



Housing, Land and Property Task Force
Afghanistan



**AFGHANISTAN
SHELTER CLUSTER**

Coordinating Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements

Integrated Housing, Land and Property (HLP) and Shelter Support for Afghan Returnees: a case study of Nangarhar Province



Background

In 2023, the Government of Pakistan announced a policy of forced return of Afghan nationals. Since then, IOM has recorded the return of over 600,000 people at border points in Nangarhar and Kandahar provinces.ⁱ Currently, emergency assistance is provided at border crossing points, but given the precarity of the returning population, the modality of support is shifting to include cross-sectoral assistance in places of settlement.

Intention surveys suggest that 77% of returnees plan to return to their province of origin, with the majority located to Nangarhar, Kandahar, Kabul and Kunduz.ⁱⁱ In these areas, informal settlements are emerging as key sites experiencing high volumes of return: many low-income migrants resided in informal settlements prior to moving to Pakistan in search of economic opportunities and are now returning to these communities. In addition, it is likely that returnees unable to return or remain in their place of origin will locate to informal settlements as sites of low-cost accommodation to access livelihoods and/or humanitarian services.

Returnees to informal settlements face intersecting vulnerabilities. Recent surveys demonstrate a range of underlying needs: the risk of eviction, inadequate shelter and low incomes being the most prominent, with women – both in female- and male-headed households – being particularly vulnerable.ⁱⁱⁱ In this context, returnees from Pakistan face intersectional vulnerabilities associated with their forced return.

This brief presents the results of a needs assessment and provides details of a UN-Habitat response plan for integrated HLP and shelter programming to support returnee informal settlements in proximity of Jalalabad municipality, Nangarhar Province. The brief draws on key informant interviews conducted with community members in April 2024, and a full-coverage household surveys of all sites conducted in 2023. It provides evidence that an integrated HLP and shelter programmatic approach will address returnees' most critical needs and provide a foundation for longer-term improvements in living conditions through cross-cluster humanitarian investments.

HLP and Shelter needs in returnee informal settlements in Jalalabad, Nangarhar

UN-Habitat assessment teams identified seven major informal settlements located in and around Jalalabad municipality. These include Kabul Camp, Tagab Camp, Farmi Hada, Kuz Shekhmesri, Farmi Ghai Abad, Daman, and Wochtangi. The sites range in distance from 0 to 25 km from Jalalabad city

(Fig 1). Since 2023, 1,561 families accounting for almost 11,000 people have returned to these sites from Pakistan. The total population of these sites is around 160,000; therefore, since 2023, they account for 7% of the total population of these sites.

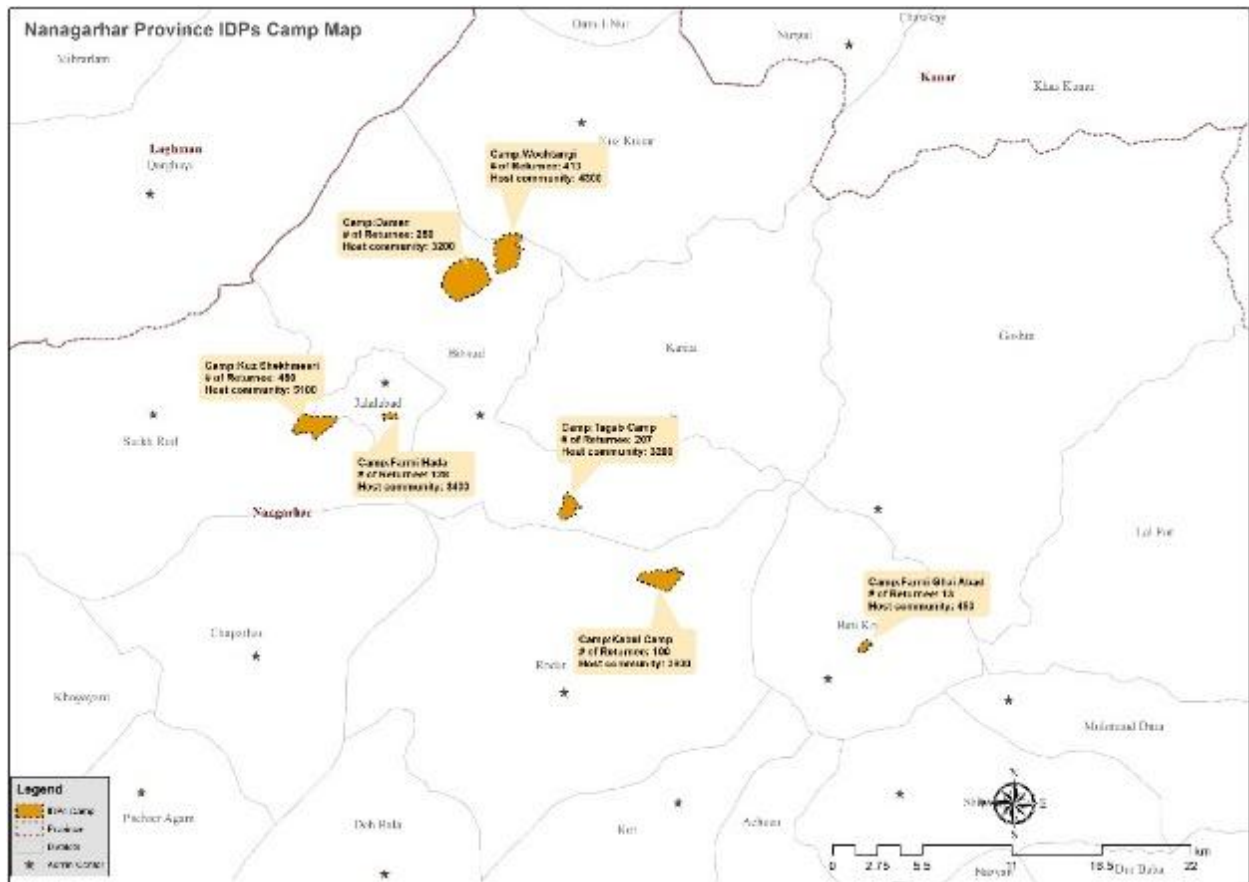


Fig 1: Location and size of returnee informal settlements, Jalalabad

Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Needs

Residents of the seven sites face severe HLP needs being subject to continuing threats of evictions by authorities. The HLP characteristics of the sites render residents highly vulnerable to these threats of eviction. Many residents have occupied vacant land following their displacement, which means that they likely have weak occupancy claims; around 65% of households acquired their property in this way (Fig 2). Women-headed households less frequently inherit or purchase property, which relates to gender-

based restrictions in control over land, and the more vulnerable economic situation of women generally.^{iv}

The precarious nature of residents' HLP rights is also evidenced by data showing the majority live on land owned by the government, or a private individual/entity: only 5% of households claim to own their land (Fig 3). In addition, a very high proportion of people did not have any document to prove their occupancy status (Fig 4).

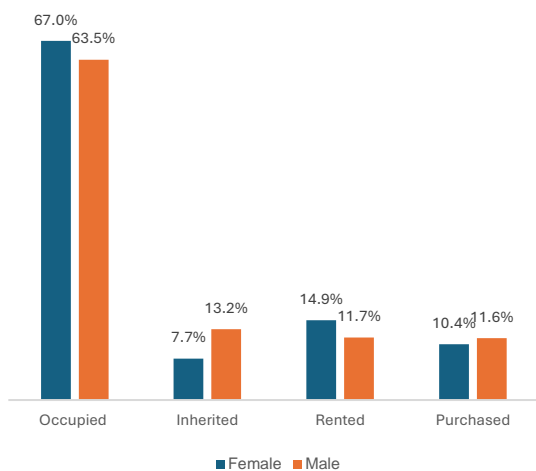


Fig 2: Mode of acquisition of land

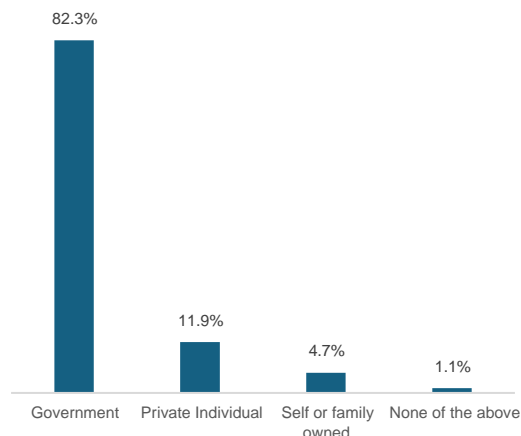


Fig 3: Land ownership status

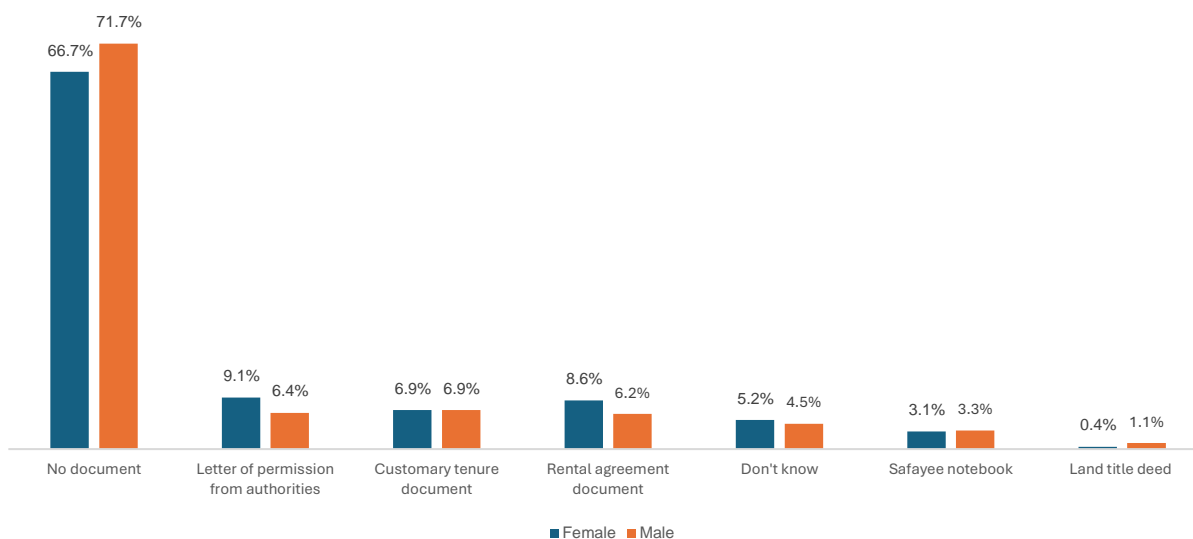


Fig 4: Tenure documents

Shelter Needs

The quality dwellings in the seven sites are generally very low. Most families' dwellings are structures of either mud brick or mud paksa construction; however, recent returnees are often forced to reside in tents (Fig 5). Mud brick or mud paksa construction accounted for nearly 80% of dwellings; concrete and brick shelters are considered the most durable structures and accounted

for around 20% of the survey population (Fig 6). Mud structures – while relatively durable in comparison to tents – are not considered as durable as brick or concrete. WASH facilities in dwellings were also typically of low capacity. Most households used a pit or open latrine; only 6% reported a flush latrine (Fig 6). A small but significant number of households had no latrine in their dwelling and relied on

public latrines, and in a small but severe number of cases, open defecation. The shelter and WASH profiles of male -and

women-headed households were similar across dwelling and latrine types.

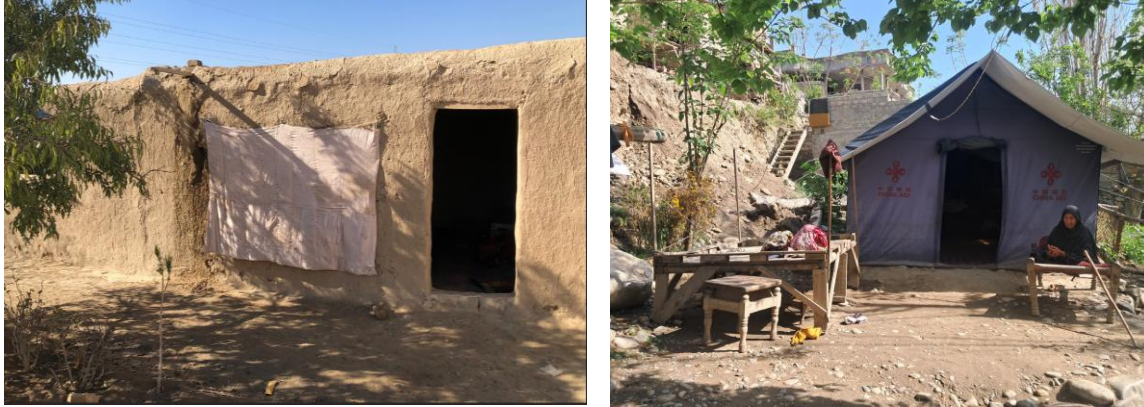


Fig 5: Examples of mud paska shelters and tents in Jalalabad returnee informal settlements

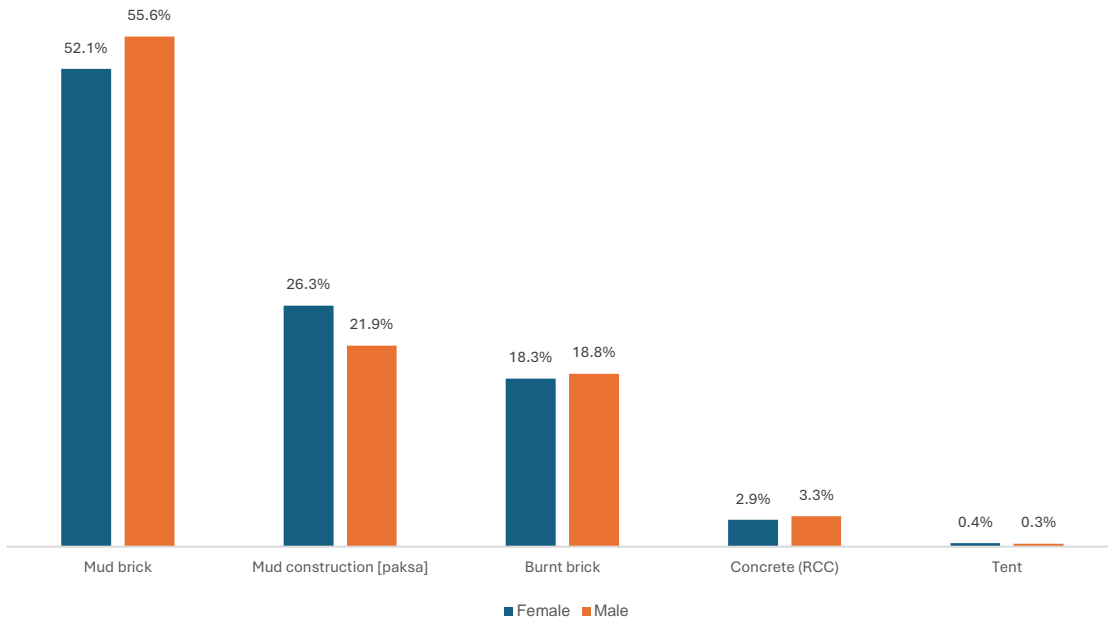


Fig 6: Shelter type by gender of household head

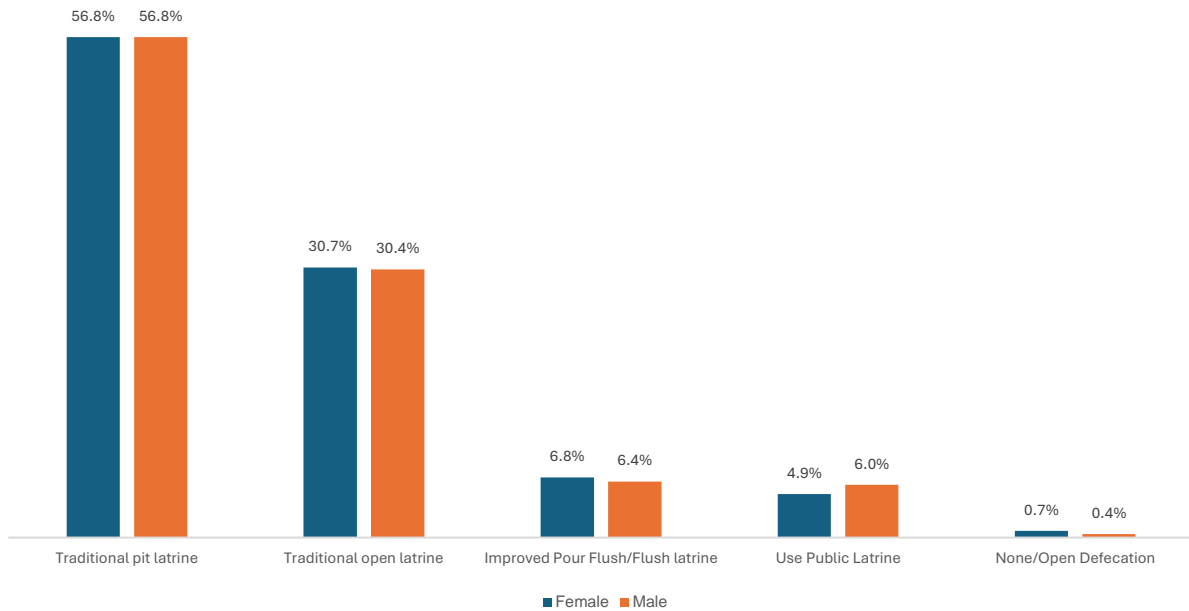


Fig 7: Latrine usage by gender of household head

Most households consider their shelter inadequate: 77% of respondents reported that their shelter is unsuitable for the family's needs. Most shelters are single-room ad-hoc constructions, and hence the most frequently cited improvement was to develop additional living spaces through the construction of additional rooms (Fig 8). Frequently, dwellings had very few rooms, which limits

privacy (a key issue for women and GBV risk) and results in hygiene issues; as demonstrated in the COVID-19 pandemic, the inability to quarantine people with illness in such conditions led to the rapid spread of disease through the population^v. In other cases (around 24% of all shelters), shelter required major structural repairs.

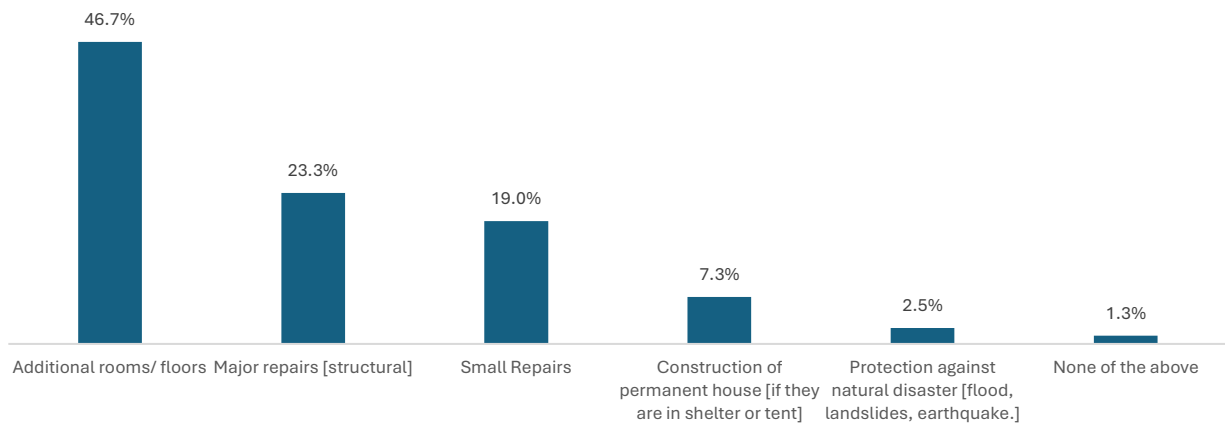


Fig 8: Shelter improvements required

Insecure Livelihoods

The precarious livelihood characteristics of residents of the survey population render them vulnerable to HLP and shelter deficits. A key issue relates to low and irregular income. Many households work in the informal sector as unskilled labourers (around 30%), with around 11% identifying as skilled labourers, and the remainder earning a living in a range

of low-income activities, such as street vendors (Fig 9). Around 15% of respondents relied on loans for income, as they were unable to meet basic needs with income earned through work. This high dependency on loans underscores the precarious economic situation of many residents.

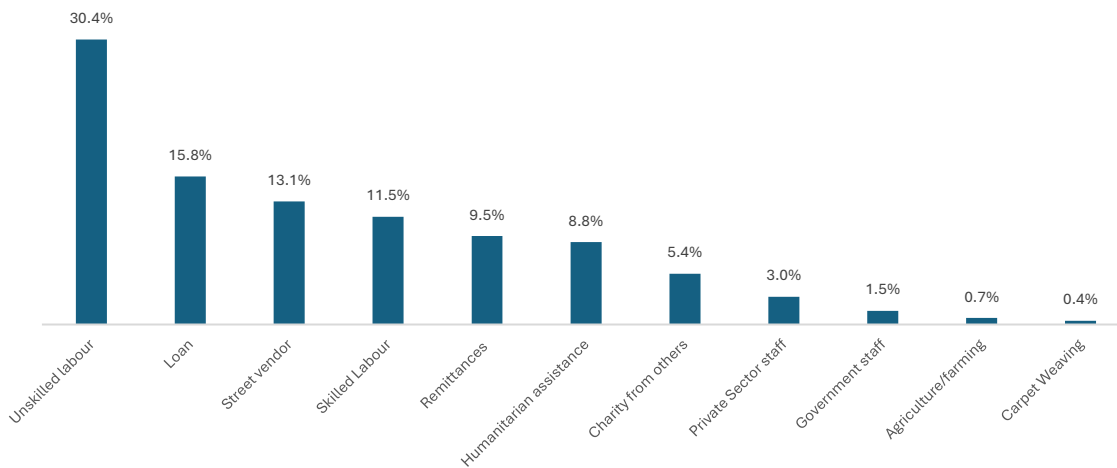


Fig 9: Livelihood activities

Household incomes in the survey populations were very low. The majority (around 65%) of respondents report a family income of less than 5,000 AFG on average per month (around 70 USD), which equates to around 1,000 AFG per month per capita (around 14 USD); these figures are below the average for Afghanistan (Fig 10).¹ A smaller but significant proportion of households suffer

extremely low incomes. Around 20% reported a family income of less than 1,000 AFG a month (14 USD) Female-headed households were most often in the lowest income bracket: nearly 25% report a family income of less than 1,000 AFG a month, and were least likely to be in the highest income bracket, with only three percent reporting a monthly income of over 5,000 AFN.

¹ According to [World Bank data](#), per capita GDP in Afghanistan is around USD 352 per year (the second lowest globally)

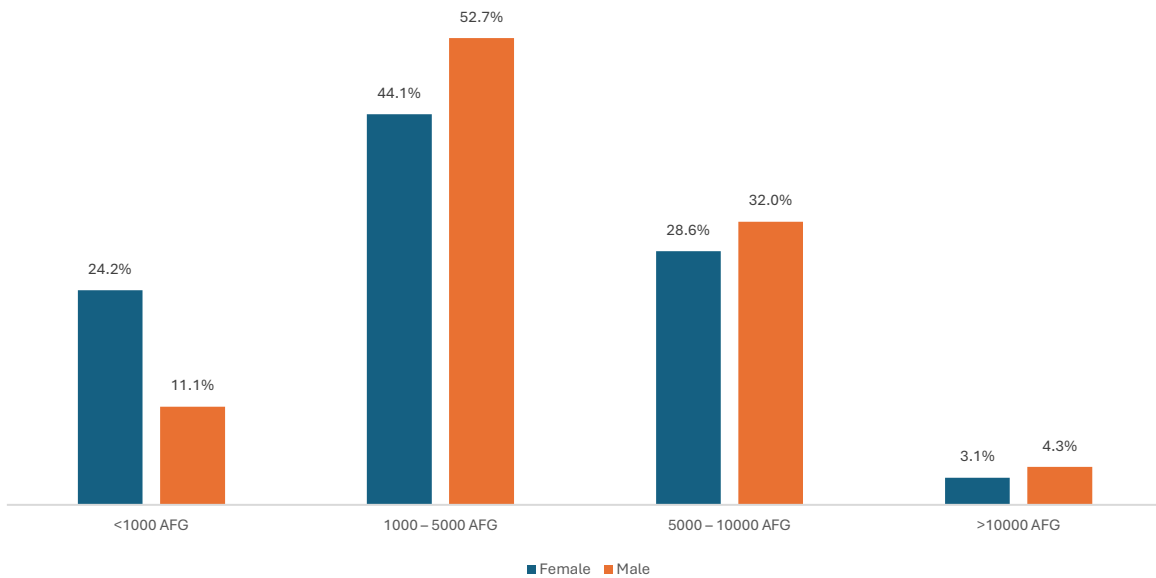


Fig 10 : Income profiles for female and male headed households

Integrated HLP and shelter interventions

To respond to the HLP and shelter needs for returnees in Nangahar and other areas of return, UN-Habitat implements an integrated approach to (i) strengthen the community's HLP rights: to reduce eviction risks and provide a foundation for shelter investment; (ii) to plan and implement shelter

investments that address the needs of the most vulnerable. This approach is tailored to meet the needs of residents of informal settlements, where HLP and shelter needs are particularly severe. To this end, the following activities are implemented:

1. Participatory land use mapping to strengthen HLP rights

Land use mapping is conducted to create a spatial record of the settlement, including approximate parcel boundaries (Fig 11). Community groups endorse the maps and are supported to secure the endorsement of local authorities. The land use and parcel boundary map is formally endorsed and stamped by local authorities, providing an important

community-level HLP document. Through securing authorities' official endorsement of the map, this activity provides protection to the customary tenure arrangements that exist in the settlement, and paves the way for household-level land registration to further strengthen tenure security.

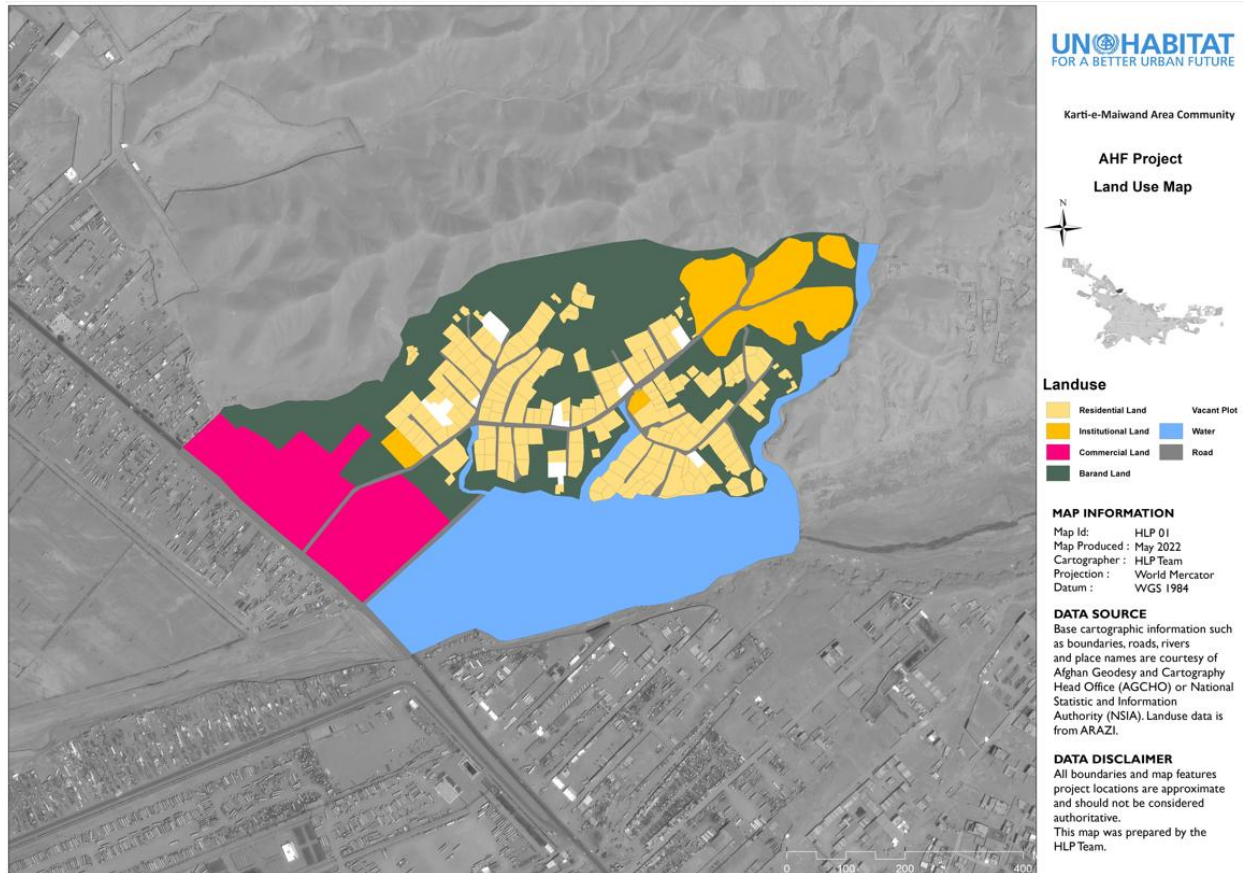


Fig 11: Settlement land use and parcel boundary map

2. Participatory assessment and spatial planning

In each community, Participatory Hazard Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (PHVCAs) are conducted to understand shelter and associated community infrastructure deficits and identify how these deficits impact the population. The PHVCA deploys participatory tools to assess how inadequate shelter and infrastructure interact with climate change, economic shocks and other hazards, to produce complex vulnerability profiles. PHVCA tools include hazard matrixes, hazard mapping, seasonal calendars and a range of other participatory methods, which are conducted separately for male and female community members, to

identify gender-specific vulnerability. The PHVCA also includes participatory planning sessions, where critical shelter and infrastructure investments are identified that reduce vulnerabilities to critical hazards. Community groups are supported to secure authorities' endorsement of these maps and spatial plans. In this way, the land rights, shelter and community infrastructure investment plan of the settlement obtains official recognition, reducing the risk of eviction and mainstreaming integrated shelter and infrastructure planning in the community's future development (Fig 12).

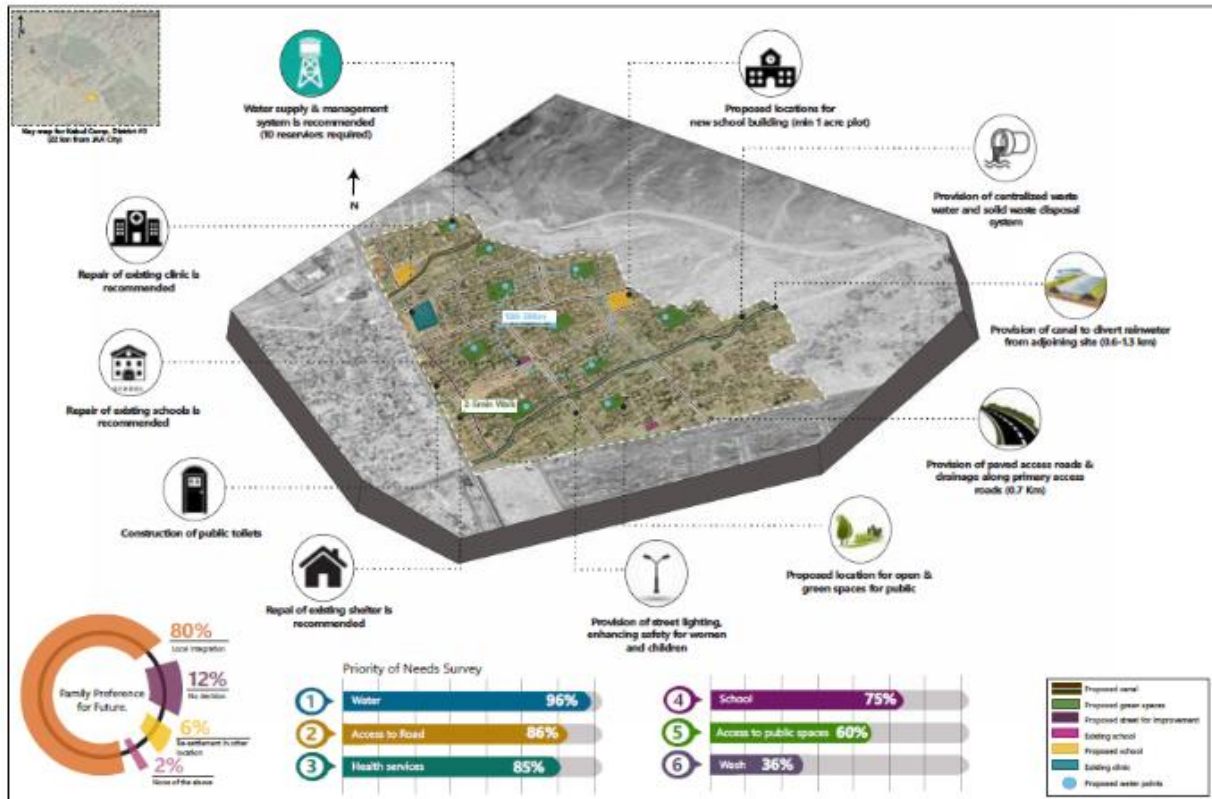


Fig 12: Example of settlement planning

3. Shelter and associated community infrastructure investments

Investments detailed in the settlement plan (developed under Step 2) are implemented to upgrade shelter and associated community infrastructure in coordination with local authorities: to improve living conditions and strengthen community and household resilience. Households are supported with durable shelters that meet their basic needs and provide a foundation for their reintegration in Afghanistan's economy and society (Fig 13). In addition, upgrading shelter and associated infrastructure is a key

HLP intervention, because it consolidates the settlement, strengthening the bonds between authorities and communities to increase *de facto* tenure security of the informal settlement. Global best practice suggests that upgrading shelter and community infrastructure in this way is as or more effective in increasing tenure security than the provision of land tenure documents, because it represents the authorities' tangible recognition of a settlement's legitimacy.^{vi}



Figure 13: Upgraded shelters

Way Forward

UN-Habitat is currently piloting the integrated HLP and shelter approach in three returnee informal settlements in Jalalabad. The agency plans to upscale the approach to target other informal settlements in Jalalabad, across Nangahar, and move into other provinces with high rates of return. In doing so, UN-Habitat will support vulnerable returnees with secure, adequate housing, providing a foundation for their long-term socioeconomic development.

The ES/NFI (Shelter) Cluster and HLP AoR are promoting an integrated approach as a best practice for other partners to implement widely across the country. In this regard, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is key HLP and Shelter partner that is currently piloting property rights verification and shelter investments in areas of high return, through integrating their ICLA HLP and Shelter programme streams.

Building on the innovative work that is ongoing will provide funding to be directed into integrated HLP and shelter programmes. Therefore, it is essential that donors support this important area moving forward: to link humanitarian action to longer-term outcomes that address the integration needs of vulnerable returnees.

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ⁱ IOM (2024) [Pakistan — Flow Monitoring of Afghan Returnees — Bi-Weekly Report \(1 – 15 June 2024\)](#)

ⁱⁱ IOM (2024) [Afghanistan - Rapid Returnee Assessment: Key Findings \(December 2023\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ HLP/GIHA (2023) [Gender-based Vulnerability to Evictions in Kabul Informal Settlements \(KIS\)](#)

^{iv} See footnote iii

^v UN-Habitat (2020) [COVID-19 Vulnerability in Informal Settlements: A Case Study of an Urban IDP Community in Jalalabad, Afghanistan](#)

^{vi} Gilbert, A. (2012). [De Soto's The Mystery of Capital: reflections on the book's public impact](#). *International development planning review*, 34(3), v-xviii.