needs. These needs could be met with food and non-food distribution, as well as services that may be inaccessible in rural areas, among which people include food (35%), health (28%), and education (27%), whereas people in urban areas emphasise shelter (38%) and education (34%).

Do the aid and services you receive meet your most important needs?



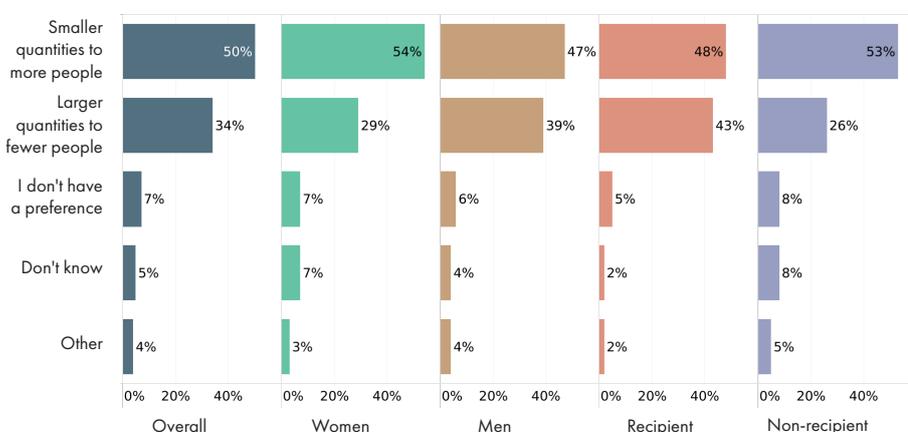
● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely

What are your three most important needs that are not currently met? (n=1,897)



Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

Should aid agencies prioritise giving more people smaller quantities to increase coverage, or fewer people larger quantities to increase impact? (n=1,897)



Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

Women and people not receiving aid want assistance in smaller quantities but for more people, whereas men and those who have received aid prefer the opposite

Aid providers face an impossible decision when asked to prioritise quantity over wider coverage, or vice versa. So, we asked communities for their input. Half of the people we spoke to feel that aid providers should prioritise giving more people smaller quantities, to increase coverage; one-third (34%) prefer giving fewer people larger amounts to maximise impact; while 7% have no preference. Women are more in favour of broader coverage (54%) than men (47%), while men show a higher preference for increased quantities (39%) than women (29%). Preference for larger individual amounts is also more common among those who receive aid (43%) than those who do not (26%).

In qualitative interviews, we asked people about another trade-off – smaller transfers for longer durations or larger transfers for shorter ones. All participants who had received aid in the previous six months valued the benefits of receiving continuous aid, rather than one-off distributions. Many said they preferred to receive food baskets regularly for longer periods, even if provided in smaller quantities. This preference was particularly prevalent among women, who said managing smaller amounts of food was easier. Larger amounts of food are more difficult to store, can spoil, and are more visible to extended family members who may then demand a portion.



It is better to receive smaller amounts of aid, but over longer periods. Receiving a lot of aid at one time is not very useful because food items go off, and the money might be wasted. If we receive it over longer periods, this will help us to better use the aid.

– displaced woman in Nangarhar

Men's views were mostly the opposite, perhaps due to their lack of involvement in household work like cooking rendering them less aware of which foods can be stored and for how long. Their responses were also shaped by their experiences of collecting aid. Many men said they preferred receiving larger amounts of aid at once instead of visiting distribution points several times. They agreed that travelling and waiting at distribution points to receive aid was a bigger burden. It is therefore important to consult both men and women before providing aid; only asking men does not necessarily capture women's experiences or preferences.



Key findings: aid relevance

- Men and women say that aid does not meet all their needs, and they find it even more difficult during winter months.
- Cash and food are the top unmet needs among the population, with people in rural areas and those with disabilities struggling the most.
- People show a high preference for broader coverage, even if individual amounts are less. Women and people not receiving aid have a higher preference for wider coverage than men and those receiving aid.
- Most women prefer aid provided in smaller portions over longer periods than in one large quantity. This allows them to manage aid more efficiently and prevents family from selling aid and food going off. Men prefer the opposite because it means they must only collect aid once, instead of going to distributions more often.



I think receiving aid in a large amount is better ... We won't need to wait for the next wave of aid and we won't need multiple visits to distribution sites.

– man in Khost, who received one-off aid distribution



[Receiving aid one time] will save us time because we won't need to visit the distribution site every month. The women can manage the food items in a good way.

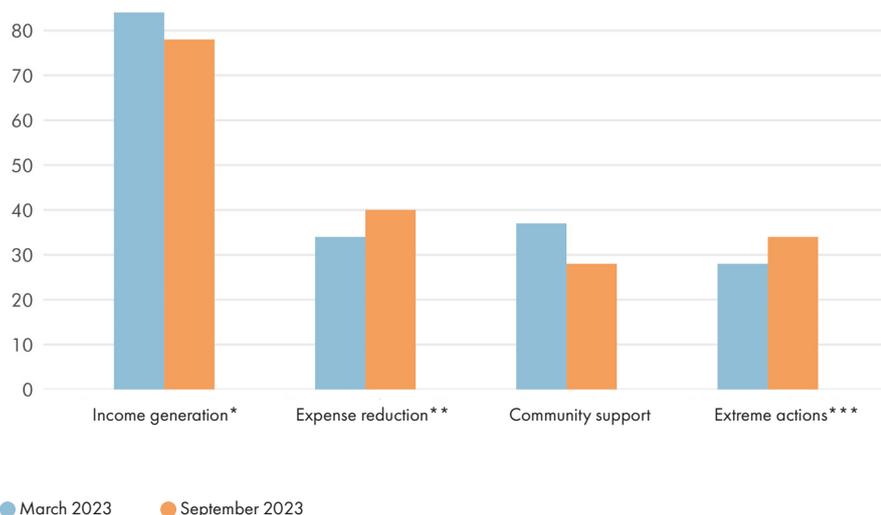
– man in Khost, who received aid multiple times

Parents resort to early marriage of daughters and sending sons to work as coping mechanisms

“We are Pashtuns; we are ready to die for our daughters and sisters ... but we have economic problems; we need to feed all our children.”
 – Man in Khost, who received a one-off aid distribution

People say they cope in different ways when they are out of resources to meet the needs of their families. Between March 2023 and September 2023, there is minimal difference in the use of “extremely negative” coping strategies like marrying daughters off earlier than planned or sending children to work. However, analysis of the two sets of responses combined shows that certain groups are at a higher risk of resorting to such mechanisms than others. Displaced people are more likely to adopt these mechanisms (43%) than members of host communities (32%). People with disabilities are at a higher risk of using these mechanisms (43%) than those without (32%). And rural residents are twice as likely (36%) as those in urban areas (23%).

How do you and your household cope when you are not able to meet everyone’s needs in the family? (n= 1,897)



- * Income generation strategies include moving provinces, selling belongings, and taking loans.
- ** Expense reduction strategies include skipping meals and postponing health treatment.
- *** Extreme strategies include child work and marrying off daughters earlier than planned.

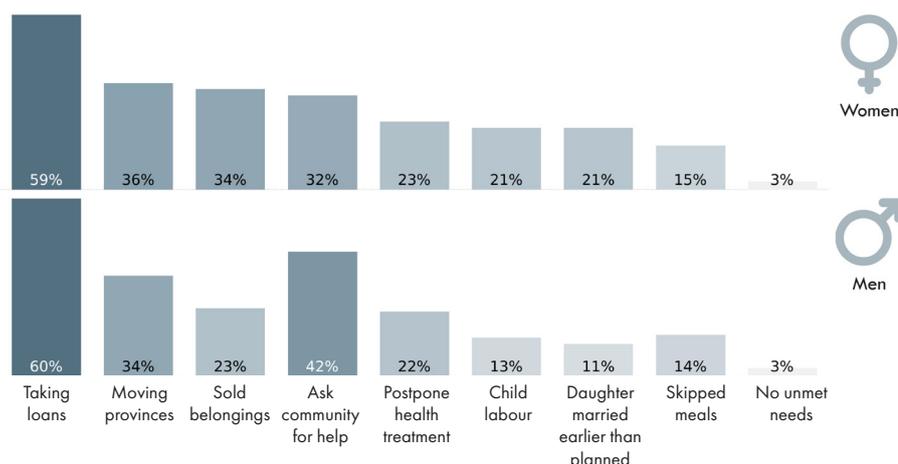
Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

Comparing people’s responses from March and September 2023 also reveals a decrease in the use of strategies that aim to secure more income for the household, like moving provinces to find employment, taking loans, or selling belongings.¹⁷ This may be explained in part by the fact that more people report assistance meeting their most important needs in September 2023, and the positive correlation between receiving humanitarian assistance and a reduction in negative coping mechanisms. Reliance on community support also declined significantly between March 2023 and September 2023. Disaggregating the data by urban–rural residential status shows that this decline in reliance on community support is driven by rural areas, it has fallen by about 10% since last winter. This suggests that people are recovering from the severe winter conditions which often put people in a more vulnerable state.

¹⁷ This is based on combining the proportions of respondents who reported moving provinces, taking loans, or selling belongings in both rounds. In September 2023, we saw a clear fall in the proportion of respondents resorting to these strategies compared to earlier in the year.

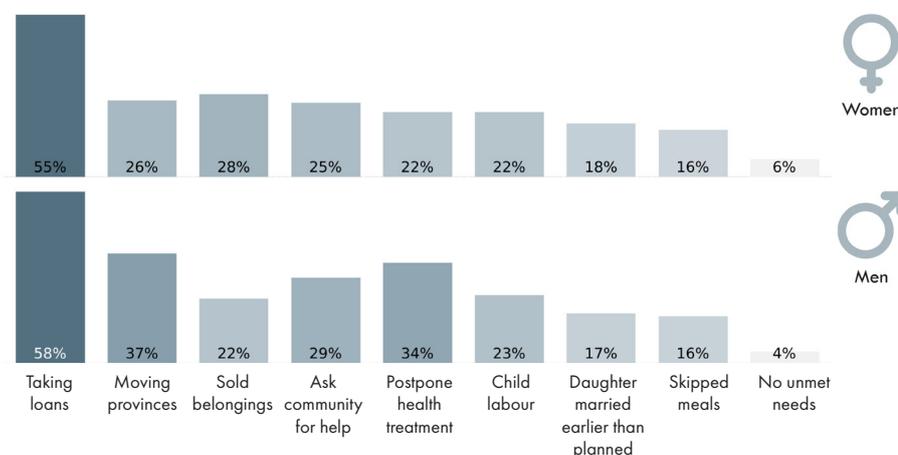
How do you and your household cope when you are not able to meet everyone's needs in the family?

March 2023 (n=1,855)



Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

September 2023 (n=1,897)



Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

Reductions in negative coping strategies are consistent with the latest food security projections by the Integrated Food Security Phase (IPC) classification, which predicts that many households across Afghanistan will have better food security by the end of 2023.¹⁸ Eight percent of the population are estimated to move from famine conditions (phase five)¹⁹ to emergency levels of food insecurity (phase four),²⁰ particularly in Ghor and Nuristan provinces, and 39% are estimated to remain in phase two.²¹ If these predicted improvements in food security materialise, reliance on negative coping strategies should reduce.

In qualitative interviews, people shared their insight into some extreme coping strategies and conditions which push people to use them. Some said that people view these mechanisms as a last resort, and only rely on them after depleting all their other resources, like selling their belongings or taking as many loans as they can. People mentioned taking children out of school, marrying off daughters earlier than planned, and sending their sons abroad undocumented to earn an income. Households with no men caregivers or whose caregivers are unable to find jobs are more at risk of taking their sons out of school, engaging them in child labour, or sending them to neighbouring countries to seek income opportunities. In northern provinces, it was very common for families to send sons abroad to try and earn an income when alternative income opportunities were not available.

“

One of my grandchildren has gone to Iran. He has now lived there for three years. He works in Iran, but there is little work there; people are forced to work for little money. In the three years he has been there, he has only sent back AFN 20,000 (USD 260).

– community leader in Badakhshan

“

My son works with his cart; my second son sells plastic bags ... but my sons earn less than AFN 100 (USD 1.30) per day.

– woman in Kunduz, head of household

“

Some people have had to deprive their children of education so they can work. These children do tough jobs because they need to support their family. Even my brothers have left school to help me support the family because we suffer from economic problems.

– man in Khost, who received a one-off aid distribution

¹⁸ IPC. May 2023. “Afghanistan: Acute food insecurity situation for April 2023 and projection for May – October 2023.”

¹⁹ At IPC phase 5, households have an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution, and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident. (For famine classification, an area needs to have extreme critical levels of acute malnutrition and mortality).

²⁰ At IPC phase 4, households either have large food consumption gaps which are reflected as very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality, or are able to mitigate large food consumption gaps but only by employing emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation.

²¹ At IPC phase 2, households have minimally adequate food consumption but are unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures without engaging in stress-coping strategies.

Families are marrying their daughters earlier as a coping mechanism and a form of protection

A coping mechanism that people mentioned consistently in March and September 2023 is marrying daughters earlier than planned, in exchange for money to support household needs. Anecdotes suggest that this practice is common among households unable to meet their basic needs, as it allows them to receive a dowry. Depending on family negotiations, a dowry can traditionally range from USD 1,000 to 100,000. Although it is not part of Islamic practice, it is a cultural norm in some locations. For this reason, if a girl is culturally eligible for marriage she offers her family an opportunity for financial gain. There are also instances of girls being betrothed to a family before they are 14 years old, in return for payment, with the agreement that at a certain age she will move to her in-laws house.

In most cases, families will already have plans to marry their daughters before they reach 20 years old, and more commonly so in rural areas. Agreeing to marry them off a few years earlier allows families to secure additional finances sooner, to help them cover household needs and reduce the number of dependents for whom the family is responsible. Families usually marry their daughters off to richer men who they know can feed them and provide them with a home. However, it is important to note that many girls continue to face serious protection concerns in their new households, such as gender-based violence, sexual assault, and mistreatment by their new in-laws.

Some households use early marriage of their daughters as a protection mechanism. Households struggling to meet their needs or living in dangerous conditions resort to early marriage in order to, as they explain, protect their daughters. For example, one displaced woman in Kabul shared that most of her neighbours married their daughters earlier because they felt the situation in informal settlements was not safe or appropriate for girls and they saw marriage as a way for their daughters to leave these settlements. In qualitative interviews, women in informal settlements explained that living in tents puts girls at a risk of sexual harassment or rape, and they have seen early marriage as a means to protect them. In addition, marrying a daughter allows resources to be shared among fewer household members. A man in Jawzjan also felt that marrying off a daughter earlier, into a richer household, would ensure she did not go hungry.

“

I am a school teacher, but I have few students now; even the students that are here are not attentive. They don't attend classes because they have to work to support their families. They don't have time to study or do their homework.

– man in Jawzjan, who received a one-off aid distribution

“

Most teenage boys are migrating to Iran. They face a lot of problems on their journeys, but there is no choice. Their families have sold their land and their houses, and this is all that is left.

– man who received aid in Jawzjan

“

Families now have no other choice but to marry their daughters at an earlier age. We have a tradition in which parents charge money when accepting the marriage; they do this to support the remaining family members.

– women's group member in Balkh

“

Girls do not feel safe in tents because they might face problems and harassment. That's why most of these parents are willing to accept a premature marriage. We have no door or walls in a tent, and keeping daughters in these tents is unsafe. That's why it would be better to accept a premature marriage; it can also help us economically because we can charge a certain amount of money for our girl.

– displaced woman in Kabul

“

Some people say they are doing this [marrying daughters earlier] to protect their daughters from hunger and a bad life. It is a good way to protect girls.

– man in Jawzjan, who received a one-off aid distribution



Key findings: coping mechanisms

- Between March and September 2023, there has been little change in the proportion of people resorting to extreme coping mechanisms, including marrying daughters off earlier than planned and sending children to work.
- Displaced people were 1.6 times more likely to adopt extreme coping mechanisms than host community members, and people with disabilities were twice as likely as people with no disabilities.
- Some households who have been unable to improve their food security are using more extreme coping mechanisms like child marriage or labour because they can no longer take out loans or sell household goods.
- Commonly cited coping mechanisms included taking children out of school for paid employment (particularly boys) and allowing boys to migrate undocumented to neighbouring countries to try and earn an income.
- Early marriage for girls is still a commonly cited coping mechanism among people we surveyed. Marriage is used to support household income through a dowry, but families also explain that they hope this will ensure food and a house for their daughters.

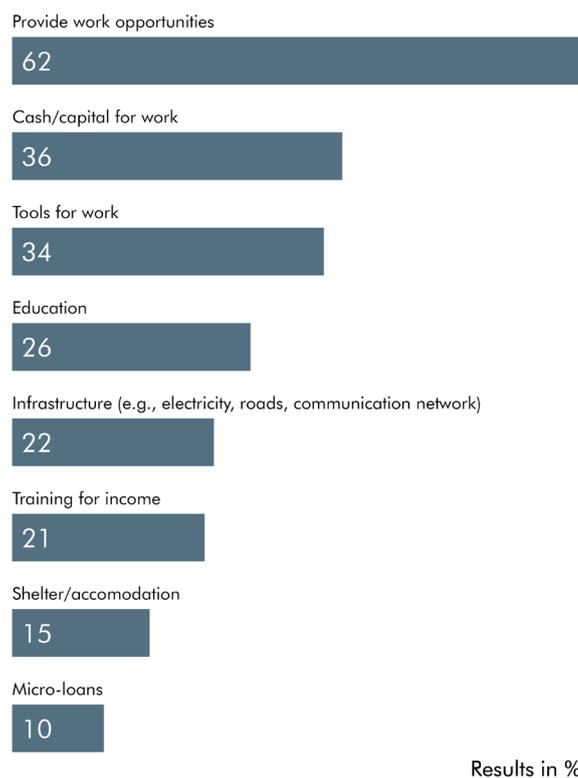
People want aid providers to prioritise resilience interventions

“It would be better to receive long-term aid through things like poultry farming, or they could build a factory in the area where we could work to support our families. Food items have no long-term effectiveness.”

– Woman in Kunduz, who received a one-off aid distribution

People in Afghanistan want interventions that are designed to help them become more resilient in the long term. Whereas the majority (84%) of those we spoke to say it is important for aid and services to help them make long-term plans, less than half (45%) feel able to do so. Overall, people want jobs (62%), cash transfers (36%), and tools for work (34%). These priorities differ across different demographics. For example, where urban residence and gender interact, urban women feel far less able to plan for the future (22%) than urban men (65%) and rural women (48%). A much higher proportion of urban women (83%) than urban men (72%) and rural women (54%) say that work would enable them to make long-term plans, likely because opportunities for women’s employment are greater in urban locations, especially in office locations and vocational trades.

What would enable you to live without aid in the future? (n=872)



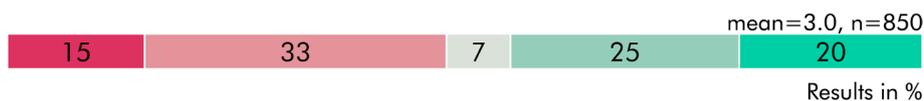
Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

Is it important to you that the aid and services you receive support you to be able to make long-term plans?



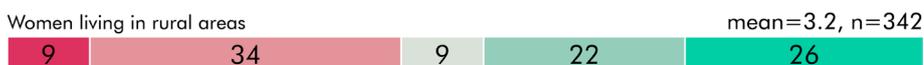
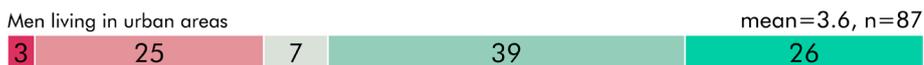
● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes very important

Do you think the aid and services in your community help you to make long-term plans?



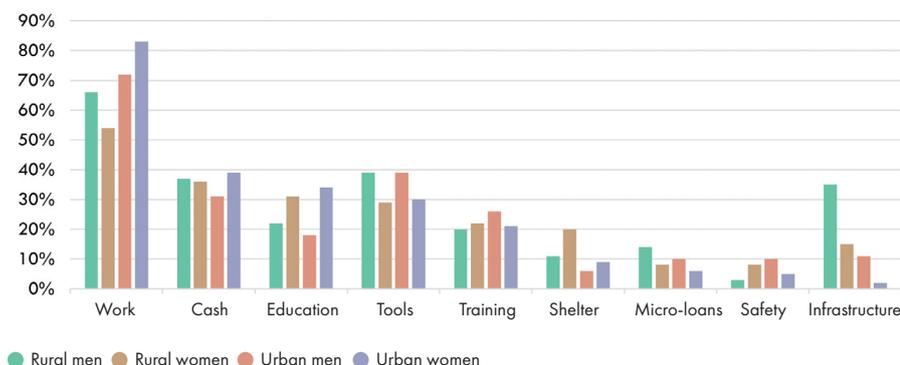
● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely

Do you think the aid and services in your community help you to make long-term plans?



● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely

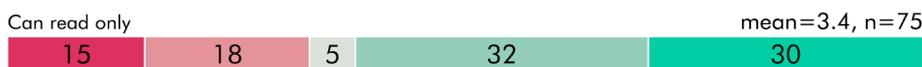
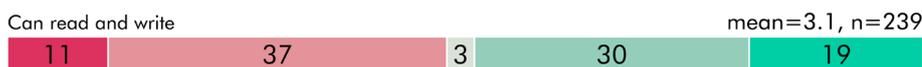
What would enable you to live without aid in the future? (n=872)



Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

Being able to read and write, or at least read, improves resilience. Nearly half (49%) of literate respondents and 62% of those who can only read say the aid and services in their community help them make long-term plans, while only 38% of respondents with lower literacy feel the same. Work remains the top priority for all respondents, regardless of literacy status, but respondents with lower literacy highlight cash (37%) and tools (36%), while those who can only read mention education as well (43%).

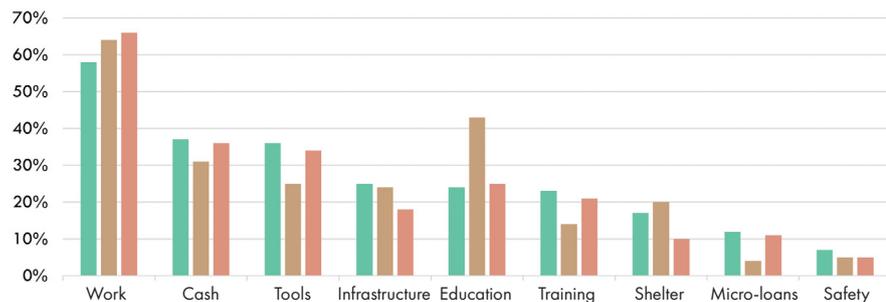
Do you think the aid and services in your community help you to make long-term plans?



Results in %

● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely

What would enable you to live without aid in the future? (n=872)

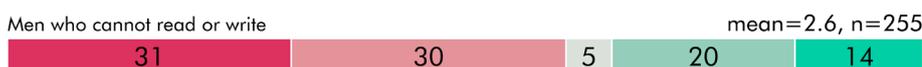
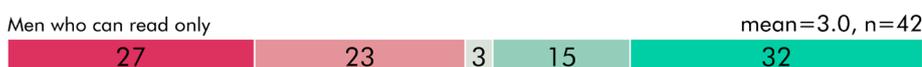


● Cannot read or write ● Can read only ● Can read and write

Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options.

In rural locations, literacy improves resilience for men, but not for women. This makes sense, as men can use these skills to obtain jobs and higher income, which is not the case for women. More literate men say aid enables them to plan for the long term (56%) than men who can only read (47%) and men with lower literacy (34%). But rural women with lower literacy may have stronger positive coping mechanisms than rural men with similarly low literacy, as their lack of access to education in the past may have led them to find other ways to navigate poverty, besides pursuing work or education. For example, women in rural areas can rely on herbal medicine for health. They can also engage in agriculture, grow food in their kitchen gardens, and are more skilled at storing and preserving food.

Do you think the aid and services in your community help you to make long-term plans?



Results in %

● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes completely

Food, non-food items and cash aid remain relevant and in demand among men and women, despite stronger demand for livelihoods

In qualitative discussions, men and women across all locations said that aid, whether provided as food, non-food items, or cash, positively impacts their living conditions. For example, some shared that they find it easier to cover the food needs of their households during months when they are selected to receive aid. However, participants said that this support is only enough to cover short-term needs, sometimes only partially, leaving other needs like health, education, and debt repayment unmet.

Both men and women stressed the need for aid organisations to prioritise livelihood support. Interview and focus group participants said they want to stop relying on short-term aid and suggested shifting the focus to vocational training, agriculture, and job creation for both men and women. Some gave specific examples of the support they needed, including livestock, seeds, and farming equipment. Others requested vocational training in tailoring and carpentry. Some asked for cash-for-work schemes. Women in particular were interested in finding income opportunities to allow them to support the men in their households, who are usually the primary breadwinners, in meeting their family's needs. It was important though that any job opportunities for women were still offered with the permission of community leaders and women's husbands or fathers.



Key findings: resilience

- Food, non-food items, and cash distributions remain relevant and in demand, but both men and women call for long-term aid, such as livelihood support, to ensure sustainable income.
- Urban women feel much less able to plan for the future than urban men and rural women. More urban women say they need work to improve their resilience than rural women, as rural women have historically used other mechanisms to survive and create wealth.
- In rural locations, literacy improves men's resilience since it leads to access to better employment opportunities and higher income. The same is not true for women, who do not have access to the labour market.



In the past, we didn't eat three times a day. But the aid enables us to eat three times a day. It was helpful support, but it really didn't solve most of our problems.

– man in Jawzjan, who received aid multiple times



We need to work to support our families, because aid organisations do not give us AFN 500,000–700,000 (USD 6,500–9,100). This money could resolve issues and give us stability. They only give us a package of lentils, flour, and cooking oil. This only resolves issues for a few days.

– man in Khost, who received a one-



We are very poor people and we need more support to find an income. Winter is coming, but aid agencies are not thinking about the long term. We have no income; we need to find an income or life will be even more difficult.

– man in Jawzjan, who received a one-off aid distribution



Aid is useful of course, but it doesn't fulfil our needs. We are poor people and we have agriculture, but we can't buy crops, we just need help managing our farms.

– man in Jawzjan, who received aid multiple times



We want to buy sewing machines for tailoring to help us support our families for a long time. Receiving food items is not very helpful because I am a tailor and I need a good machine.

– woman in Kunduz, who received a one-off aid distribution

Conclusions

Ensuring the humanitarian response aligns with the priorities of women and men is crucial, especially in times of critical funding gaps. While women feel safer accessing distributions and highlight good practices at distribution sites, they remain concerned at the lack of women aid workers in the response. Working with locally led women's groups can provide valuable entry points for aid organisations to engage with women, specifically where they have no exemptions for women staff. To stay in touch with women, aid agencies should engage with them through their preferred methods, which tend to be through their trusted local networks, rather than asking them to use mechanisms designed by the aid providers. That said, cultural sensitivity is key – when permissions from local leaders are not sought, women can be exposed to social risks, making them less willing to participate. Aid agencies should aim to improve the distribution experience for women by ensuring they have access to clear and timely information about distribution dates and times, allowing them to make necessary arrangements, and streamlining good practices that make distributions more accessible to women. More transparency around how aid organisations measure vulnerability with the general community is key to improving perceptions of fairness. While people say that short-term aid is still relevant, they want aid agencies to prioritise programmes with a longer-term focus such as job opportunities, building skills, and providing resources for families to establish long-term sustainability.

What next?

With the support of UN Women, Ground Truth Solutions and Salma Consulting are planning a series of workshops with humanitarian actors in country between December 2023 and January 2024 to share lessons learnt and best practices when including women and girls in assessments as well further unpacking the findings and recommendations from the studies. In addition to this, we will be disseminating the key takeaways and recommendations with the humanitarian country team in Afghanistan. This will be done through holding presentations and discussions with the GiHA working group, Accountability to Affected People working group, ACBAR members, and bilateral conversations with other key partners, with the aim of supporting the humanitarian response in strengthening accountability to women and girls in their programme design, delivery, and evaluations.

This work was part of a broader project, that sought to iteratively respond to questions which came out of the previous two rounds. Similarly, this third round of surveys and conversations uncovered additional research questions and specific groups of women within Afghanistan which warrant further investigation in order to provide an accurate and up to date information on the evolving priorities, capacities, and needs of women and girls in Afghanistan. This will in part be explored further through an additional qualitative round in December 2023 – January 2024, where we will conduct a series of in-depth interviews with internally displaced women living in IDP settlements, widow's living in extended families, and women's groups.

Methodology

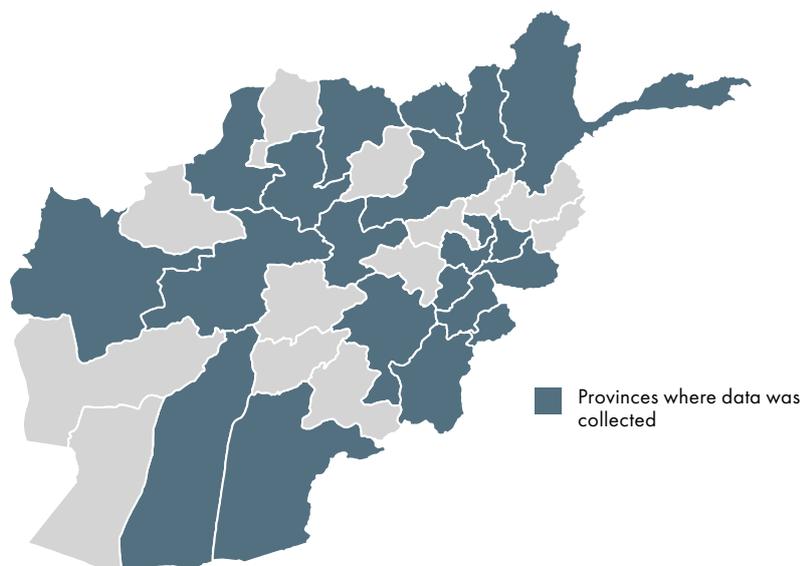
Design

The study adopted a mixed-method approach, relying on qualitative and quantitative data collection. Data was collected over three rounds. We completed the first in December 2022, the second in March 2023, and the third in September 2023.

Sampling

Quantitative sampling

Our sampling targeted the general population of Afghanistan. Having identified the coverage area of our survey, we proceeded with a two-stage sampling design.



Regions where data was collected

In the first stage, we sampled 41 sites (primary survey units, PSUs) with probability proportional to size (PPS) and stratifying by urban–rural status using [GridSample](#). We used [WorldPop](#) data for projected population estimates in Afghanistan in 2020 and Global Human Settlement Layer – Settlement Model grid data to distinguish between urban and rural areas. Considering that a significant proportion of Afghanistan's population resides in rural areas, we also implemented stratification for the rural sample based on UN regions. We reviewed the PSUs through satellite images. Moreover, foreseeing difficulties in accessing certain areas, we provided replacement locations. In the second phase, surveyors conducted a process of random selection within the designated Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) and gathered data from 50 households, which we referred to as Secondary Survey Units (SSU). During this stage, our aim was to maintain a balanced gender distribution with a 50/50 ratio between men and women.

We aimed for a total sample size of 2,050 (including 350 and 1,700 respondents from urban and rural areas, respectively), and reached 1,897 respondents due to under and over-sampling in some areas. Given the high design effect estimated in the previous rounds of quantitative data collection, we prioritised targeting as many sites as possible over increasing the SSU size per site.

Qualitative sampling

In this round, we sampled participants in Nangarhar, Khost, Jawzjan, Balkh, Kunduz, Nuristan, and Kabul. Participants included people who had received aid at least once, women’s groups, and community leaders. Since our samples in 2022 and earlier in 2023 included participants from central and northern regions, we focused this time on selecting participants from other regions where women face more restrictions.

We conducted six focus group discussions (FGDs) with men and women who had received aid and three with members of women’s groups. We also conducted 15 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with women-headed households, IDP women, IDP men, widows, and community leaders. This ensured a sufficient number of participants to ensure a valuable discussion, but not too many to create limited opportunities for participants to expand on their opinions and experiences. We completed all discussions and interviews in the local language – either Dari or Pashto.

Location	Target	Type of interview	Number of participants
Balkh	Community leader	IDI	1
Balkh	Woman-headed household	IDI	1
Balkh	Women’s group	FGD	6
Kabul	IDP woman	IDI	1
Kabul	Woman widow in joint family	IDI	1
Kabul	IDP man	IDI	1
Nangarhar	IDP man	IDI	1
Nangarhar	Women one-time aid recipients	FGD	6
Nangarhar	IDP woman	IDI	1
Nangarhar	Women's group	FGD	6
Nuristan	Women's group	FGD	5
Nangarhar	Community leader	IDI	1
Nangarhar	Widow	IDI	1
Nangarhar	Women multiple aid recipients	FGD	6
Jawzjan	Men multiple aid recipients	FGD	6
Jawzjan	Widow	IDI	1
Jawzjan	IDP woman	IDI	1
Khost	Woman-headed household	IDI	1
Khost	Men multiple aid recipients	FGD	6
Khost	Men one-time aid recipients	FGD	6
Khost	Man	IDI	1
Kunduz	Women one-time aid recipients	FGD	6
Kunduz	Community leader	IDI	1
Kunduz	Woman-headed household	IDI	1

Quantitative tools

We designed the quantitative data collection tools using the previous surveys implemented by Ground Truth Solutions and Salma Consulting in Afghanistan in 2022 and 2023, including our core questions (see table below) that measure the quality of aid in terms of information provision, participation, transparency, fairness, relevance, and feedback mechanisms. The survey tool also included questions on gender-specific access barriers. The survey tool was shared and discussed with the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) working group members.

To measure intersectional vulnerabilities, we included Washington Group questions, and multiple demographic questions to measure socio-economic status and other demographic features of the final sample.

Dimension	Survey question
Aid provided by the same gender	<p>Expectation: Is it important to you that you can always receive humanitarian assistance from an aid worker of the same gender as you?</p> <p>Perception: When you receive aid, do you always receive humanitarian assistance from someone of the same gender as you?</p>
Feeling able to participate	<p>Expectation: Is it important to you that you can participate in decisions about the aid and services you receive?</p> <p>Perception: If you wanted to, can you participate in decisions about the aid and services you receive?</p> <p>Have you participated in decisions, implementation, or monitoring of aid and services, or any other way?</p> <p>If yes: How?</p>
Needs covered by aid	Perception: Does humanitarian assistance meet all your most essential needs?
Aid reaches most in need	Does aid and services go to those who need it most?
Fairness	Are aid and services provided in a fair way in your community?
Feeling informed about aid registration	Do you feel informed about how and where to register for aid and services?
Feeling informed about distributions	Do you feel informed about distribution dates and times?
Feeling informed about aid duration	<p>Expectation: Is it important to you that you know how long your aid and services will last?</p> <p>Perception: Do you know how long your aid and services will last?</p>
Feeling informed about how aid is targeted	<p>Expectation: Is it important to you that you know how aid providers decide who receives aid and services and who does not?</p> <p>Perception: Do you know how aid providers decide who receives aid and services and who does not?</p>

Dimension	Survey question
Feeling informed about feedback mechanisms	Expectation: Is it important to you that you know how to share suggestions or concerns with aid providers? Perception: Do you know how to share suggestions or concerns with aid providers?
Perceptions around feedback submitted, response, and satisfaction	Have you shared a suggestion or concern about aid and services? Did you receive a response to your suggestion or concern? Are you satisfied with the response to your suggestion or concern?
Feeling that aid providers act on community feedback	Expectation: Is it important to you that aid providers act on the suggestions you or your community share? Perception: Do aid providers act on/implement/make use of the suggestions your community shares?
Transparency of decisions	Expectation: Is it important that decisions about aid and services are made in a transparent way? Perception: Are decisions about aid and services made in a transparent way?
Transparency of money	Expectation: Is it important that aid providers are transparent about where their money goes? Perception: Are aid providers transparent about where their money goes?
Resilience	Expectation: Is it important to you that the aid and services you receive support you to be able to make long-term plans? Perception: Do you think the aid and services in your community help you to make long-term plans?

Qualitative tools

We designed qualitative interview guides through a thematic framework. We included a selection of themes which arose in the second round of data collection in March 2023, as well as themes identified by humanitarian actors during a design workshop held in July 2023. We then designed the research questions to explore each area of interest in more depth.

The themes covered included:

- How do communities define participation/consultation?
- What makes an accountable response?
- Who is considered most “deserving” in a community.
- Exploring networks within communities for information-sharing.
- Negative coping strategies and how aid impacts them.
- Feedback, complaints, and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).

Language

We conducted surveys and interviews using a Dari or Pashto questionnaire and interview guide. The language was chosen based on the respondent’s language preference.

Analysis

Weighting

We applied design weights to account for variations in sample sizes across different sites and the probability of site selection. The design-based weights were raked to marginal totals by age group and gender based on demographics of the Afghan population (demographic information taken from [UN population data](#)). The raking step is essential to ensure that when we apply weighting to the survey respondents, they accurately mirror the population's age group and gender distribution.

Coverage and exclusion

Due to difficulties encountered by the enumerators in obtaining permissions for certain locations and being able to interview women respondents, six rural sites in the following provinces had to be replaced: Paktya, Paktika, Khost (south east), Hilmand (south west), Takhar (north east), Herat (west).

Precision of estimates

To calculate margins of error per question we used the "Survey" R package, a statistical software used in R programming, specifying our survey design and the raking adopted as specified above. Note that precision of our estimates varies from question to question, and sample size also varies per question (as some questions are follow-up questions asked to a subset of the total sample).

For questions asked to at least 90% of all respondents, margins of error range between 3.3% and 6.9% points for Likert questions. Although binary questions were follow-up questions and therefore asked to a subset of the total sample size, estimated margins of error range from 1.9% to 20.6% points.

For questions that were asked in all 41 selected PSUs, intra-cluster correlations were highest (about 0.3) for questions related to access, information about the registration process, fairness, and consultation regarding humanitarian assistance.

Limitations

Likert scale

Despite the difficulties encountered in our previous round, in training the enumerators on the 1–5 point Likert, which resulted in the adoption of a 3-point Likert scale, during the training for this round we were able to overcome these difficulties and use a 5-point Likert scale. The advantage of using a 5-point Likert scale, in fact, is primarily related to the increased sensitivity or granularity of the data collected and it also generally allows for higher statistical power.

However, in comparing our results with the previous rounds of data collection, the Likert questions had to be recoded into a 3-point scale.

GPS collection issues

Quality assurance practices required enumerators to collect GPS locations for all interviews completed. As provided by our data collection platform (Survey CTO), these GPS locations are supposed to be automatically recorded on the enumerators' devices during the interview. However, in the Afghan context local authorities were sometimes suspicious of enumerators collecting GPS data. Therefore, acknowledging the security situation, it was decided not to use the GPS data as a strict quality criterion, while using it when available to ensure quality of collected data. The total percentages of interviews lacking GPS coordinates was 6%.

Identifying sampled locations

The Ground Truth Solutions team led the design of the sampling procedure, including the selection of sites. Using a grid-sampling approach, Google Earth and maps were needed to share the selected sites with Salma's Consulting firm. There were considerable challenges among the field teams in identifying the selected locations as experienced in previous rounds. To facilitate the identification of these locations, names of the nearest settlements were provided to the team.

Permission to conduct interviews with women

The current de facto authorities' policies concerning women – specifically around mobility – have created anxiety across the population, particularly in rural communities. The team found, therefore, that attempting to identify and invite women to participate in FGDs was more difficult than before August 2021. Women and their husbands were more suspicious of our activities, and feared that information would be shared with authorities and used inappropriately. A letter of support from UN Women and buy-in from community leaders helped to ensure confidence in some instances. Locations in the south, which were new to this round, remain the most challenging for data collection.

Permission to record interviews

Salma Consulting holds an internal policy that interviews completed in the field must be recorded. This ensures a higher quality of data available to the analysis team and reduces the loss of data that can occur through summaries of data either by translators or facilitators. This has always proved a difficult task. When interviews cannot be recorded, the research team is directed not to go ahead with the interview and find an alternative group of participants. For this round of data collection, the refusal for recording happened more regularly with women than men. In two instances, the team was refused the right to record. As such, interviews did not take place and replacements were completed.



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