

Her Future at Risk

**The Cost of Humanitarian Crises
on Women and Girls.**

Focus.
Afghanistan's Dual Crisis





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*A heartfelt thank you to all our colleagues who have shared their stories and insights from years of dedicated humanitarian work.
 We are equally grateful to the countless people we encounter daily, with whom we collaborate to create a world where human rights are upheld for everyone.*

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Opening Remarks

Natural and man-made crises have a different impact on women, girls, boys, men. Nonetheless, gender equality is still underfunded especially in crisis contexts. According to OECD data, humanitarian aid continues to have the lowest shares of aid with gender equality objectives, with only 18% including gender equality objectives.

The report “Her Future at Risk. The Cost of Humanitarian Crises on Women and Girls” gives a clear picture of the difficulties women and girls experience in their daily lives in crisis and conflict situations. Just to underline some data: 60% of preventable maternal deaths occur in conflict, displacement, or disaster settings due to lack of emergency obstetric care; 70% of women in humanitarian settings experience gender-based violence; only 55% of women and girls in refugee camps have access to menstrual products; in 2023, the UN recorded 3,688 verified cases of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence CRSV - a 50% increase from the previous year.

It is clear that humanitarian as well as development and peace actors active in fragile and crisis contexts need to do more, as their engagement is crucial to save women and girls lives and to maintain their dignity. The debate on the integration of gender equality in fragile and crisis contexts has certainly progressed since the World Humanitarian Summit (Istanbul, 2016), but it is evident that we still have a long way ahead to define a “new way of working” to reach equally women as well as men.

From a technical perspective, three key messages should drive the change.

First of all, humanitarian, development and peace interventions should follow a **women voice approach**. Women should no longer be perceived as part of the marginalised and disadvantaged population, but as individuals who lead processes. Women’s leadership in humanitarian response, development cooperation and peacebuilding is crucial. **Women are not only people to be protected but real agents of change even, or perhaps especially, in contexts of conflict and crisis.** If we really are aiming to “leave no one behind” – how can we still forget to listen to women and girls’ needs? How can we forget that they play a crucial role in supporting the resilience of their families and communities?

Gender equality should not be treated just as a stand-alone sector. Gender equality should be included in all programmes aiming to eradicate poverty, including in those areas where gender considerations are generally undervalued – such as humanitarian aid, peacebuilding, climate change, energy, agricul-

ture. Women are discriminated in every single domain of their lives and gender equality cannot be addressed in isolation. **All the obstacles that women and girls face must be tackled, and women active participation should be fostered through dedicated actions, always.** No action should be excluded from this approach.

The response system needs a **cultural shift** to promote a collective responsibility. Organisations should invest in **training and awareness raising activities** – at all levels -including all the staff engaged in development, peace and humanitarian actions. Sharing knowledge on gender equality and good practices in this field is key to widen the community of gender champions, which should include experts – women and men – coming from different experiences and engaged in promoting a real change.

Finally, it is essential to recognize the important role of men in this process. Men have a significant responsibility in supporting the redefinition of social and legal patterns in more equitable terms. By utilizing the power positions they often occupy, men can contribute not only to the development and reinforcement of systems that protect and support women but also to promoting their participation in decision-making processes, which is crucial for rethinking a fairer society together.

Marta Collu

Coordinator of the Humanitarian Aid and Fragility Unit and Gender Equality Focal Point, Office of the Deputy Technical Director, AICS (Italian Agency for Development Cooperation)



Foreword

I take immense pride in and feel deeply committed in presenting *Her Future at Risk: The Cost of Humanitarian Crises on Women and Girls*. This study not only presents critical data and urgent challenges but also highlights the courage and resilience of women and girls who are shaping solutions in fragile and crisis-affected contexts. As a humanitarian worker who embarked on this journey nearly 25 years ago during the Burundi crisis in Africa, I have witnessed first-hand both the devastating consequences of conflict and displacement and the extraordinary strength of women and girls who confront them. This study is more than just statistics; it amplifies the voices of those on the front lines—women whose leadership, innovation, and determination are driving real and lasting change.

Humanitarian crises do not just expose systemic inequalities—they deepen them, with women and girls bearing the greatest burden. As climate disasters intensify and conflicts displace millions, entrenched patriarchal norms and structural injustices continue to deny women and girls equal access to resources, education, healthcare, and decision-making. These barriers are not incidental; they are deeply rooted forces that perpetuate cycles of inequality. **This report confronts these dynamics head-on, not by depicting women and girls solely as survivors of violence, but as powerful agents of change—central to building sustainable, just, and resilient futures.**

The title, *Her Future at Risk. The Cost of Humanitarian Crises on Women and Girls*, reflects the dual urgency and complexity of the gendered impacts of humanitarian crises. It captures both the immediate consequences of crises—lost opportunities for education, economic empowerment, safety, and well-being—and the longer-term costs of inaction. These costs include the compounding of structural inequalities, the marginalisation of women’s voices in decision-making, and the chronic underfunding of gender-focused programmes. The “her” in the title represents not only the millions of women and girls disproportionately affected by crises but also their resilience, leadership, and potential as agents of transformative change. Their future is not a distant hope, but an ongoing, present reality shaped by their agency, contributions, and leadership—even under the most challenging circumstances.

Grounded in research across eight countries—**Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Palestine, and Ukraine**—where WeWorld and ChildFund Alliance operate, this study reveals how humanitarian crises magnify gender disparities. **It emphasises the need for gender-transformative solutions to address these disparities while placing women and girls at the heart of recovery and resilience efforts.** By

drawing on data from the *ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024* and other reputable sources, the report highlights the state of women’s and girls’ rights in the context of ongoing crises, including a factsheet for each country considered. These findings are enriched by qualitative testimonies from women and girls, offering a human perspective on the challenges they face and the leadership they demonstrate.

The report also examines Afghanistan’s dual crisis as a case study of systemic and entrenched gender inequality, where the worsening conditions under Taliban rule exemplify the critical need for action. Afghan women and girls face a progressive denial on their rights, yet they continue to advocate for their communities and gender equity. WeWorld’s cash-for-food programme, highlighted in this study, demonstrates the importance of adapting interventions through a gender lens, even in the most complex contexts of human rights violations. The voices of Afghan women, including refugee activists, offer a powerful reminder of the ongoing fight for justice and dignity, even in the face of profound challenges.

This report moves beyond analysis, presenting actionable recommendations to dismantle systemic inequalities and embed gender justice into every stage of humanitarian response. **It calls for a paradigm shift, one that integrates women’s voices and leadership into the core of humanitarian strategies, ensuring that responses address not only immediate needs but also the root causes of inequality.**

At the heart of the challenges faced by women and girls in humanitarian settings lie deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, restricting their access to education, healthcare, and decision-making. A gender-transformative approach seeks to dismantle these inequalities by involving entire communities in building more inclusive and equitable societies. Rooted in feminist humanitarianism, it places women’s leadership and agency at the forefront—recognising them as essential to driving effective and lasting humanitarian action.

At WeWorld, these principles shape our 2024-2030 strategy. With a human-rights-based approach, we embed child rights, gender and intersectionality into all we do, tracking progress with clear, actionable indicators. Tackling systemic inequalities is both a moral duty and a strategic necessity for stronger, more equitable communities. While responding to immediate crises, we prioritise long-term recovery, resilience, and sustainable systems that advance gender and intergenerational equality. Rooted in a nexus approach, our work goes beyond emergency aid to foster lasting peace, justice, and dignity.

The “cost” in the title of this report carries a profound weight. It reflects not only the human suffering endured by women and girls in crisis contexts but also the global failure to invest adequately in gender-specific interventions. As of November 2024, **only 27% of the required funding for gender-based violence programmes had been met, despite the staggering needs: 92 million people requiring GBV-related services, including 11 million pregnant women in need of care.** This is not only a funding gap but a failure to prioritise the systemic change necessary to address inequality at its root.

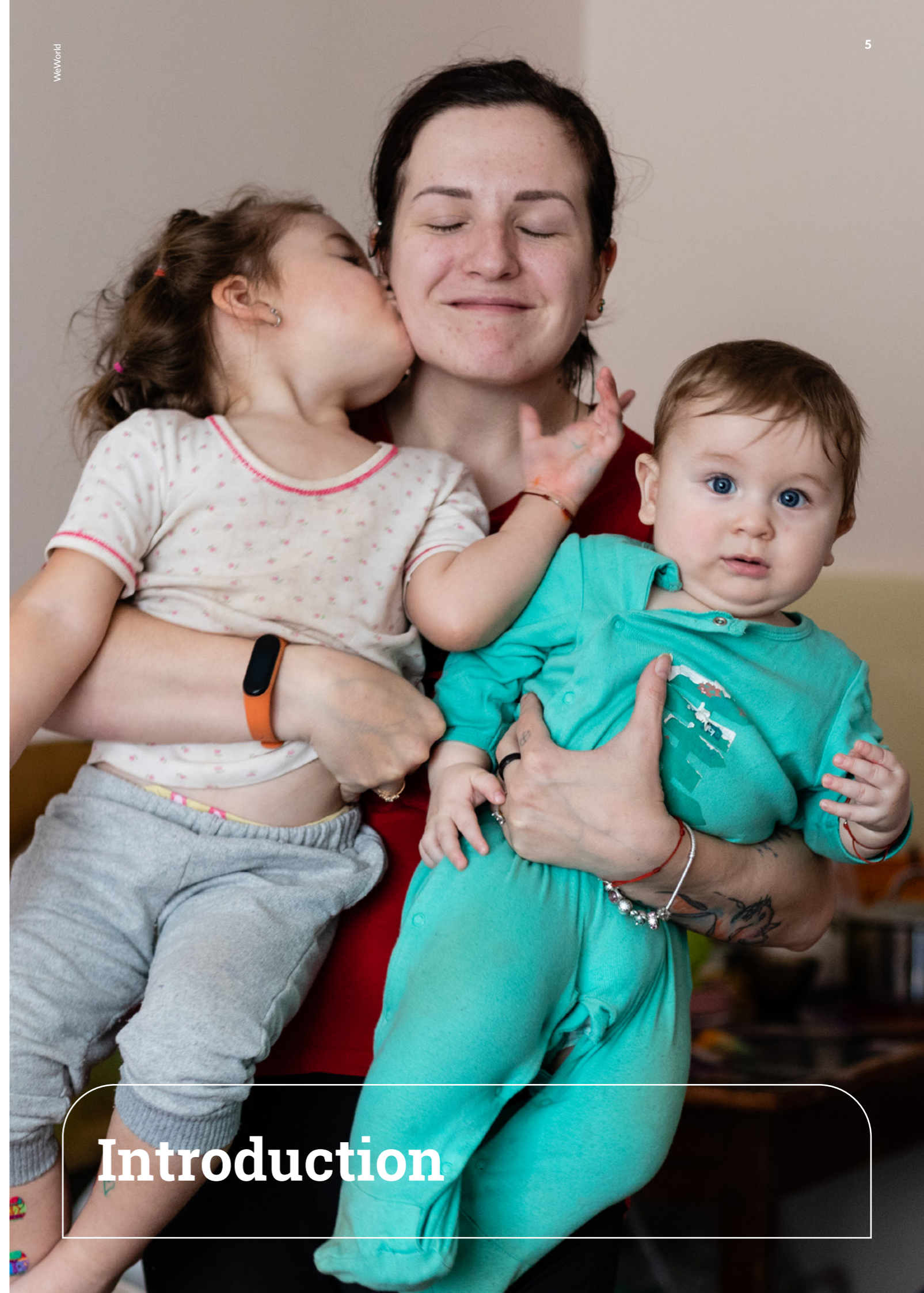
Despite these challenges, women and girls continue to lead—rebuilding communities, advocating for rights, and dismantling systemic barriers. Their stories, gathered through field research, form the backbone of this report. At WeWorld, we work with those too often marginalised—both geographically and socially—ensuring their voices are heard and amplified. These testimonies highlight not just their struggles but their remarkable courage and resilience. Recognising and supporting their leadership is not optional; it is vital to achieving lasting change.

Engaging men and boys as allies is equally critical. Gender equality cannot be achieved in isolation—it requires the collective effort of all members of society to challenge harmful norms and build inclusive communities. **Men and boys must be part of the solution, actively participating in the reshaping of power structures and cultural narratives that sustain inequality and discrimination.**

As this report demonstrates, addressing gender inequality in humanitarian crises is not merely about responding to immediate needs—it is about seizing the opportunity to create transformative change. By investing in the leadership, agency, and potential of women and girls, we can build futures that are equitable, inclusive, and resilient. The findings and recommendations outlined here demand urgent action from governments, donors, and humanitarian actors alike. **It is time to shift from treating gender equity as an afterthought to making it the foundation of our humanitarian response.**

Stefania Piccinelli

Head of International Programmes,
WeWorld



Introduction

Introduction

Today humanitarian crises are growing increasingly multifaceted, complex, and protracted, reflecting the interconnected nature of the challenges that drive them. Whether caused by armed conflicts, natural disasters, economic collapse, or climate change, these crises are defined by their devastating impact on human lives and livelihoods. While some crises, such as those in Palestine, Syria, and Ukraine, dominate global attention due to their geopolitical significance or the immediacy of their suffering, countless others remain neglected, perpetuating cycles of deprivation and instability. These crises are not just emergencies; they are enduring tragedies that expose systemic vulnerabilities and highlight the fragility of institutions, societies, and systems at the intersection of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding challenges¹.



In 2025, humanitarian actors are appealing for over **US\$47 billion** to assist nearly **190 million** people facing life-threatening and urgent needs across **72** countries

(OCHA, 2024)

The growing scale and longevity of these crises are starkly evident in the numbers. In 2025, humanitarian actors are appealing for over US\$47 billion to assist nearly 190 million people facing

life-threatening and urgent needs across 72 countries (OCHA, 2024). Yet the distribution of aid and attention is far from equal. **Factors such as media coverage, public opinion, and political priorities often dictate which crises garner support, while others fade into obscurity.** Neglected crises, like those in the Sahel region, face chronic and systemic challenges—weak governance, poverty, and climate vulnerability—that persist long after the initial emergency fades from the global spotlight.

Factors such as media coverage, public opinion, and political priorities often dictate which crises garner support, while others fade into obscurity.

These disparities have profound consequences for those caught in the shadows of neglect, particularly women and children, who bear the brunt of these crises. Women are disproportionately exposed to risks such as gender-based and sexual violence, trafficking, exploitation, and abuse. In conflict zones, sexual violence is often weaponised, compounding the challenges women face in accessing healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. Yet women are not merely survivors; they are agents of change, playing critical roles in peacebuilding and community resilience.

Children are equally vulnerable. Armed conflict, displacement, and poverty disrupt their education, health, and security, leaving them exposed to forced labour, recruitment into armed groups, and malnutrition. Girls, in particular, face height-

ened risks, including early marriage and dropping out of school, perpetuating cycles of inequality. The compounded vulnerabilities women and children are facing underline the urgent need for targeted and transformative responses.

These inequities are not new, nor are they inevitable. In 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace, and Security”², the first resolution to explicitly recognise the **disproportionate impact of conflict on women and the vital contributions women make to peace processes and sustainable recovery.** Subsequent resolutions have reinforced the importance of involving women in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction, while identifying sexual violence as a deliberate tactic of war that poses a threat to international peace and security.

Equally important is the inclusion of children in peacebuilding efforts and decision-making processes. Their participation not only upholds their rights but also ensures that peacebuilding initiatives are responsive to the needs and aspirations of younger generations. Children, as key stakeholders in any community’s future, play a critical role in fostering reconciliation, rebuilding trust, and shaping more inclusive and resilient societies.

Objective and Structure of the Study

This study explores how humanitarian crises exacerbate existing inequalities and underscores the importance of empowering women and girls to actively participate in developing solutions. The research places a specific emphasis on the unique impacts these crises have on women and girls.

² See <https://dppa.un.org/en/women-peace-and-security>

¹ This fragility, as conceptualised within the HDP Nexus, highlights the need for integrated and sustainable approaches that tackle root causes rather than symptoms, aiming to build resilience and prevent future crises. See Brugger F., Holliger J., Mason S. J. A. (2022). Triple Nexus in Fragile Contexts: Next Steps. https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/nadel-dam/documents/research/policybriefs/ETH_NADEL_CSS_Policy_Brief_Triple_Nexus_20Sept22.pdf

Through desk research and an analysis of eight countries—Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Palestine, and Ukraine—where WeWorld and ChildFund Alliance operate, it highlights the urgent need for gender-transformative interventions.

Drawing on data from the **ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024** – a ChildFund Alliance flagship report – and other reputable secondary sources, **the study presents a factsheet for each of the eight countries, offering an overview of the state of implementation of women’s and girls’ human rights within the context of the ongoing humanitarian crises. Quantitative findings are further complemented by qualitative testimonies from women and girls collected directly from the field, delivering a nuanced and human-centred perspective on their lived experiences.**

The study contains a specific focus on Afghanistan, which serves as a stark example of systemic and entrenched violations of women’s and girls’ rights. This section delves into the worsening conditions under Taliban rule while showcasing WeWorld’s cash for food programme, which has delivered critical support to women and the broader population. It also amplifies the voices of Afghan activists who, despite having left the country, continue to advocate for the rights and dignity of women and girls.

The document concludes with actionable recommendations, underscoring the importance of addressing systemic inequalities and integrating women’s voices

at every stage of humanitarian response in shaping solutions for peace, recovery, and long-term resilience. By recognising the interconnected and enduring nature

of these crises, we can chart a path towards more equitable and resilient societies, ensuring no one is left behind.

About WeWorld



WeWorld is an independent Italian organisation working in development cooperation and humanitarian aid for over 50 years, active in more than 25 countries. We strive for a better world where everyone, especially women and children, has equal opportunities and rights, access to resources, to health, to education and to dignified work. A world in which the environment is a common resource to be respected and preserved; in which war, violence and exploitation are banned. A world that belongs to everybody and where no one is left behind.

About ChildFund Alliance



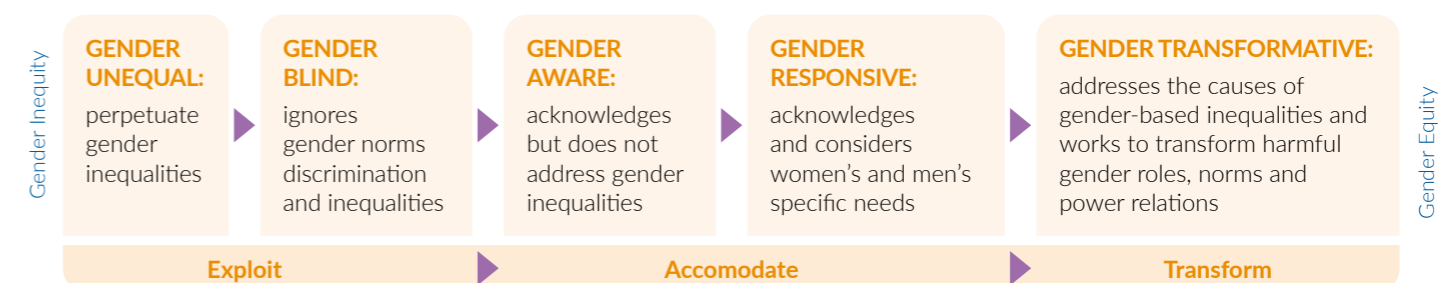
ChildFund Alliance is a global network of 11 child-focused development and humanitarian organizations reaching nearly 30 million children and family members in more than 70 countries. Members work to end violence and exploitation against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and engage children, families and communities to create lasting change. With more than 80 years of collective experience, our commitment, resources, innovation, and expertise serve as a powerful force to help children and families around the world transform their lives.

Towards a Gender-Transformative Approach

To fully comprehend the impacts of humanitarian crises on women and girls and to adopt effective and long-lasting solutions, it is essential to operate within the gender equality continuum. This framework progresses from a gender-unequal approach, which perpetuates existing inequalities, through various stages of increasing inclusivity and equity, ultimately reaching the transformative level of gender-transformative approaches.

This continuum not only addresses the immediate needs of women and girls in emergency contexts but also seeks to confront and reform the entrenched power imbalances that exacerbate their vulnerabilities. By doing so, it provides a comprehensive strategy that not only alleviates the symptoms of inequality but also targets its root causes, paving the way for enduring systemic change.

FIGURE 1. Gender Equality Continuum
Source: WeWorld Elaboration on UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women (2020)



The ultimate goal is to modify these systemic power imbalances, which are often magnified in crisis situations. Addressing the root causes of inequality and discrimination enables the identification of more suitable, sustainable actions and strategies. Such an approach fosters transformative change that benefits society as a whole, creating solutions that are designed, implemented, and embraced by the community itself.

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What Defines a Gender-Transformative Approach?

For an approach to be truly transformative, it must incorporate the following elements³:

- **COMPREHENSIVE GENDER ANALYSIS:** This involves identifying and understanding the societal norms and power imbalances that disadvantage women and girls, with a focus on the discrimination they face from early childhood. Such analysis lays the groundwork for effective interventions that address both the symptoms and root causes of gender inequality.

- **ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS:** Actively involving men and boys, particularly young men, as agents of change is critical. By fostering awareness and encouraging them to challenge harmful norms, they can play a pivotal role in creating a more equitable society.
- **BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS:** Collaboration with women and feminist organizations, national actors, community groups and civil society is key to ensuring that solutions are contextually relevant and driven by those who are most affected by these inequalities.

Understanding Patriarchy and Its Role in Gender Inequality

The term patriarchy refers to a long-established system of societal organisation in which men—or what is deemed masculine—are afforded greater importance than women or what is considered feminine. This structure often serves as the foundation of gender inequality, dictating how property, residence, descent, and decision-making processes are managed. Historically, patriarchal systems have positioned men as the primary holders of power across most areas of life, from family dynamics to broader societal governance⁴.

In the context of humanitarian crises, patriarchal norms not only exacerbate the pre-existing inequalities but also hinder the recovery and resilience of affected communities. These norms shape access to resources, decision-making opportunities, and even basic rights such as education and healthcare. Addressing patriarchy, therefore, is a critical step in fostering transformative, gender-equitable outcomes that are resilient and sustainable.

In the context of humanitarian crises, patriarchal norms not only exacerbate the pre-existing inequalities but also hinder the recovery and resilience of affected communities. These norms shape access to resources, decision-making opportunities, and even basic rights such as education and healthcare.

By challenging entrenched gender norms and involving all segments of society—women, men, boys, and girls—a gender-transformative approach ensures that humanitarian responses do not merely alleviate immediate suffering but also contribute to dismantling the systemic inequalities that perpetuate these crises. Such an approach is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for building more inclusive, equitable, and resilient communities.

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³ See AICS (2023), *Manuale per l'analisi di genere*, https://www.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Strumenti-operativi_Analisi-di-genereDEF.pdf

⁴ See UN Women Gender Equality Glossary <https://training-centre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36&mode=letter&hook=P&sortkey=&sortorder=>

WEWORLD'S 2024-2030 STRATEGY

WeWorld's 2024-2030 strategy is built around a programme-based strategic framework, focusing on five key areas of field intervention. This is complemented by an organisational development framework that outlines the Foundation's priorities for growth and development in the coming years.

Our strategy remains firmly rooted in the priorities identified in the previous strategic cycles:

- Supporting people in vulnerable and marginalised situations to promote their inclusion and protection.
- Strengthening communities by fostering active participation and building more inclusive and resilient structures.
- Advancing governance and localisation, by involving local stakeholders, from NGOs to local authorities, to enhance their capacities and responsibilities in safeguarding rights.

Inclusion, Community, and Governance/Localisation have thus become the pillars of our action, around which we have defined three long-term outcomes that guide all of our interventions.

We have outlined and structured the framework within which our strategy operates, grounded in a HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH, CHILD RIGHTS, GENDER AND INTERSECTIONALITY. **These guiding principles shape our actions, and we have specified them for each pillar, extending to measurable indicators for progress.**



The current global landscape presents increasingly complex and interconnected challenges, which is why our approach remains multisectoral and integrated. We have defined five Domains of Change, each contributing directly to eleven Sustainable Development Goals:

1. WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE
2. EDUCATION
3. FOOD SECURITY, LIVELIHOOD AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT
4. GENDER AND PROTECTION
5. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE

For each Domain of Change, we have rigorously defined the following components:

- **Impact:** The overarching change that WeWorld aims to contribute to achieving.
- **Outcomes:** Specific, measurable, and achievable results, with associated indicators that directly contribute to the desired impact and strategy.
- **Intermediate Results:** Specific and measurable achievements that highlight progress through output indicators.
- **Macro-Activities:** Clusters of activities directly linked to each outcome, defining our interventions.
- **Indicators:** Quantitative or qualitative measures used to assess progress and impact against set objectives, supporting result monitoring.

In alignment with WeWorld's dual mandate between development and emergency response, the 2024-2030 strategic framework outlines three distinct programmatic approaches:

1. **Long-term Development Approach:** Contributing to sustainable development for both people and the planet, in line with the 2030 Agenda.
2. **Humanitarian and Emergency Approach:** Responding effectively to various humanitarian crises with emergency interventions.
3. **Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Approach:** Offering flexible solutions in complex, protracted crises and conflict situations through an integrated approach between emergency, development, and peace.

CHAPTER 1.

The Gendered and Generational Consequences of Humanitarian Crises



1. Global Humanitarian Crises at a Glance

By 2025, it is estimated that 305.1 million people across 72 countries will require urgent humanitarian assistance and protection as multiple crises escalate, profoundly affecting those impacted (OCHA, 2024). The Southern and Eastern Africa region is the hardest hit, with 85 million people in need, while the Middle East and North Africa closely follow, with 59 million requiring assistance. In West and Central Africa, 57 million individuals are in need, while Asia and the Pacific report 55 million. Latin America and the Caribbean account for 34 million individuals in need of support, and Europe continues to have 15 million people requiring aid (ibid.).



By 2025, it is estimated that **305.1 million** people across **72** countries will require urgent humanitarian assistance and protection

(OCHA, 2024)

Although there is no universal definition of a “humanitarian crisis”, it is commonly described as a significant disruption to the normal functioning of a community due to an event or series of events that pose a critical threat to the long-term health, safety, security, and well-being of a large population, potentially affecting an entire nation.

Such crises deprive people of essential living conditions, including access to water, food, shelter, medical care, and education (Humanitarian Coalition, 2013; Malteser International, 2022).

Humanitarian crises result in systemic violence, loss of life, displacement, and widespread damage to societies,

economies, and the environment. They lead to human rights violations and exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities. Over recent decades, it has become increasingly difficult to establish clear definitions and boundaries for humanitarian crises due to their nuanced and complex nature. Many crises are multifaceted, involving a combination of

Types of Humanitarian Crises

Various concepts have been developed to distinguish different types of humanitarian crises based on their underlying causes. The most common classification differentiates between “natural disasters,” “man-made disasters,” and “complex emergencies,” which represent a combination of the first two.



Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, typhoons, droughts, floods, and other extreme weather events, involve sudden and destructive changes in the environment caused by naturally occurring physical phenomena, often referred to as natural hazards (EEA, 2004). Natural hazards are multifaceted, and their humanitarian impact can vary significantly depending on the nature of the event triggering the crisis.



Man-made disasters, by contrast, are caused by human behaviour and actions. Examples include wars, armed conflicts, terrorism, nuclear disasters, plane or train crashes, environmental pollution, and technological hazards (Humanitarian Coalition, 2013).



Complex emergencies are defined as humanitarian crises occurring within a country, region, or society where there is a complete or substantial breakdown of authority due to internal or external conflict. These crises necessitate an international response that exceeds the capacity of any single country's programme (IASC, 1994). Complex emergencies are typically marked by extensive violence, large-scale displacement, significant security risks, and a need for substantial humanitarian assistance.

factors such as armed conflicts, political instability, economic collapse, and social issues. This complexity makes it challenging to address these situations effectively or deliver a one-size-fits-all response. In many cases, countries face overlapping aspects of a crisis; while recovering from one critical event, they may begin to confront another, perpetuating the state of emergency.

Moreover, some crises receive uneven levels of international attention and media coverage. Crises in regions with lower geopolitical significance, often deemed less strategically important, may struggle to attract media focus, leading to limited global awareness and a reduced likelihood of receiving substantial aid (NRC, 2018).

When certain crises are prioritised over others, the latter are neglected, remaining largely ignored by the international community. Some crises become protracted, evolving into long-lasting situations of instability and hardship. As these ongoing crises persist, maintaining the momentum necessary to address them effectively becomes difficult. This often results in a sense of fatigue or resignation within the international community, leading to reduced funding, waning interest, and diminished support—all of which exacerbate the suffering of affected populations (World Concern, 2024; Integral Alliance, 2024).

Some humanitarian crises, such as those in Syria, Yemen, or Somalia, are no longer mere emergencies. Instead, they evolve into chronic, structural, and stagnant conditions where multiple factors intersect and compound one another. These circumstances exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and impede efforts to secure basic human rights and access to essential services, particularly for those in the most vulnerable conditions, such as women and children (World Concern, 2024).

Trends and Figures



Civilians today face unprecedented challenges due to a record number of armed conflicts, which have resulted in widespread atrocities. The year 2024 stands out as one of the most brutal in recent memory for those caught in these conflicts, and without urgent intervention, 2025 could prove even more catastrophic (OCHA, 2024). By mid-2024, nearly 123 million people had been forcibly displaced due to conflict and violence, marking the twelfth consecutive year of increase (ibid.).



The global food security crisis is equally alarming, with over 280 million individuals experiencing acute hunger (ibid.), and projections for 2025 suggest that 130 to 140 million people will face famine (FEWS, 2024).



Meanwhile, the climate crisis continues to exacerbate global challenges. In 2024, the world's average temperature exceeded the 1.5°C warming threshold, intensifying the frequency and severity of disasters with devastating consequences for millions of lives and livelihoods (Climate Copernicus, 2025). In 2023 alone, 363 weather-related disasters impacted at least 93.1 million people, resulting in thousands of fatalities and approximately 26.4 million internal displacements (OCHA, 2024).



Data also highlight the profound impact of crises on human well-being. In crisis-affected countries, life expectancy is six years below the global average (67 compared to 73), over 25% of the population is undernourished, and only half have access to improved sanitation facilities (ibid.).



By mid-2024, nearly **123 million** people had been forcibly displaced due to conflict and violence, marking the twelfth consecutive year of increase

(OCHA, 2024)



2. Intersectional Vulnerabilities: Women, Girls, and the Lasting Impact of Crises

During humanitarian crises, the most vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected, as their differing statuses and roles in society render them more susceptible to adverse impacts. **Crises exacerbate pre-existing and intersecting inequalities, particularly for women and children—especially girls—who face increased risks of violence, human rights abuses, food insecurity, forced and child marriage, and loss of protection** (ICRC, 2019; UNFPA, 2024). These effects not only have immediate consequences but also an intergenerational impact. The trauma and hardships faced by children during crises can have lasting psychological, social, and economic consequences, limiting their ability to

envision and build a better future. Additionally, the struggles of mothers and caregivers during such times can affect their well-being, further entrenching cycles of poverty and trauma that are passed down to future generations.

This section examines some key areas to provide a macro-level analysis of the effects of humanitarian crises on women and girls, who continue to bear the brunt of these crises. Existing norms and practices rooted in patriarchal structures, which become more pronounced during times of crisis, restrict their access to basic services such as water, sanitation, shelter, healthcare, and education. These limitations make women and girls



more vulnerable to violence, displacement, and discrimination.

To implement effective and sustainable solutions in humanitarian interventions, it is essential to adopt a gender-transformative approach. Such an approach should address and challenge the root causes of gender inequality while identifying the unique needs and capabilities of women and girls. This will help to promote their empowerment and ensure their active participation in decision-making processes.

2.1. Gender Inequality in Employment and Economic Vulnerabilities in Humanitarian Crises

EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES	Underrepresentation in Formal Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women are often relegated to informal, low-wage, and unregulated jobs, limiting financial independence and perpetuating gender inequality. Cultural norms and discriminatory practices create barriers to employment and fair pay. Inadequate education and limited resources push women into informal work, restricting access to stable jobs.
	Scale of Informal Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80% of jobs held by women globally are in the informal economy (WEF, 2024). In low-income countries, 92% of women work in informal roles (ibid.).
	Impact of Economic Inequality on Women in Crises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited income opportunities and lack of social protection leave women vulnerable. During humanitarian crises, women are at higher risk of falling deeper into poverty, struggling to access food, shelter, and healthcare (UN Women, 2013).
THE BURDEN OF UNPAID CARE WORK	Women's Role in Caregiving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A significant portion of women's work involves unpaid care for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. 708 million women worldwide are unable to engage in paid work due to caregiving responsibilities (ILO, 2024). Patriarchal norms frame caregiving as a woman's "natural duty," reinforcing gender roles (Jiménez Ruiz et al., 2018).
	Increased Responsibilities During Crises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Humanitarian crises exacerbate women's caregiving burden, especially when public services are disrupted. With the loss of male family members, women must manage childcare, eldercare, and resource collection (food, water, firewood) alone (CARE International, 2018; Medair, 2019).
SURVIVAL STRATEGIES AND RISKS	Engagement in Exploitative or Dangerous Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic hardship forces some women into transactional sex, exposing them to violence, health risks, and exploitation (SLRC, 2016). Others turn to illicit work, facing severe injuries, abuse, and legal consequences. Female refugees are especially vulnerable due to economic hardships and employment barriers (UNHCR, 2020).
BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT	Limited Access to Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caregiving and survival activities reduce women's ability to participate in education and employment programmes. Time constraints and exhaustion prevent them from seizing economic opportunities.
	Gender Inequality in Employment Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even when women engage in job programmes, they often receive lower wages than men or are assigned low-skill roles. Women are frequently excluded from decision-making in economic and humanitarian initiatives (CARE International, 2018).

2.2. The Overlooked Health and Menstrual Hygiene Crisis for Women and Girls in Humanitarian Emergencies

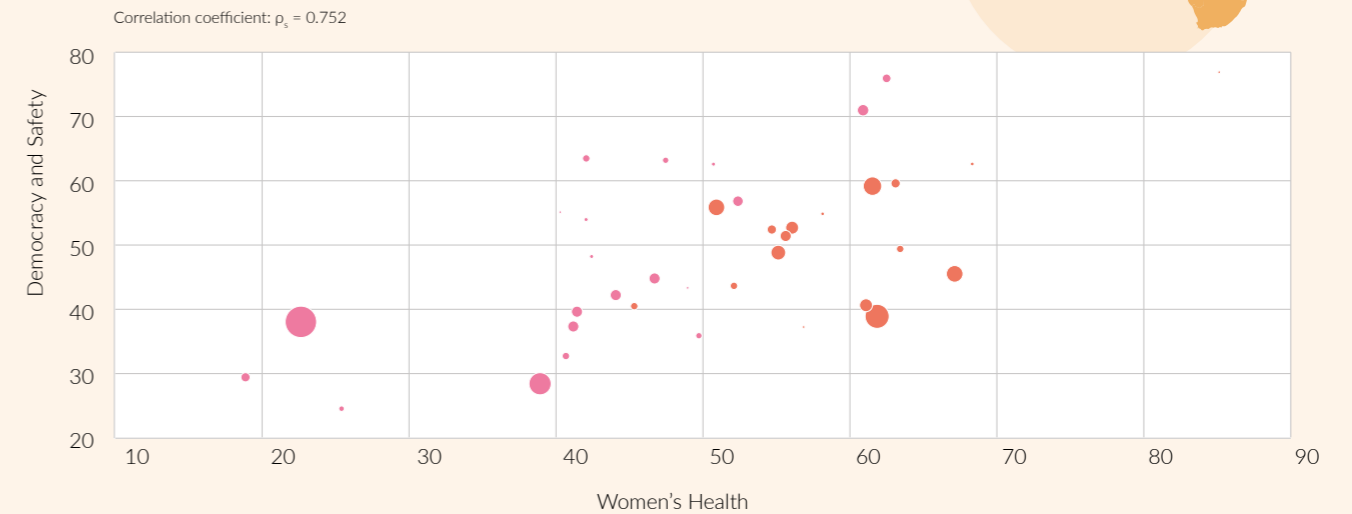
 <p>HEALTH AND SAFETY RISKS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN HUMANITARIAN CRISES</p>	<p>Overlooked Sexual, Reproductive, and Menstrual Health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During conflicts, natural disasters, and public health emergencies, the health needs of women and girls are often deprioritised. Patriarchal norms and stigma devalue women's reproductive and sexual health, limiting their autonomy and access to care (WeWorld, 2023).
	<p>Maternal and Neonatal Mortality in Crisis Settings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of emergency obstetric care puts pregnant women at life-threatening risk. 60% of preventable maternal deaths occur in conflict, displacement, or disaster settings (UN Women & UNFPA, 2020). Under-five mortality rates in fragile countries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 55 deaths per 1,000 live births on average; » 75 deaths per 1,000 live births in conflict-affected areas (UN IGME, 2024).
	<p>Limited Access to Family Planning and Safe Abortions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women in crisis zones often lack contraception and family planning services, leading to higher rates of unwanted or early pregnancies. Unsafe abortions account for up to 50% of maternal deaths in humanitarian settings (Heidari et al., 2019; Endler et al., 2020).
 <p>MENSTRUAL HEALTH CHALLENGES IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS</p>	<p>Lack of Access to Basic Menstrual Hygiene</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women and girls often struggle to manage menstruation safely and with dignity due to inadequate access to pads, underwear, water, and toilets. Many facilities lack doors, locks, lighting, or privacy, making them unsafe. Only 55% of women and girls in refugee camps have access to menstrual products, and just 37% have suitable underwear (WVE, 2021).
	<p>Safety Risks and Extreme Coping Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to lack of privacy, some women bury used menstrual products or seek secluded areas at night to change, increasing their risk of harassment and violence. Makeshift menstrual solutions (e.g., cloth, toilet paper) can cause infections and severe health complications due to inadequate washing facilities.
	<p>Increased Challenges for Women with Disabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inaccessible sanitation facilities worsen pain, discomfort, and hygiene risks for disabled individuals. Socio-cultural expectations that women must manage menstruation independently leave many without necessary support. Menstrual materials are often uncomfortable or impractical for women and girls with disabilities (Wilbur et al., 2022).



Insights from the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024



FIGURE 1. The Correlation between the Dimensions Women's Health and Democracy and Safety in Sub-Saharan Africa



This graph, extracted from the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024, highlights a particularly striking correlation between political instability in Sub-Saharan African countries and the state of women's rights, specifically their health outcomes (Figure 1).

Many countries in this region, characterised by lower levels of democracy and safety, face significant challenges in women's health. These challenges include high maternal mortality rates, limited access to healthcare, and pervasive gender-based violence.

While correlation does not equate to causation, **the observed patterns across different countries strongly indicate that higher levels of democracy and safety are associated with improved health outcomes for women.**





Policies that foster democratic governance and enhance security can therefore play a pivotal role in advancing women's health globally.

2.3. The Impact of Conflict and Crises on Children's Education and Safety

 THE IMPACT ON EDUCATION AND WELL-BEING	Children in Conflict-Affected Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 473 million children—more than 1 in 6 worldwide—live in conflict-affected regions (UNICEF, 2024). 85 million children in crisis-affected countries are out of school (ECW, 2025). Among them: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 52% are girls; Over 20% have functional difficulties; Almost 17% are forcibly displaced.
	Schools as Safe Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education extends beyond classroom lessons—it provides protection, socialisation, and critical life skills. Schools promote hygiene, healthy eating, and sexual and menstrual health. They offer a structured environment for physical and psychological development through learning, play, and social interaction.
	Consequences of School Denial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Without access to school, children lose a safe environment, food, water, and social connections. Between 2022 and 2023, there were over 6,000 attacks on schools and universities, and more than 1,000 were used for military purposes (GCPEA, 2024). Such attacks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Violate children's right to education; Lead to mass displacement and permanent school dropouts, especially for girls.
 BARRIERS TO GIRLS' EDUCATION	Gender-Based Restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In countries like Afghanistan, Mali, and Niger, conservative social norms prevent girls from accessing education (World Vision, 2023).
	Higher Dropout Rates for Girls in Emergencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In conflict-affected areas, girls are 2.5 times more likely than boys to be out of school (World Bank, 2017).
	During crises, girls are often withdrawn to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist with increased domestic responsibilities. Protect them from gender-based violence, abduction, and gang activity (Kwauk et al., 2019).



2.4. Protecting Children in Emergencies: The Impact of Crises on Children's Safety

 CHILDREN AS A HIGHLY VULNERABLE GROUP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During crises, children face increased risks of violence, exploitation, and abuse. Limited access to food, shelter, healthcare, and essential services worsens their vulnerability. Unaccompanied children are at high risk of trafficking, exploitation, and hazardous child labour (ILO, 2023).
 CHILD RECRUITMENT IN ARMED CONFLICTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Between 2005 and 2022, more than 105,000 children were verified as recruited into armed forces—with estimates as high as 300,000 (UNICEF, 2022). 30–40% of child soldiers in some countries are girls (NRC, 2018a). Children are forced into roles as combatants, spies, human shields, checkpoint staff, and servants (ILO, 2023).
 GENDER-SPECIFIC RISKS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boys are often exploited for forced labour, combat, and criminal activities. Girls face higher risks of sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and domestic servitude (SRSG-CAAC, 2013). Natural disasters increase child labour, especially among boys, as families rely on them for survival (ILO, 2017). Countries affected by armed conflict have a 77% higher child labour rate than the global average (ibid.).
 COERCION AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILD SOLDIERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some children are abducted, threatened, or coerced, while others join in exchange for money or benefits. Recruited girls often serve as combatants and domestic workers, making them even more vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation (ILO, 2023).



Insights from the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024

As part of the consultation with 10,000 children from 41 countries included in the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024, we asked children about their perceptions of war and crime, and how these issues might affect their ability to envision their future. Here's what they told us.

- Children's Feelings of Safety**
 - A significant percentage of children (4 in 10) feel unsafe due to wars and crime, with noticeable differences based on region:
 - 47.8% of children in Eastern Europe and Central Asia feel unsafe due to wars and crime.
 - This concern is higher in Africa and Latin America.
- Impact on Future Outlook**
 - Children, particularly from Moldova, express heightened concerns about their future:
 - 100% of children from Moldova see wars as the greatest threat.
- Recruitment into Conflict**
 - Nearly 90% of children in Central and West Africa see preventing child recruitment into war as a top priority.
- Children with Disabilities**
 - Children with disabilities have a slightly more pessimistic outlook on the possibility of living in a world without wars or crime.
- Global Priorities**
 - Overall, children from various regions stress that their biggest priorities include ensuring they don't have to live in war-torn areas.
- What Children Ask of Adults**
 - Children's requests revolve around safety, protection from violence, and the end of discrimination.

→ Girls, in general, feel more concerned about wars than boys.

2.5 Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Humanitarian Contexts



GBV IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

- » 70% of women in humanitarian settings experience gender-based violence (UN Women, 2024).
- Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV)
 - » The term “conflict-related sexual violence” includes acts such as rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, sterilisation, sexual mutilation, abuse, and torture committed by armed groups, law enforcement, and armed forces.
 - » However, intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual violence by peacekeepers are excluded from this definition (Save the Children, 2021).
 - » In 2023, the UN recorded 3,688 verified cases of CRSV, a 50% increase from the previous year (OCHA, 2024).
 - » Women and girls accounted for 95% of cases, with 32% of survivors being children (ibid).
 - » Sexual violence is often used as a weapon of war, causing physical, psychological, and social devastation in communities (UN Women, 2010).



CHILD AND FORCED MARRIAGES

- » 18 of the 20 countries with the highest child marriage rates are affected by crises (Girls Not Brides, 2020).
- » Economic shocks, school closures, and displacement heighten the risk of early and forced marriages.
- » Families often resort to child marriage as a coping mechanism during armed conflict, food shortages, and natural disasters.
- The Impact of Child Forced Marriage
 - » Girls who marry before age 15 are 50% more likely to experience intimate partner violence (Girls Not Brides, 2021).
 - » Early marriage often leads to early pregnancies, higher maternal mortality, and reduced life opportunities (UNICEF, 2022a).
 - » Girls in crisis settings may view marriage as their only option due to lack of security, education, and economic opportunities (GEC, 2024).



INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV)

- IPV is the most prevalent form of violence against women, occurring in both conflict and non-conflict settings.
- Despite its prevalence, IPV receives less attention in conflict zones, often being viewed as a private family issue (Ringdal, 2024).
- In conflict contexts, shifting power dynamics and militarised gender norms increase the risk of IPV, with 39% of women and girls in conflict-affected areas experiencing it (Murphy et al., 2024).



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (SEA) BY PEACEKEEPERS

- Peacekeepers, despite their mandate to protect vulnerable populations, have been involved in sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA).
- Between 2004 and 2016, the UN received nearly 2,000 allegations of SEA by peacekeepers and personnel in UN missions, including over 300 cases involving children (CRIN & REDRESS, 2020).
- In 2023, 758 allegations of SEA were recorded, a significant rise from 534 in 2022 and 265 in 2018 (UN, 2024).



The Intersection of Humanitarian Crises and Forced Marriage

During humanitarian crises, gender-based violence often manifests as child and forced marriages, practices deeply rooted in cultural norms that disproportionately affect women and girls. These practices not only violate human rights but are also seen as coping mechanisms in times of hardship. **Among the 20 countries with the highest rates of child marriage, 18 are affected by crises** (Girls Not Brides, 2020).

Cultural beliefs and societal expectations play a significant role in the prevalence of child marriage, particularly during crises. In environments of economic instability, armed conflict, or natural disasters, early marriage is often viewed as a survival strategy for families. Within these communities, marriage is not only a cultural norm but is seen as a means of securing a girl's future in the face of uncertain and unsafe conditions. Families, especially those with limited resources, may view marrying off a daughter as a way to alleviate financial strain or protect her from perceived threats. For girls, especially when access to education and economic opportunities is restricted, marriage can appear to be the only available option to achieve stability.

In these settings, where traditional gender roles are reinforced, girls are often expected to marry young and fulfil prescribed roles as wives and mothers. **As young as 14 or 15, many girls feel that they have no other choice but to marry, seeing it as the only way to secure their future in an environment where their options are limited** (GEC, 2024).

To effectively address the issue of child and forced marriages, especially in crisis contexts, a gender-transformative approach is essential. This means not only challenging harmful practices but also reshaping the cultural norms that underpin them. **Gender-transformative programmes work by engaging both men and women, as well as community leaders, to foster an environment where traditional gender roles are questioned, and girls' rights are prioritised. These programmes should involve communities in the design and implementation of solutions, ensuring that interventions are locally grounded and culturally relevant.**

Community-based approaches are critical because they recognise the unique social structures and traditions that influence attitudes towards marriage and gender. By working with community leaders, both male and female, such programmes can challenge entrenched beliefs and promote gender equality. Empowering both women and men to take an active role in transforming societal norms is key to creating lasting change. When men and boys are involved, they can help dismantle patriarchal structures and advocate for girls' education, economic empowerment, and the protection of their rights.

Addressing child and forced marriages requires not just legal frameworks and educational access but a shift in how communities perceive gender roles and girls' futures. Only by working alongside communities, leaders, and both genders can we ensure that girls are not seen as commodities to be married off but as individuals with rights, potential, and a future free from violence and oppression.

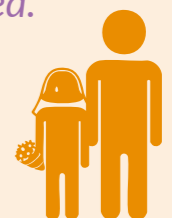


“Give me to marriage and help my husband succeed.”

*Girl, 15 years old**

“I ask adults to help me get married.”

*Girl, 14 years old**



*Testimonies collected by Educo for the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 in Niger

2.6. Barriers to Women's Leadership and Participation in Humanitarian Crises



EXCLUSION FROM LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING

- **Barriers to Leadership:** Women and girls in crisis settings face significant barriers to leadership roles, with social norms and patriarchal structures often preventing their full participation in crisis response and peacebuilding processes.
- **Gender Discrimination:** Due to their vulnerability within patriarchal societies, women frequently experience discrimination and marginalisation, which limits their access to decision-making roles.
- **Overlooked Contributions:** Women's activism and contributions are often ignored, and issues affecting women are frequently treated as peripheral to peacebuilding agendas (CARE International, 2018).



FACTORS BEHIND EXCLUSION

- **Social Norms and Gender Biases:** Women's exclusion from leadership roles is deeply influenced by social norms, gender biases, and structural inequalities, particularly in patriarchal societies, where male family members often control women's public participation.
- **Threat to Traditional Roles:** Women's involvement in leadership may be seen as challenging traditional gender roles, exposing them to criticism, harassment, and violence.
- **Erosion of Confidence:** Prevalent narratives that undermine women's leadership abilities often lead to lower self-confidence, discouraging women from seeking leadership positions (HPN, 2024).



UNDERREPRESENTATION IN PEACE PROCESSES

In 2023, women made up only:

- 9.6% of negotiators.
- 13.7% of mediators.
- 26.6% of signatories to peace and ceasefire agreements (UN Women, 2024a).



THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

- **Unique Perspectives:** Women bring valuable perspectives and solutions to crisis response and peacebuilding due to their lived experiences.
- **Evidence of Impact:** Research shows that women's participation in peace processes increases the likelihood of long-lasting peace agreements:
 - » A 20% higher chance of a peace agreement lasting at least two years (Chatnam House, 2023).
 - » A 35% higher chance of an agreement lasting 15 years (ibid).
- **Increased Effectiveness:** Despite the positive impact of women's participation, their involvement remains low, leading to inequitable and less effective responses. Without their input, humanitarian programmes often fail to address gender-specific needs (UN Women, 2024b).



Feminist Humanitarianism

Feminist humanitarianism is an approach that incorporates feminist principles and perspectives into humanitarian action and response, with a strong emphasis on gender equality and social justice. Its aim is to address the specific needs and rights of women and other marginalised groups in crisis situations. This framework acknowledges the disproportionate impact of crises on women, girls, and gender-diverse communities, drawing attention to the patriarchal dynamics that often marginalise the contributions of women and minorities. Recognising the importance of their unique perspective advocates for women's leadership and their active participation in decision-making, re-

covery and peace processes adopting an intersectional and inclusive approach (CDP, 2024). This is achieved by incorporating, at every stage of the intervention—particularly in humanitarian efforts—the unique expertise of women's and feminist CSOs. For far too long, these organisations have been excluded from consultation phases and decision-making processes, despite their invaluable contributions. They have an in-depth understanding of the needs, priorities, and aspirations of women and the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, making their involvement essential.

3. Breaking the Cycle of Trauma and Neglect

Humanitarian crises have profound and long-lasting impacts on children, often putting their ability to exercise their rights and imagine a positive future at risk. The trauma children endure during crises can lead to a wide range of psychological, social, and economic consequences that extend well beyond the immediate crisis, hindering their ability to build a better tomorrow. This is especially true for children and young people who face disruptions in education, development, and opportunities. **Such upheavals contribute to what is often termed a “lost generation”—one that is left without the tools or opportunities to rebuild their lives or contribute to their communities after the crisis has passed.** The effects are not only physical but also emotional, as children struggle to overcome the trauma, isolation, and stigmatization they experience (Education Above All, 2024).

To safeguard children's *right to the future*, it is critical to actively involve them in peacebuilding efforts and conflict prevention initiatives at all levels—community, national, and local. Children, who make up a significant portion of the populations in conflict-affected regions, have unique insights into the challenges they face. Their direct experiences give them a valuable perspective on the impact of conflict and the specific needs of younger populations. Involving children in peace processes helps ensure that interventions are tailored to their unique needs and challenges, such as disrupted education, child labour, and mental health issues. By integrating children's voices, policymakers can design more effective child-centred solutions that address the root causes of their suffering and offer real, sustainable change (ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024).

Moreover, engaging children in peacebuilding processes offers the opportunity to foster long-term peace. When children are included in these discussions, they are more likely to grow into strong advocates for peace, stability, and conflict resolution, contributing to the creation of a lasting culture of peace. Promoting inclusivity within peace processes is also essential—by ensuring that all children, including those from marginalised groups, have a seat at the table, peace initiatives are strengthened and legitimised. This inclusive approach signals to communities that peacebuilding is not just for the powerful but is for everyone, including the most vulnerable members of society (ibid.).

Furthermore, integrating child rights and peace education into school curricula, alongside community-based education for adults, plays a crucial role in shifting societal norms toward non-violence and respect for children's rights. By embedding these values early in life, children are equipped with the knowledge to recognise and protect their rights, understand peaceful conflict resolution, and navigate societal challenges in a constructive manner. Educating adults, including

parents, teachers, and community leaders, about child rights and non-violent conflict resolution ensures that children grow up in environments that uphold their dignity and safety (UNICEF, 2021).

Empowering children to take on leadership roles in peace advocacy not only fosters their confidence but also allows them to contribute to the peacebuilding process in meaningful ways. Offering them opportunities to lead peace initiatives, participate in youth advocacy groups, or engage in inter-community exchanges promotes active agency and resilience. Finally, adapting peace and rights education to local cultural contexts ensures its relevance and enhances its acceptance within communities, particularly in regions where violence and conflict are deeply embedded in societal norms (ACF, 2022).

By integrating these measures into humanitarian responses, we can ensure that children's rights to a better, safer future are upheld, helping to prevent future cycles of conflict and building more resilient, peaceful communities for generations to come (ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024).

WeWorld's Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit

WeWorld, in collaboration with the Peaceful Change Initiative, has developed a Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit. This comprehensive resource on conflict sensitivity provides a range of methods, resources, and case studies to support personnel in integrating conflict sensitivity into every aspect of the project cycle—from design to implementation and MEAL. Initially developed in Libya, the toolkit is now being rolled out across the organisation as a global resource.

Introduction to
The conflict
sensitivity
operational toolkit



4. Women in Humanitarian

We set out to explore not only the experience of being a woman or a girl affected by humanitarian crises, but also the experience of being a woman at the forefront of humanitarian work—those who respond to emergencies and work with communities through the complex processes of emergency response, recovery, reconstruction, and the build-

ing of long-term peace. To achieve this, we engaged with colleagues working in diverse, often volatile contexts, each with their own unique set of challenges. Their insights revealed the critical yet frequently overlooked needs of women in crisis situations, as well as compelling perspectives on why women must be placed at the heart of both immediate

responses and long-term solutions. Ultimately, we sought to understand what it means for these women to navigate the humanitarian sector, not just as responders, but as leaders and changemakers in a world that needs their strength, vision, and expertise.

“

THE VOICE OF

Claudia Oriolo



Claudia Oriolo has been working with WeWorld since February 2022. After two years as Country Representative in Syria, she now serves as Regional Manager for Eurasia. In this role, she oversees complex operations in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Thailand, Ukraine, and Moldova. Her responsibilities include developing country strategies, overseeing operations, strengthening partnerships with donors, and ensuring that field missions effectively address the needs of local communities.

Claudia's experience spans a range of diverse contexts, each with its own challenges, but all share a commonality: women and girls are often among the most vulnerable. Her work focuses on providing practical solutions to issues such as lack of access to education, gender-based violence, discrimination, and economic exclusion. While each situation requires tailored approaches, Claudia believes that meaningful results are achievable, even in the most challenging circumstances.

Claudia immediately clarifies a fundamental point: “Women are not a homogeneous group. Adolescent girls, elderly women, women with disabilities, and those from ethnic minorities may have distinct needs that require tailored approaches when it comes to programme interventions. Similarly, the role

of female humanitarian workers must be understood within the context of expatriate staff versus local staff. The difference can be significant.”

Claudia uses this intersectional approach to explain the different needs of women and girls, and the risks they face in the various contexts in which she has worked. “In Syria,” Claudia explains, “the welfare system is essentially non-existent, particularly in rural areas. Women and girls face constant risks of violence, abuse, and child labour. But one thing that stood out to me was how open Syria was to women in leadership roles. When I was there as a Country Representative, despite the fact that it was still a dictatorship, the country did not seem to place barriers on women in positions of authority. Personally, I never encountered resistance due to my gender, but I must emphasise that my situation was somewhat ‘privileged’ as a woman in a managerial role, but as expatriate staff. This is to reiterate that, not to say life is easy for women there—especially in rural areas where opportunities and services are incredibly limited—but I would not describe the context as inherently hostile to recognising female leadership.”

The contrast with Afghanistan is stark. Since the return of the Taliban to power, women have been systematically excluded from public life, denied access to work, education, and societal participation. “Women are essentially cut off from society. They cannot work, they cannot study, and they have no access to basic resources. Families are forced into making unthinkable decisions, like marrying off or even selling their daughters to ensure survival. The system discriminates against women at every level. It is driven by rigid religious rules, which makes it even harder to find a way forward. For us in the humanitarian sector, it's about being creative—finding ways to support communities without crossing lines that could put people in danger.”

Claudia emphasises that working in Afghanistan demands a discreet approach, particularly when addressing gender-based violence. “We cannot use terms like ‘women's empowerment’ or ‘gender-based violence’—it would put everyone in danger. Instead, we take a more subtle route, such as employing female community mobilizers, but always accompanied by their mahram. These women help us understand the needs of other women and families in ways that are safer and more culturally acceptable. It is not about avoiding the issues but about addressing them in ways that do not draw unnecessary attention or increase risks.”

In Ukraine and Moldova, the challenges are different—less about immediate survival and more about cultural and social barriers. “In these countries, traditional attitudes about gender are still very strong,” Claudia says. “In Moldova, for example, women are often viewed as primary caregivers, while men are seen as the breadwinners. These stereotypes also affect workplaces, where women often have to work harder to gain recognition. That said, Ukraine and Moldova are places where we can push for cultural change. We can be more direct here, addressing issues like domestic violence or how to balance work and family life. It is not just the right thing to do; it also makes our interventions more effective.”

Reflecting on the priorities for the humanitarian sector over the next decade, Claudia highlights the need for cultural shifts around gender inclusion. “It needs to become a natural part of programme design, not something we are constantly justifying. Too often, gender inclusion is reduced to numbers—hiring more women or ensuring they are among the beneficiaries. Those are important steps, but they are not enough. Gender is a complex issue that goes beyond representation. For instance, in Afghanistan, while much of the focus is rightly on women, we also see young boys subjected to exploitation. That is a gender issue too, but it does not receive the same attention. We need

to expand the conversation to include everyone affected by gender inequality.”

Claudia envisions a future where the value of women in leadership roles no longer needs constant emphasis. “The goal should be a system where men and women are viewed as equals, with the same opportunities and recognition. Of course, there are contexts, like Afghanistan, where adaptations are necessary. Sometimes we have to appoint male representatives to engage with governments that will not accept women in senior roles. But that should be a pragmatic decision, not a default setting. Ultimately, it is about recognising competence, not gender.”

“Gender inclusion needs to become part of programme design, not something we are constantly justifying.”

When asked what it means to her to be a woman in humanitarian work, Claudia reflects on her experience in Syria, in the conflict-stricken region of Deir ez-Zor. “We were negotiating with a Governor reporting directly to the Assad regime to implement a reconstruction project. I expected the interaction to be formal and distant, perhaps even dismissive. Instead, I was surprised by the respect and attention he gave to my proposals. We managed to reach an agreement through genuine dialogue. That experience reinforced the importance of mutual respect—when it is present, gender can become secondary, even in the most difficult contexts.”

For Claudia, change must also come from within humanitarian organisations. “We cannot go into Afghanistan or Moldova promoting gender equality if our offices in Europe still have issues with stereotypes or sexist behaviours. Real progress comes when we stop treating gender as an obstacle and start valuing people for their abilities. It is not going to happen overnight, but I genuinely believe we will get there.”



Ganna Kolomiets



Olena Grebenyk



Olena Ostapenko

“

THE VOICES OF

Ganna Kolomiets, Olena Grebenyk, and Olena Ostapenko

Ganna Kolomiets, Olena Grebenyk, and Olena Ostapenko are all part of WeWorld humanitarian staff in Ukraine. Despite their different roles, they share a common commitment to advocating for gender equality and empowering women in crisis contexts. Through their work, they reflect on the challenges faced by women, the barriers to their participation in the humanitarian sector, and the critical needs that remain unaddressed, underscoring the importance of their active involvement in rebuilding and shaping societies after conflict.

Ganna Kolomiets, who works as an HR & Conscriptio Officer witnesses firsthand the challenges women face in her field. She points out that competition and pressure from colleagues—both male and female—can create stress and inequality in the workplace. Ganna also emphasises the importance of providing women with opportunities to find meaningful employment that allows them to survive and support their families, particularly in crisis situations. “*There is an opportunity to find a job and earn a salary that allows you to survive and meet basic needs,*” she notes. However, Ganna also identifies barriers to women’s participation in humanitarian work, including a lack of appropriate education and experience.

Olena Ostapenko, who works as a Cash Officer, highlights the pervasive issue of gender discrimination, which limits women’s access to education, employment, and other es-

sential services. “*Women often face discrimination because of their gender, which restricts their access to education, employment, healthcare, and other opportunities,*” she explains. She also draws attention to the limited availability of reproductive health services, which can lead to unwanted pregnancies and health complications. “*In poor or crisis settings, women may be economically dependent on men, further limiting their autonomy,*” Olena adds.

Olena Grebenyk, a Public Health Officer with the Wash Fit programme, works in the southern regions of Ukraine—Mykolaiv and Kherson—both heavily affected by the conflict. Olena stresses that the risks faced by women and girls in these areas are severe, from the constant threat of violence to the daily struggle for survival. “*In Kherson, people are constantly under fire, and the main need there is survival,*” she shares. In Mykolaiv, the destruction of homes and infrastructure has left many women responsible for providing for their families, while also carrying the mental burden of worrying about loved ones fighting in the war. “*The burden on women is both material—providing for their families—and mental, as they worry about their husbands, sons, both those serving in the army and those who could be called up,*” she adds, describing the daily emotional strain many women face.

Despite these shared challenges, each woman identifies key needs that are often overlooked by humanitarian organisations. Ganna calls for greater opportunities for women to

acquire highly skilled professions to help them adapt to a tough world. Olena Ostapenko advocates for equal access to education, protection from violence, and economic independence. She also stresses the need for better psychosocial support for women who have experienced violence or loss. Olena Grebenyk, on the other hand, highlights the importance of addressing sexual and reproductive health issues, which she believes are still neglected in crisis settings.

The women also discuss the barriers that prevent women from fully participating in the humanitarian sector. Ganna highlights the lack of access to appropriate education and experience as a significant hurdle for women entering the field. “*The availability of education, basic experience, and a chance to enter the field are considerable challenges,*” she says. Olena Ostapenko points out that cultural stereotypes and gender perceptions often prevent women from taking on leadership roles in humanitarian efforts. “*Gender stereotypes can limit women’s ability to participate in humanitarian action,*” she explains. Additionally, domestic responsibilities, such as caring for children and relatives, often prevent women from engaging in humanitarian work, especially in roles that are mobile or dangerous.

Olena Grebenyk points to the ageing workforce as another factor that limits women’s participation in physically demanding roles. Nevertheless, each of the women has observed the positive impact of women’s involvement in humanitarian responses. Ganna notes that the inclusion of women brings innovative ideas and additional resources to the sector. “*Innovative ideas emerged, and additional resources were mobilised,*” she notes, highlighting the vital role women play in advancing humanitarian action. Olena Ostapenko has seen that when women are included in humanitarian teams, the effectiveness of aid delivery improves, as women bring unique perspectives and a more comprehensive approach to addressing community needs. “*The inclusion of women in humanitarian teams often leads to a more comprehensive approach to working with communities,*” Olena says. Olena Grebenyk observes that women’s involvement in programmes such as gender-based violence, mental health and psychosocial support, and lactation consultancy is critical to their success. “*Women’s involvement goes beyond specific programmes; it is integral to any humanitarian initiative,*” she emphasises.

Looking ahead, all three women agree on the need to prioritise reproductive health and women’s rights in the coming years. For Ganna, equipping women with the opportunity to acquire new skills and adapt to challenges is a priority. She

believes that empowering women to thrive in a tough world is key to creating sustainable change. Olena Ostapenko stresses the importance of ensuring equal access to reproductive health services and women’s rights, which she believes are essential to building resilient, equitable communities. Olena Grebenyk, similarly, views SRH as a key issue for the future, especially given the ongoing migration of populations. “*With the large migration of populations across Europe and beyond, the issue of sexual and reproductive health seems to me to be the most relevant in the coming years,*” she says.

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When individuals understand their rights, gender can become an advantage, not a category of risk.

All three women believe that gender should be seen as an opportunity rather than a risk in humanitarian responses. Ganna stresses the importance of understanding one’s rights and opportunities to transform gender into an advantage. “*When individuals understand their rights, gender can become an advantage, not a category of risk,*” she explains. Olena Ostapenko agrees, emphasising the importance of creating culturally sensitive environments where women can fully participate in humanitarian work. Olena Grebenyk believes that awareness and education are crucial in turning gender into a strength. “*When a person knows their rights and opportunities, gender can become an advantage,*” she asserts.

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Women are the ones who decide and raise nations after crises.

For each of these women, being a woman in the humanitarian sector is about more than fulfilling professional duties. It is about making meaningful change in situations where women’s needs are often ignored or underestimated. Ganna believes that “*Women are the ones who decide and raise nations after crises*”. Olena Ostapenko reflects on the critical role women play in fostering equality and protecting human rights, blending professionalism with humanity in their work. Olena Grebenyk, while emphasising teamwork and unity, believes that humanitarian work transcends gender, focusing on human qualities. “*The main thing is human qualities—teamwork, cohesion, support for each other,*” she says.

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THE VOICE OF

Giovanna Fotia



Giovanna Fotia has been working with WeWorld for over a year. Her journey started in WeWorld Moldova, though she has spent the last 11 months in the Palestine Country Office where she now works as the Country Representative.

Discussing the situation in Palestine, Giovanna outlines the significant risk factors that women and girls face, particularly exacerbated by the ongoing conflict and long-lasting occupation. *“Economic hardships remain some of the most serious challenges, with high unemployment and poverty rates, especially following the recent war on Gaza that began on 7 October 2023. The war has left families in an increasingly fragile situation, with the Gaza Strip completely devastated. Added to this, there are further restrictions on movement in the West Bank, including the complete inaccessibility of employment opportunities previously available in Israel. This has disproportionately impacted women and girls, who are often the most affected when it comes to accessing basic services.”*

Giovanna emphasises that these difficulties are particularly felt when it comes to health and education. *“Access to maternal and reproductive health has been greatly restricted, making pregnancy and childbirth far more dangerous. Even education has been deeply compromised, especially in the West Bank and Gaza, with the coercive environment and the ongoing conflict disrupting children’s schooling. This has led to higher dropout rates, especially for girls, further perpetuating poverty and dependence. Mental health is another critical issue, as the constant exposure to violence and instability has resulted in increased anxiety, depression, and trauma-related disorders among women and girls.”*

She adds, *“The needs of Palestinian women and girls are wide-ranging and span all areas of basic services, particularly health, education, protection, and economic empowerment.”*

Turning to overlooked needs, Giovanna reflects on the continued marginalisation of women in peace and decision-making processes. *“Women are underrepresented in peace negotiations and decision-making. Despite studies rec-*

ognising their essential role in sustaining peace, they continue to be marginalised. In emergency and displacement settings, their unique needs are often overlooked.”

She continues, *“While the humanitarian sector has made efforts to integrate gender considerations into interventions, it remains a challenge to fully address their specific needs—ranging from healthcare to protection—while rushing to deliver life-saving assistance. For instance, the specific health and hygiene needs related to menstruation are often neglected in war zones. This was particularly evident in Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of women and girls were left without proper support. At WeWorld, we’ve made it a priority to include menstrual health and hygiene management in our response.”*

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Giovanna also highlights barriers women face in the humanitarian sector itself. *“The main barriers stem from deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and cultural norms that limit opportunities. Women are often underrepresented in decision-making processes, which prevents their voices from being fully heard in humanitarian strategies.”*

She adds, *“Certain peacekeeping environments are highly male-dominated, which increases the risks of discrimination and harassment. It’s critical for humanitarian organisations to proactively address these risks by creating policies that promote gender equality and ensure inclusive work environments.”*

“Women’s leadership directly impacts the inclusivity, relevance, and effectiveness of humanitarian responses. Women bring critical insights that are vital for understanding the needs of diverse populations, especially women and girls, who are often the most affected by crises.”

Reflecting on her experience of women’s involvement in humanitarian interventions, Giovanna notes a key positive outcome. *“One of the most tangible changes I’ve seen is the increased prioritisation of gender-sensitive approaches in programme design and delivery. When women are actively involved, there’s a noticeable shift in addressing the unique needs of marginalised groups, including women, girls, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.”*

She goes on, *“Prioritising the participation of women in community engagement is essential. Women and girls often feel more comfortable discussing sensitive issues with other women, allowing us to gather more detailed information about the needs of affected populations. As a result, we’ve been able to design more relevant and effective interventions.”*

When asked about the future of women in the humanitarian sector, Giovanna identifies a clear objective. *“Ensuring women’s leadership and equal participation in decision-making processes at all levels should be the number one priority. Women’s leadership directly impacts the inclusivity, relevance, and effectiveness of humanitarian responses. Women bring critical insights that are vital for understanding the needs of diverse populations, especially women and girls, who are often the most affected by crises. Promoting women’s leadership would strengthen humanitarian outcomes, challenge cultural norms, and foster economic empowerment.”*

Lastly, Giovanna reflects on what being a woman in the humanitarian sector means to her. *“It’s a journey of personal growth. It’s an opportunity to navigate complex environments, testing my ability to lead with strength and empathy. It’s also about the solidarity I share with other women in the sector, building a network of collaboration and shared vision.”*

She concludes, *“Being in a higher management role has given me the privilege to advocate for and promote decisions that enhance the welfare and opportunities for women in the humanitarian sector, which is something I feel particularly proud of.”*

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THE VOICE OF

Hadeel Tahboub



Hadeel Tahboub has been with WeWorld for over 11 years, holding various roles that deepened her connection to the humanitarian sector. “I currently work as the West Bank Protection Consortium Programme Manager, but my journey with WeWorld started in 2013 as a social worker. That role laid the foundation for the job I do now, understanding the complexities of the communities we work with.”

Working in Palestine, specifically the West Bank, Hadeel explains the challenges women and girls face daily. “Movement restrictions are a critical issue. Checkpoints, roadblocks, and settler violence severely limit their access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment. These barriers push women into cycles of dependency.”

The economic struggles facing women are stark. “Unemployment rates are high, particularly for women, and societal expectations around caregiving roles compound the issue. Since the 7th of October, the economic situation has worsened, with many men losing their jobs. Women are often left to manage the burden of financial instability with limited access to opportunities.”

Hadeel also highlights risks of violence and harassment. “Women and girls are vulnerable to harassment and violence in their homes, communities, and while accessing services. This includes violence from settlers and military forces, creating a pervasive sense of insecurity.”

Addressing pressing needs, Hadeel states, “Protection and safety from violence are critical. Beyond that, economic empowerment is essential to ensure resilience, and increasing women’s participation in decision-making is vital for transformative change.”

She notes some overlooked needs in conflict contexts. “Mental health and psychosocial support is a glaring gap. The demand far outweighs the supply due to the effects of long-term occupation and daily violence. Additionally, barriers like social stigma and logistical challenges make accessing gender-based violence services difficult for many women.”

Economic empowerment remains a major challenge, especially in Area C. “Women typically engage in unpaid work like herding, milking, and agriculture, while men control the income. This system leaves women without financial independence or decision-making power.”

Reflecting on women’s participation in humanitarian work, Hadeel identifies key barriers. “Security concerns, mobility restrictions, and cultural norms discourage women from working in high-risk areas or participating in decision-making processes. These societal pressures add another layer of difficulty for women.”

Access to income-generating opportunities, vocational training, and micro-finance support can transform their lives.

Financial independence reduces vulnerability to exploitation and helps women access other critical sectors like mental health services.

When women are empowered economically, they gain the confidence to take control of their lives and foster resilience.

Despite these challenges, Hadeel sees positive impacts from women’s involvement. “Their participation has brought a sharper focus on the specific needs of women and children, better understanding of community risks, and empowered women to become decision-makers within their communities. It’s a powerful shift when women take ownership of their roles and influence change.”

I balance many roles, not just as a professional but as an advocate for the rights of women and marginalised groups. In Palestine, where women’s roles are often limited by social and political circumstances, working in this field is an opportunity to break barriers and drive transformative change.

Looking ahead, Hadeel prioritises economic empowerment for women. “Access to income-generating opportunities, vocational training, and micro-finance support can transform their lives. Financial independence reduces vulnerability to exploitation and helps women access other critical sectors like mental health services. When women are empowered economically, they gain the confidence to take control of their lives and foster resilience.”

She believes the humanitarian sector must rethink its approach to gender, viewing it as an opportunity rather than a risk category. “At WeWorld Palestine, we’ve implemented the Community Protection Approach (CPA) since 2014. One of its core principles is the inclusion of women as leaders and change-makers.”

On a personal level, Hadeel reflects on her role as a woman in the humanitarian sector. “I balance many roles, not just as a professional but as an advocate for the rights of women and marginalised groups. In Palestine, where women’s roles are often limited by social and political circumstances, working in this field is an opportunity to break barriers and drive transformative change.”

She adds, “It’s about creating spaces where women can lead and shape the future of their communities. On a personal level, being a woman in this sector also carries a deep sense of responsibility and solidarity. Many of us, as women in Palestine, are directly impacted by the political and socio-economic challenges we face, whether it’s the violence of the ongoing occupation, restrictions on our movement, or the economic hardships. Despite these challenges, we are often at the forefront of humanitarian work, showing immense strength and resilience.”

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THE VOICE OF

Viviana Bianchessi



Viviana Bianchessi, Country Representative in Mali for We-World, stepped into her role in March 2024. With nearly a year in the position, Viviana has been deeply immersed in the complex and multifaceted challenges facing Mali, particularly for women and girls. Reflecting on the region's crisis, she explains, “Mali has been grappling with a worsening political crisis since 2012, marked by two coups d'état and ongoing conflict between armed groups for control of the territory. The desert regions, controlled by Islamist groups, are particularly dangerous. In these areas, women and children bear the brunt of the crisis, facing gender-based violence, sexual violence, human trafficking, and the systematic denial of their fundamental rights. These realities are not isolated incidents but the norm.”

Viviana speaks about the urgent needs of women in the region, emphasising the systemic obstacles that prevent their empowerment. “Women in these contexts have needs that span multiple sectors. At the heart of it all is the need for recognition—the affirmation of their rights and their role in society. Cultural and social norms often relegate women to the sidelines, forcing girls into early marriages and denying them access to education, healthcare, and protection from violence. These are basic human rights, yet for many women here, they remain out of reach.” However, Viviana believes that some aspects of women's experiences remain invisible or under-addressed in humanitarian responses. “One critical area that humanitarian actors often overlook is individuality. People are too often treated as homogeneous groups—men, women, children, or youth—without acknowledging the unique histories, traumas, and needs of each person. While this grouping is sometimes necessary to maximise the reach of humanitarian interventions, it risks reducing humanity to numbers, stripping away the uniqueness of each person's story.”

She continues, “Another overlooked aspect is the long-term consequences of crises, which are frequently neglected in favour of addressing immediate needs. For example, in cases of gender-based violence, humanitarian interventions often focus on urgent physical and material support, but the psychological scars, social stigma, and long-term disempowerment are rarely given the attention they deserve. These lingering effects can hinder women's recovery and prevent them from reclaiming their independence.”

Viviana also highlights the barriers that prevent women from participating in the humanitarian sector. “Traditional gender roles remain one of the biggest obstacles. While some women have managed to defy these norms, stepping into leadership roles or founding local associations within the humanitarian field, too many are still confined to the roles of wives and mothers. Cultural expectations and societal pressures discourage women from pursuing careers or roles outside their domestic responsibilities. Displacement, extremism, and protests further compound these challenges, making it nearly impossible for many women to break free from the cycle of exclusion. Many young girls are forced into early marriages, subjected to sexual violence, or denied education, often being confined to domestic chores or treated as commodities to support their families.”

Despite these systemic barriers, Viviana recounts moments of resilience and transformation that give her hope. “One of the most inspiring changes I've witnessed was among a group of women—mothers of children with disabilities. With encouragement and support, they came together to form a business enterprise, empowering themselves financially and gaining the ability to support their families. This shift was profound: they moved from being women who waited for aid to women who took initiative and control over their lives. What's more, their example inspired others in the community, sparking a ripple effect of empowerment and change. It was a powerful reminder of what women can achieve when given the right opportunities and support.”

Looking ahead, Viviana is clear about the humanitarian sector's top priority. “Empowering women must be the focus of the next decade. Empowering women means empowering entire communities. It starts with reversing traditional roles through greater access to education and training and fostering confidence in women's abilities to lead. This is not just about addressing immediate needs but enabling women to reclaim their agency and take control of their lives. Disarming patriarchy and arming women with knowledge and awareness is essential for lasting change.”

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When it comes to designing humanitarian responses, Viviana advocates for a fundamental shift in perspective. “We need to go beyond gender stereotypes, which are often deeply entrenched and difficult to overcome, especially in crisis contexts. In some areas, even talking about gender-based violence is taboo or outright forbidden by culture or extremist groups. To overcome these barriers, we must stop viewing gender as a vulnerability and instead recognise it as a strength. Each person—man, woman, or child—has unique strengths and resilience that should be leveraged. But this shift cannot be limited to humanitarian contexts; it must extend to society as a whole. Far too often, womanhood is still narrowly defined as being synonymous with motherhood or wifehood. We need to break these outdated notions and create space for women to thrive as individuals.”

For Viviana, being a woman in the humanitarian sector is both a challenge and an opportunity. “It's an opportunity to approach interventions from a different perspective, prioritising women's rights and addressing the unique challenges they face in contexts where they are often invisible. It's also a chance to challenge gender stereotypes, which often portray women as less capable of operating in dangerous or insecure environments. Leading a team of men in these contexts can be particularly challenging, as cultural norms often position men as decision-makers who are unaccustomed to being led by women.”

Despite these challenges, Viviana finds deep fulfilment in her work. “Being a woman in this sector is about more than just breaking barriers. It's about creating opportunities where none existed before, fostering inclusion, and paving the way for a more equitable future. Women have the resilience, strength, and potential to be transformative leaders in the humanitarian field, and it's our responsibility to ensure that they have the tools and opportunities to succeed.”

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CHAPTER 2.

Country Profiles



1. How to Measure a Humanitarian Crisis

Humanitarian crises are usually measured by the scale and urgency of the affected population's needs—whether for food, shelter, healthcare, or safety—yet different and often overlooked criteria can influence how a crisis is recognised and addressed. **The flow of aid is not always a definitive factor in determining whether a crisis is deemed significant; public opinion, media coverage, and international political priorities also play a major role in shaping how crises are perceived and responded to.** In many cases, crises that are long-lasting or occur in regions that are geographically distant or politically complicated tend to receive less attention, even when the humanitarian needs are equally dire. As a result, some crises are often labelled as “neglected” because they do not garner the same level of international awareness or urgency.

These countries face chronic humanitarian conditions that persist over

Some crises are often labelled as “neglected” because they do not garner the same level of international awareness or urgency.

time, yet their struggles are frequently overshadowed by other, more immediate global emergencies. In some cases, these crises are deeply entrenched due to systemic challenges such as weak governance, insecurity, and poverty, which hinder the delivery of timely aid. Additionally, media underreporting often leads to limited global awareness of the severity of the situation. As a result, these populations experience ongoing instability, displacement, and lack of resources—challenges that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable, particularly women and children.

Today's world is marked by protracted crises, where humanitarian needs are not short-term, but rather extend over years or even decades. In this context, it is crucial to recognize that crises like these require long-term commitment and sustained international attention. Failure to address these neglected crises risks leaving vulnerable populations without the support they need to rebuild their lives and communities. Public opinion and media coverage must not dictate which crises are worthy of attention, as prolonged suffering and instability are unacceptable, regardless of the geographic or political challenges that may obscure them.

The countries included in our analysis are Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Palestine, and Ukraine. These countries were selected because they all face complex, multifaceted humanitarian challenges, and WeWorld has been active there for

many years, either directly or through its work with the ChildFund Alliance. **These are countries where groups in fragile and vulnerable conditions, such as women, girls, and people affected by intersectional discrimination, bear the greatest burden during crises or emergencies.** They are also the ones often left behind in recovery and peace processes. Yet, this should not be the case.

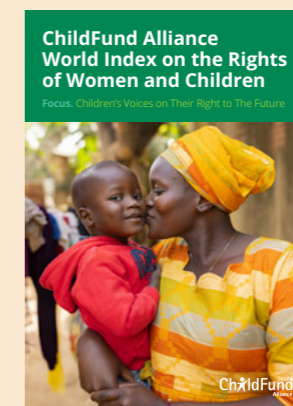
This chapter delves into the specific context of each country, examining how these ongoing crises are affecting women and girls. Focus is given to the past decade, which marked the launch not only of the 2030 Agenda but also of the ChildFund Alliance World Index – previously known as the WeWorld Index – used to extract quantitative data that informs the analysis. However, as the World Index does not reflect the latest events, the data is supplemented with qualitative insights gathered from the field, through situation reports and other research methodologies in WeWorld projects, and with more recent quantitative data from reliable secondary sources.

Continuous monitoring and updating of data are crucial to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the evolving humanitarian situations. As we move forward, it is imperative that we consistently collect and analyse the most up-to-date data. This is essential not only for accurately assessing the immediate needs of affected populations but also for shaping policies and humanitarian responses that are timely, effective, and informed by the reality on the ground. The ongoing collection and monitoring of data is a critical tool in addressing the root causes of crises, ensuring that interventions are evidence-based, and advocating for solutions that prioritise the most vulnerable, particularly women and children. In the humanitarian field, data is not just a resource – it is a lifeline that helps translate information into action, ultimately saving lives and fostering long-term recovery.

What is the ChildFund Alliance World Index?

The ChildFund Alliance World Index is a flagship report of ChildFund Alliance. Formerly known as the WeWorld Index and published annually since 2015 by WeWorld – the Italian member of ChildFund Alliance – the Index measures the living conditions of women and children worldwide by assessing the promotion, exercise, and violation of their rights. The report comprises 3 main sections:

- 1. Theoretical Framework:** This chapter outlines the theoretical framework, referencing the Human Rights-Based Approach and the concept of capabilities as the building blocks of the entire report.
- 2. Index Results and Global Ranking:** This chapter presents the Index results, and the global ranking of countries based on the implementation of women's and children's human rights. The overall Index is the result of the aggregation of the three sub-indexes (Context, Children, and Women), which in turn comprise 5 dimensions each, for a total of 15 dimensions. Each dimension comprises 2 indicators, for a total of 30¹. Such methodology allows us to obtain 4 global rankings (Overall Index, Context Sub-Index, Children's Sub-Index, and Women's Index), elaborations by geographic areas, and rankings for the 15 dimensions and individual country profiles.
- 3. Thematic Focus:** The 2024 edition focuses on the right of children, youth, and the younger generations to have a future. ChildFund Alliance has developed and articulated its understanding of the “right to the future” as a lens for analysing and addressing the complex landscape young and new generations must navigate. This section of the report includes original data and reflects the voices of **10,000 children and adolescents from 41 countries**. It also contains examples of best practices of actions implemented by the 11 ChildFund Alliance members to safeguard children's rights.



¹ Indexes are inherently political tools, as the choice of indicators reflects subjective assessments of relevance, shaped by the priorities, interests, and perspectives of their creators. There is no universal measure of a country's social, economic, or political reality; instead, each index highlights certain issues—such as women's rights, education, or WASH—while potentially sidelining others. This selection process is influenced by political, cultural, and ideological considerations, making the act of measurement far from neutral. Similarly, human rights, though often considered universal, are not guaranteed but require active commitment and concrete political decisions to uphold. Defending these rights is an ongoing process, tied not only to statistical measurements but to principles of justice and equality. Despite these limitations, indexes play a critical role. They enable comparisons between countries, provide data for tracking trends, and support advocacy by identifying gaps, such as the need for disaggregated data. Tools like the ChildFund Alliance World Index demonstrate the importance of robust data in raising awareness and driving action on key issues like human rights and gender equality.

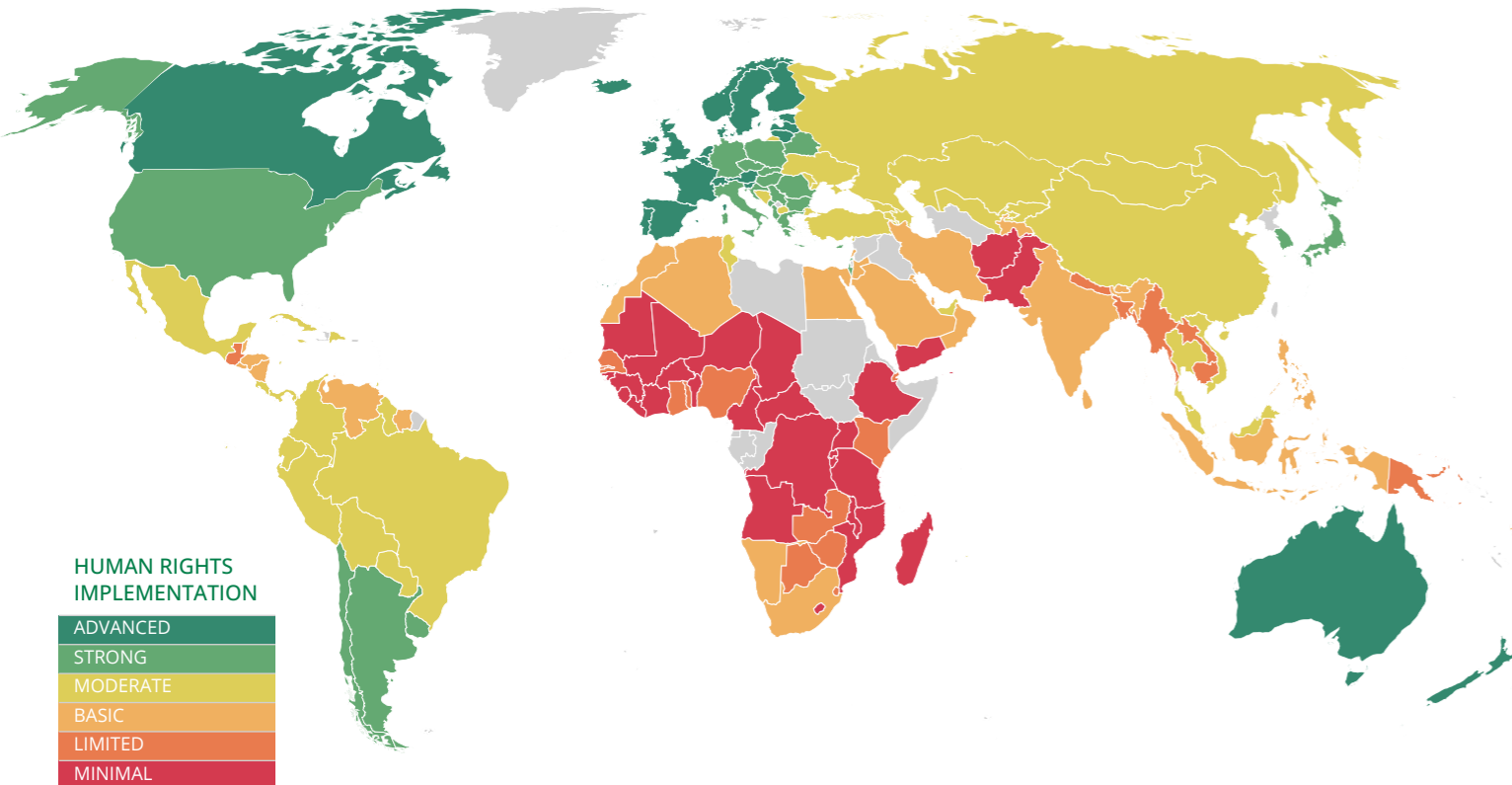
Highlights from the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024

The ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 evaluates 157 countries on their implementation of women's and children's human rights².

- As of 2023, 1 in 3 children and more than 1 in 4 women were living in countries with limited or minimal human rights implementation.
- At the current pace, it will take 113 years for women and children to witness the full implementation of rights assessed by the World Index across all countries.
- The contexts where women and children live today are less democratic and safe compared to the past, although there are improvements in access to information and WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) services.
- Significant progress has been registered in children's health, but their educational rights have stagnated since 2020, likely due to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Women's levels of education and participation in decision-making are on the rise. However, women remain the most vulnerable and marginalised social group globally, experiencing the highest likelihood of human rights violations.

² Countries lacking more than 6 indicators out of 30 were excluded: Bahamas, Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, Congo Republic, Eritrea, Micronesia, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Syria, and Turkmenistan.

ChildFund Alliance World Index on the Rights of Women and Children: the 2024 Global Map



Afghanistan

Index	World Index		Context Sub-Index		Children's Sub-Index		Women's Sub-Index	
Year	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
2015	158/163	31.8/100	142/163	41.6/100	139/163	39.7/100	163/163	19.5/100
2024	153/157	34.3/100	143/157	46.4/100	132/157	42.9/100	157/157	20.3/100

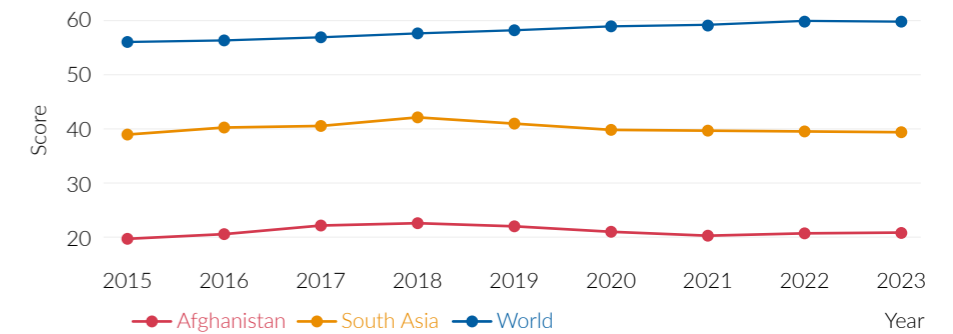
Human Rights Implementation: MINIMAL

Afghanistan Before 2021: Persistent Crisis and Gender Vulnerabilities

Since 1979, Afghanistan has endured an unrelenting humanitarian crisis driven by armed conflict, political instability, natural disasters, and socioeconomic collapse. These interconnected challenges have devastated the population, with women and girls disproportionately affected due to deeply rooted gender inequalities.

The gender disparities worsened over time, as reflected in Afghanistan's consistent last place ranking in the Women's Sub-Index since 2015. The Women's Sub-Index (Figure 1) shows Afghanistan trailing far behind South Asia and global averages. This stark inequality highlights the compounded vulnerabilities women faced even before the Taliban's return.

FIGURE 1. Historical Series of the Women's Sub-Index: World, South Asia, and Afghanistan Performance
(Source: ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024)



“ Since 2015, the first year of the World Index's publication, Afghanistan has consistently ranked last in the Women's Sub-Index.”

The Withdrawal of International Forces in 2021: A Dramatic Turning Point

In August 2021, the Taliban regained power following the withdrawal of international forces, triggering a seismic collapse in governance and essential services. This shift created widespread panic and exacerbated Afghanistan's existing instability.

Civilians bore the brunt of the upheaval, as internal conflicts, resistance movements, and violent suppression of dissent intensified. Bombings, assassinations, and mass displacement further fractured Afghanistan's already fragile social and economic fabric. The situation was compounded by a devastated economy, leaving the majority of Afghans in extreme poverty.

The Taliban's return to power has inflicted devastating consequences on millions. Three years into Taliban rule, Afghanistan is grappling with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. **By 2024, over 2 million people had been internally displaced, while another 6.4 million sought refuge in neighbouring countries** (UNHCR, 2024). The economy, heavily reliant on foreign aid, collapsed, plunging the majority of the population into extreme poverty with over 23.7 million people, including 9.2 million children, still depending on humanitarian aid (OCHA, 2024).

The Gendered Impact of the Crisis

Women in Afghanistan have been among the hardest hit under Taliban rule, with their lives dramatically altered by severe restrictions. **The so-called "Morality Law" have denied them access to education, employment, and public spaces, effectively erasing their presence from civic life.** For instance, in 2021, only 5% of Afghan girls were enrolled in secondary school, and just 1 in 5 women were

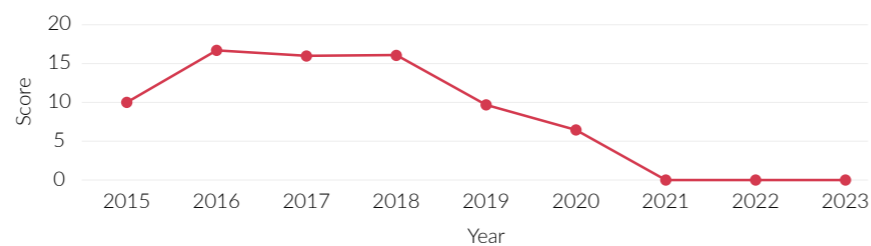
employed (ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024). This systemic exclusion extends to restrictions on travel and public presence, isolating women from their communities. Being forced to wear the abaya and banned from working in many NGOs silences their contributions to society. Moreover, the closure of the Ministry of Women's Affairs has removed a vital voice for their rights, leaving women with fewer avenues to seek justice and empowerment.



In 2021, only **5%** of Afghan girls were enrolled in secondary school and only **1 in 5** women were employed

(ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024¹)

FIGURE 2. **Women in Ministerial Level Position 2015-2024 in Afghanistan²**



¹ Source: Elaboration on UNESCO and World Bank/ILO 2023.

² Source: ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 (Elaboration of Inter-Parliamentary Union, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), Women in Politics)

The trend of women's representation in ministerial positions shows a sharp decline under Taliban rule (Figure 2). In 2015, 10% of positions were held by women, but this dropped significantly to 0% by 2021. This decline reflects a broader pattern of erasure of women from governance and leadership roles.

The Taliban's restrictive policies have not only stripped women of economic independence but have also deprived them of access to vital services. Secondary schools for girls are closed in most provinces, and universities are largely inaccessible, creating a "lost generation" of young women with no prospects for personal or professional growth. Gender-based violence has surged, including alarming rates of forced marriages, many involving minors. Displaced women face heightened risks of sexual violence, exploitation, and trafficking. Meanwhile, the collapse of the health-care system has further endangered women's lives by depriving them of essential services such as prenatal and emergency obstetric care. These compounded challenges have left many women navigating a life of systemic exclusion and dependency, struggling for survival in a society that continues to marginalize them.

"I am a mother of five. Although I am illiterate, I take immense pride in seeing three of my children attend school. Education, I believe, is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty that has burdened my family for generations.

We live in a crumbling house, seven of us together—myself, my five children, and my elderly mother-in-law. Life is a constant struggle. My eldest daughter is only 15, but severe economic hardships forced us to marry her off early to ease our financial burdens. My son, who is 11, has mental health challenges that require monthly medical care. On top of that, my 75-year-old mother-in-law, disabled and suffering from respiratory issues, depends on me for her medications and daily care.

It hasn't been easy. After a family tragedy, I became solely responsible for my children, and our struggles deepened without any stable income. Meeting even our most basic needs felt impossible at times."

Shirin, 40 years old*

*Testimony collected by WeWorld in Afghanistan

The economic collapse has disproportionately affected women, deepening the feminisation of poverty. Female-headed households, such as those led by widows or single mothers, have been forced to adopt harmful survival strategies, including child labour and early marriages.

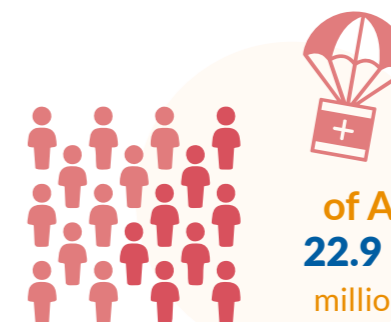
A Climate Crisis

Natural disasters have intensified these challenges. For instance, the 2023 earthquake resulted in over 1,400 casualties (OCHA, 2023), while floods in 2024, driven by the La Niña weather phenomenon, impacted more than 173,300 people and accounted for 96% of all natural disasters in the country (OCHA, 2024a). Severe winters have further deteriorated living conditions, particularly in mountainous areas where access to remote regions remains extremely difficult. A potential transition to a La Niña episode in early 2025 raises concerns about reduced snowfall and rainfall, coupled with higher temperatures, which could create drought-like conditions in key rain-fed agricultural regions, especially in the northeastern, northern, and northwestern areas. This development could reverse the modest improvement in wa-

ter access seen in 2024, when heavy spring rains alleviated drought conditions in many areas. Afghanistan continues to grapple with a water crisis driven by years of over-extraction, poor water resource management, and insufficient groundwater recharge (ibid.).

The Outlook for 2025

By 2025, nearly half of Afghanistan's population - 22.9 million people, of whom 25% are women and 53% are children (OCHA HNRP, 2025) - is expected to require humanitarian aid.



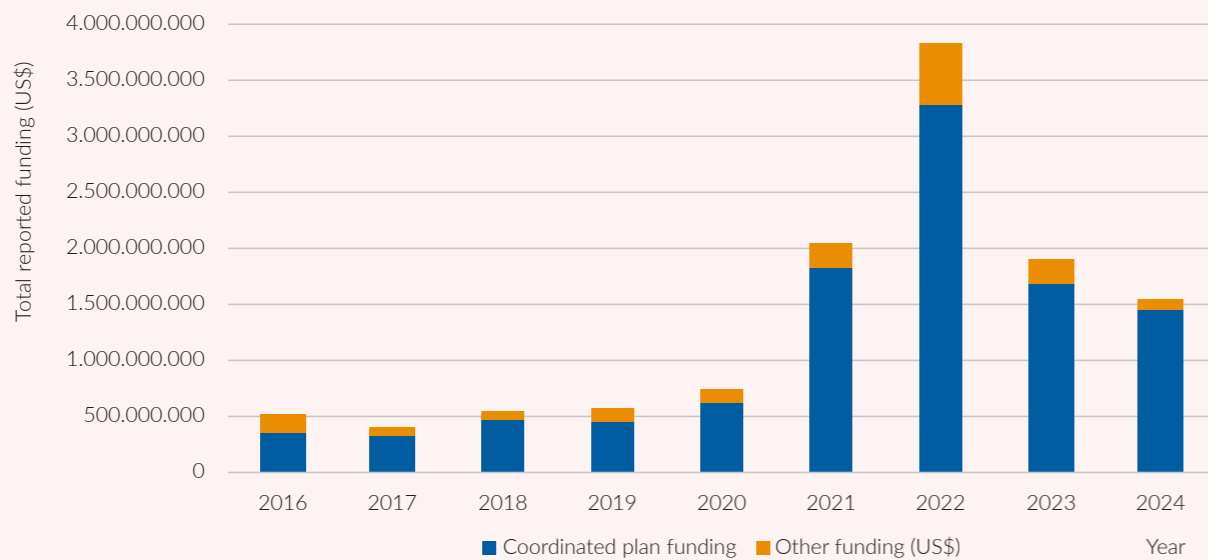
By 2025, nearly half of Afghanistan's population - 22.9 million people, including 7.8 million women and children requiring nutrition assistance - is expected to require humanitarian aid.

(OCHA, 2024a)

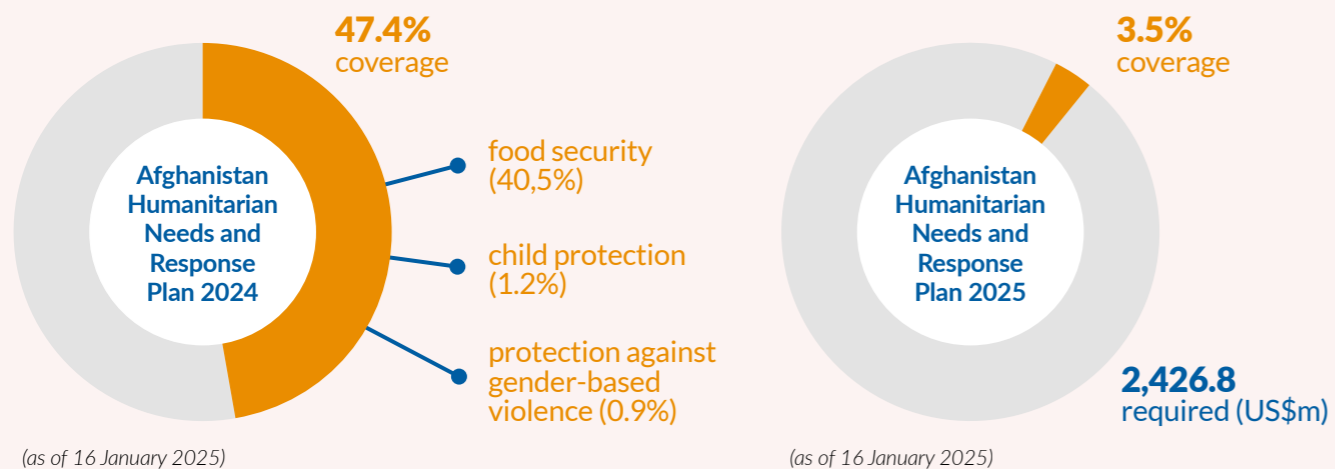
Financial Tracking Service

Trends in reported funding - Afghanistan

Source: OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service (as of 20 December 2024)



OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service



The Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 was funded at only 47.4%. Of the more than \$3 billion required to meet the population's humanitarian needs, just under \$1.5 billion was raised. The vast majority of the funds – over one-third – was allocated to food

security projects, according to OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (OCHA, 2024b). In contrast, the least-funded initiatives included those dedicated to child protection (1.2% of the total) and protection against gender-based violence (0.9% of the total).

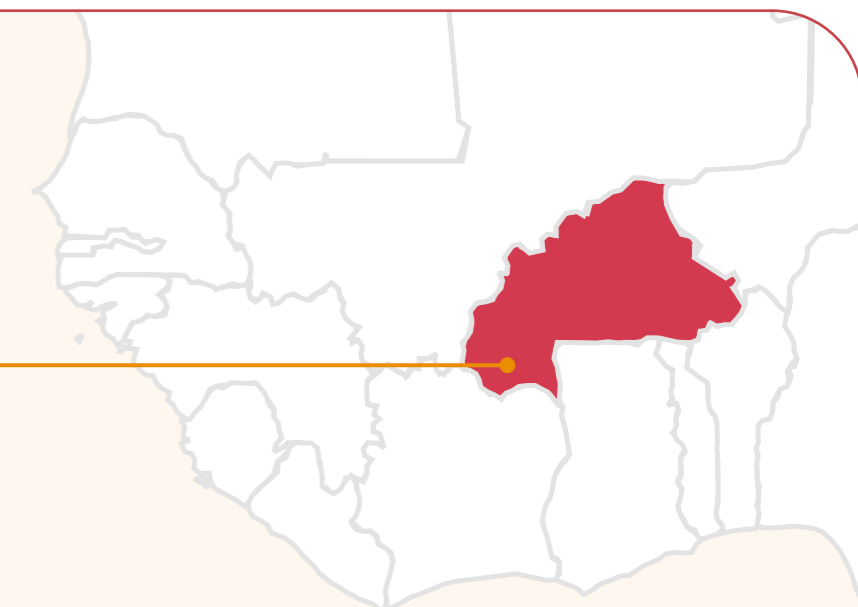
WeWorld in Afghanistan

WeWorld was present in Afghanistan from 2002 until 2017, supporting the most vulnerable groups through projects aimed at strengthening civil society and human rights. After the events of August 2021, which saw the return of the Tali-

ban to power, we resumed our activities to provide support to rural communities, particularly women-headed households and their children, during such a delicate time, both for people's rights and their access to basic needs. We operate in Af-

ghanistan with two offices, a coordination office in Kabul and a field office in Herat. Our work in Afghanistan is supported by ChildFund Alliance members ChildFund Korea, ChildFund Deutschland and ChildFund Australia.

Burkina Faso



Index	World Index		Context Sub-Index		Children's Sub-Index		Women's Sub-Index	
Year	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
2015	157/163	32.4/100	151/163	37.9/100	156/163	31.9/100	157/163	28.1/100
2024	150/157	37.4/100	151/157	41.2/100	149/157	36.7/100	145/157	34.6/100

Human Rights Implementation: MINIMAL

The Crisis in Burkina Faso: Causes and Context

Over the past decade, Burkina Faso has experienced one of the most severe humanitarian crises in its history, with armed conflicts, insecurity, and political instability having a devastating impact on the population. The crisis began in 2015, with the intensification of actions by jihadist groups, particularly in the northern and eastern regions of the country. In 2022, the population's frustration with the government's inability to manage the insurgency led to a military coup, the second in a few months.

The multidimensional crisis in Burkina Faso continues to worsen, exacerbated by the growing geographical spread of security incidents affecting the civilian population, new waves of displacement, and an increase in human rights violations. Over the past five years, the ci-

vilian population has borne the brunt of this devastation. The people of Burkina Faso are confronting a severe crisis, with widespread insecurity undermining their access to basic social services, livelihoods, and fundamental human rights, while also impeding the effective implementation of international humanitarian law.

The political instability further aggravated an already critical situation, with nearly 40% of the country under the control of non-state actors by December 2024, diminishing the power of the central government (BTI Transformation Index, 2024). The increase in violence and conflict also led to severe economic hardships and a food crisis affecting millions of people.

The Impacts of the Crisis on the Population and Intersectional Inequalities

The crisis has affected the entire population, but women, children, and people with disabilities remain the most vulnerable. By 2024, over 2.1 million people—nearly 10% of the country's total population—had been forced to flee their homes, becoming internally displaced. 39% of displaced individuals had been displaced for more than two years, while 20% had experienced displacement more than once (UNHCR, 2024a). This mass displacement has made it even more difficult to access essential services such as healthcare, education, and food supply. The health crisis has worsened the situation, with the destruction of hospitals and a shortage of healthcare professionals, putting many lives at risk, especially those of women and girls.

"Adults should let me freely choose my future spouse"

Mariam, 17 years old*

Poverty, Forced Migration, Conflict, and Climate Change

Burkina Faso is facing a devastating combination of factors driving the humanitarian crisis. The combination of armed conflict, economic inequalities, and climate change has made the country highly vulnerable to a prolonged crisis, with severe consequences for the poorest and most vulnerable people, who also face the greatest difficulties in adapting to these changes.

The growing armed violence in the northern and eastern regions, with the presence of jihadist groups and other armed factions, has led to a significant increase in internal displacement. However, the violence is not limited to armed conflicts alone; widespread violence, including crimes against civilians, attacks on villages, and human rights abuses, is also occurring across the country. In a context of increasing insecurity, the population urgently needs protection. Families and communities are exposed to the risks of indiscriminate violence, abuse, and exploitation, with women and children being particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and human trafficking.

Burkina Faso's humanitarian crisis also reflects the deep economic and social inequalities within the country. Agriculture and livestock farming are the main sources of livelihood for most of the population, but increasing insecurity has made it difficult for farmers and herders to continue their activities. Furthermore, climate change has exacerbated the crisis, with irregular rainfall affecting crops and increasing the scarcity of natural resources such as water and firewood.

Flooding due to excessive rainfall has further damaged infrastructure and hindered access to humanitarian aid (OCHA, 2024c).

The Gendered Impact of the Crisis

In Burkina Faso, every three days and a half a girl under the age of 19 becomes pregnant



(ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024¹)

"I ask adults to support me to finish my studies, listen to me and let me make my own decisions for my life"

Adama, 16 years old*

*Testimonies collected by WeWorld for the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 in Burkina Faso

Women and girls in Burkina Faso have borne the heaviest burden of the ongoing humanitarian crisis, particularly due to school closures, the rise in early and forced marriages, and gender-based violence. Over 6,000 schools—around 25% of the country's educational institutions—have closed, severely disrupting education and leaving girls 2.5 times more likely than boys to drop out of school (OCHA, 2024c). This loss of education has made many girls more vulnerable to early marriage, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking.

The lack of access to healthcare, especially sexual and reproductive health services, has contributed to a rise in early pregnancies. In fact, in Burkina Faso, every three and a half days, a girl under the age of 19 becomes pregnant (ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024). The rise in gender-based violence, particularly in conflict areas and refugee camps, has added to the challenges faced by women and girls. As the economy continues to worsen, many women—who are often the primary caregivers for their families—are pushed into precarious work or reliant on humanitarian aid (OCHA, 2024c).

Another critical issue that is often overlooked is menstrual health. Access to menstrual hygiene products is limited in many areas, making it difficult for women and girls to manage their periods properly. The lack of adequate healthcare facilities and resources means many girls must handle their menstrual cycles in difficult conditions, increasing the risk of infections and complications. In Burkina Faso, more than 1 in 4 women and girls do not have access to a private place to wash and change during their period (WeWorld, 2024). The absence of privacy and basic sanitation facilities contributes to school dropouts, as many girls are unable to attend school during menstruation due to shame or insufficient facilities. The limited efforts in this area exacerbate the vulnerability of women and girls, preventing them from leading healthy and dignified lives.

The Outlook for 2025

Looking ahead, the situation in Burkina Faso for 2025 remains uncertain. Humanitarian needs remain urgent in various sectors, including protection, access to WASH resources and services, education, and food security. **In 2025, 5.9 million people will require humanitarian assistance, of whom 25% are women and 56% are children** (OCHA HNRP, 2025). The humanitarian response must prioritise the specific needs of women and girls, with targeted interventions in education, protection against violence, and improving livelihoods, to prevent the continued marginalisation of women and promote their active participation in reconstruction and peacebuilding. The international community will

In Burkina Faso, more than 1 in 4 women and girls lack a private place to wash and change during their period.

(WeWorld, 2024²)

need to adopt an integrated and gender-sensitive approach to ensure that women and girls are not only recipients of aid but also active contributors to the country's recovery process.

WeWorld in Burkina Faso

WeWorld has been active in Burkina Faso since 1985, focusing on food security, nutrition, early recovery, protection, and cash/voucher assistance. Our operations are concentrated in the Sahel region, specifically in Soum (Djibo) and Oudalan (Gorom-Gorom), as well as the East-Central and Northern regions, including the Greater Ouaga Area, addressing a deep and multidimensional crisis. We implement interventions in malnutrition prevention, food aid, skill-building for communities in vulnerable conditions, urban regeneration, and child protection. Additionally, we foster community resilience by strengthening national and local capacities in Disaster Risk Reduction, enhancing Early Warning and Early Action systems, and promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth through improved vocational training, employment support, and micro-enterprise development.

WeWorld works in close collaboration with local authorities and vulnerable populations, particularly internally displaced persons (IDPs), women, children, and young people.

ChildFund Alliance in Burkina Faso

ChildFund Alliance members Children Believe, Educo and WeWorld run programmes in Burkina Faso to support children in vulnerable conditions and their communities. These initiatives aim to strengthen child protection systems, enhance access to formal education and vocational training, and tackle food insecurity. We also provide support to families internally displaced by political upheaval in recent years. Our work in Burkina Faso is supported by ChildFund Korea and ChildFund Deutschland.

In Burkina Faso, less than 1 in 3 children attend school regularly

(ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024³)

¹ Source: Elaboration on UN Population Division, 2022.

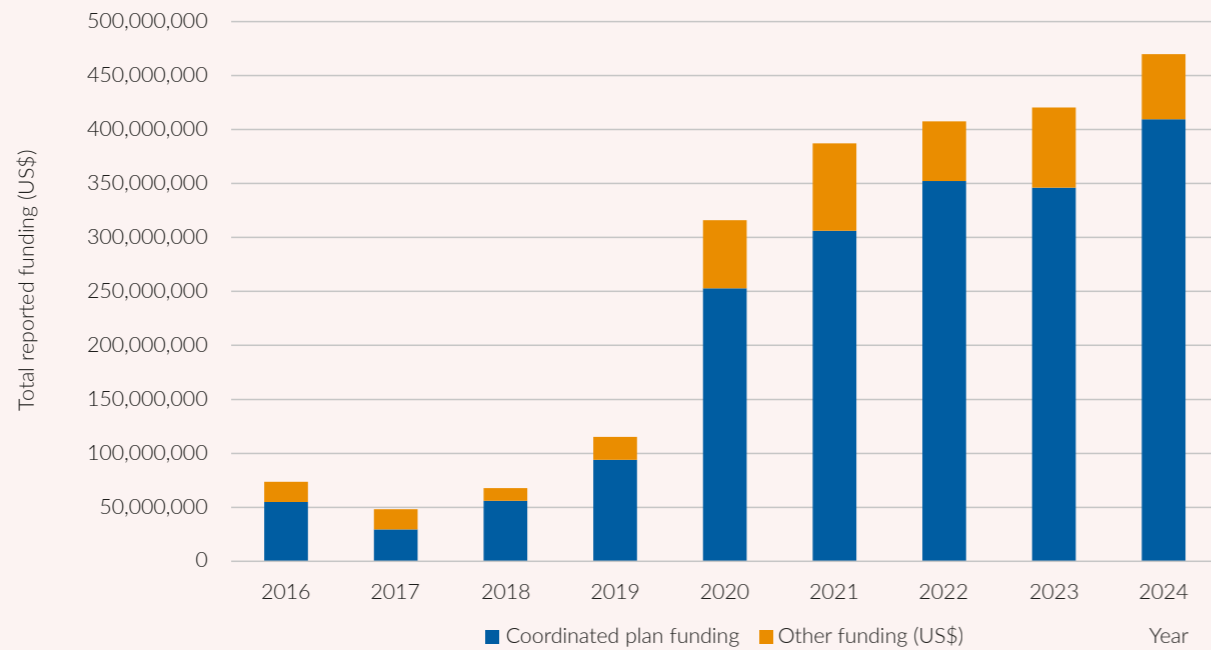
² Source: Elaboration on WHO/UNICEF JMP, 2024.

³ Source: Elaboration on UNESCO, 2022.

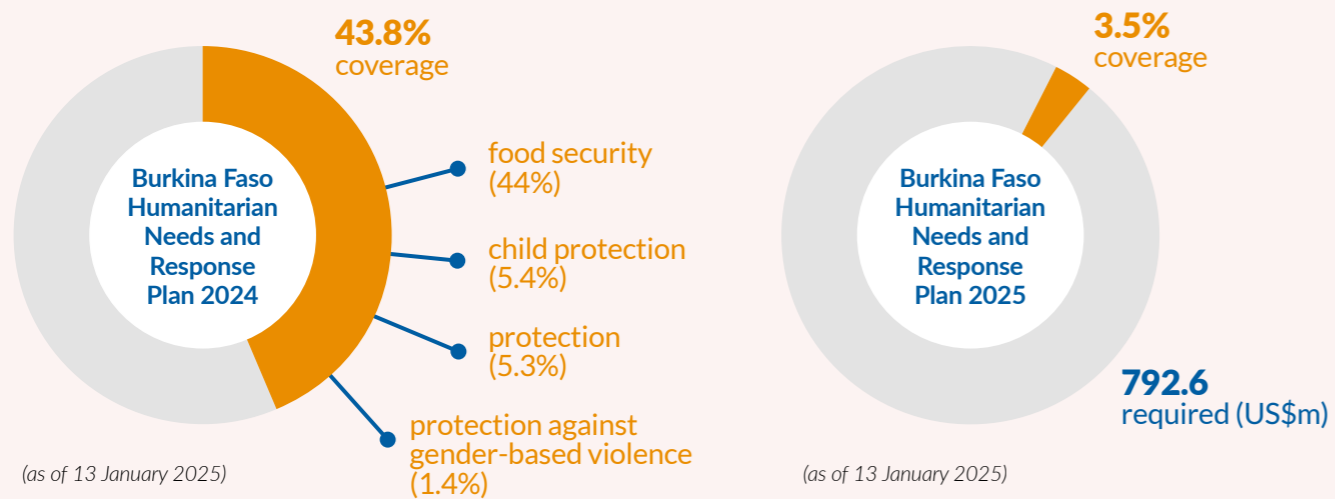
Financial Tracking Service

Trends in reported funding - Burkina Faso

Source: OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service (as of 20 December 2024)



OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service



The Burkina Faso Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 (Burkina Faso Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2024) was funded at only 43.8%. Of the \$934.6 million required to meet the population's humanitarian needs, only \$409.5 million was raised. The vast majority of the funds – over 40% – was allocated to food security projects, according to

OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (OCHA, 2024b). In contrast, the least-funded initiatives included those dedicated to child protection (5.4% of the total), general protection (5.3% of the total), and protection from gender-based violence (1.4% of the total).

Ethiopia

Index	World Index		Context Sub-Index		Children's Sub-Index		Women's Sub-Index	
Year	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
2015	152/163	34.7/100	158/163	32.4/100	131/163	43.1/100	152/163	30/100
2024	149/157	37.6/100	153/157	36.7/100	135/157	41.6/100	144/157	34.7/100

Human Rights Implementation: MINIMAL

Ethiopia's Compound Crisis

Ethiopia has faced a series of deeply interconnected humanitarian crises, which have been exacerbated by a combination of ethnic conflicts, political instability, climate change, and socio-economic challenges. These crises have had a devastating impact on the population, especially the most vulnerable, including women and girls.

The country has struggled with chronic deprivation of human rights, widespread malnutrition, and displacement, all of which have contributed to a complex humanitarian landscape.

The effects of these crises have been further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted education systems, strained healthcare resources, and deepened economic vulnerabilities.

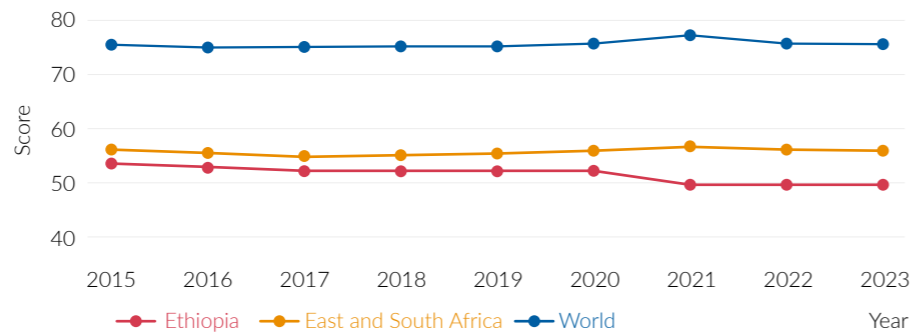
The pandemic's impact on the education system was particularly severe. Schools across Ethiopia were closed for extended periods, leaving millions of children, especially girls, without access to learning. As education programmes were disrupted, many girls did not return to school once restrictions were lifted, due to economic hardship or increased domestic responsibilities. The overall deterioration in education is starkly reflected in the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 (Figure 1).

Ethiopia's performance in the children's education dimension has consistently lagged behind global and regional averages. In 2015, Ethiopia scored 53.5 compared to 56 for East and South Africa and 74.8 globally. By 2023, Ethiopia's score had dropped further to 49.7,

showing no signs of recovery, even as regional and global scores remained stable.

The economic impact of the pandemic further compounded these challenges, with many households losing sources of income and being pushed deeper into poverty. The resulting financial pressures have forced families to prioritise survival over education, particularly for girls, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

FIGURE 1.
Historical Series of the Children's Education Dimension: World, East and South Africa, and Ethiopia Performance
(Source: ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024)



The Tigray Conflict

The Tigray War, which erupted in November 2020, was another critical factor that compounded Ethiopia's humanitarian crisis. The conflict between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) quickly escalated into a devastating civil war, resulting in widespread violence, mass displacement, and severe disruptions to daily life. **The war caused immense suffering, particularly for civilians in the Tigray region, where access to food, water, and healthcare became nearly impossible. The conflict also resulted in large-scale displacement, with over two million people fleeing the region, many seeking refuge in neighbouring Sudan** (UNHCR, 2024b). This conflict not only caused immense human suffering but also triggered violent outbreaks in other regions, including Oromia, Amhara, and Benishangul-Gumuz, where ethnic tensions and armed groups have contributed to a protracted state of instability. The humanitarian situation in these regions continues to be dire, with millions in need of assistance.

Climate Change and Forced Migration

In addition to the ongoing conflict, Ethiopia's vulnerability to climate change has had a significant impact on the country's food security and overall resilience. Recurrent droughts and unpredictable rainfall patterns have devastated crops, particularly in regions like Afar, Somali, and the southern parts of

"Adults should promise not to do war and conflicts"
Fana, 15 years old*

the country, where subsistence farming is a primary source of livelihood. In 2024, 21.4 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance, including 4.4 million internally displaced persons. Of these, nearly one million people were displaced by climate-related events, underscoring the critical need for climate adaptation strategies in Ethiopia's response to the crisis (OCHA, 2024d). Climate-induced displacement has been particularly pronounced in areas like the eastern and southeastern regions, where drought and food insecurity have forced many to leave their homes in search of water and food.

The Gendered Impact of the Crisis

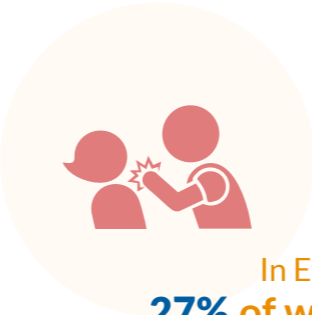
Women and girls in Ethiopia have borne a disproportionate share of the burden during these crises, facing heightened vulnerabilities due to pre-existing gender inequalities. Gender-based violence has surged, particularly in conflict zones such as Tigray, where sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war. Thousands of cases of rape, sexual violence, and kidnapping were documented at the onset of the conflict. In 2022, 27% of women in Ethiopia reported having experienced intimate partner violence, although this figure is likely underestimated due to fears of stigma, retaliation, and

difficulties in accessing support (ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024). Displacement has also placed women and girls at heightened risk of exploitation, trafficking, and other forms of abuse. More recently, despite the conflict having subsided somewhat, violence against women and girls, including gang rapes and kidnappings, remains all too common (Misikir M., 2024).

In addition to physical violence, women and girls in displacement camps face inadequate access to maternal healthcare, which has contributed to rising maternal mortality rates. The lack of proper menstrual hygiene facilities and materials further complicates the daily lives of women and girls, affecting their dignity and ability to participate fully in life. In Ethiopia, more than 1 in 2 women and girls aged 15 to 49 lack access to menstrual materials, whether single-use or reusable (WeWorld, 2024). This lack of access worsens the vulnerability of women and girls, preventing them from leading healthy and dignified lives.

"I just want peace"
Lomi, 16 years old*

"We don't want our country to get in the way of our happiness"
Azmera, 13 years old*



In Ethiopia, 27% of women report having experienced intimate partner violence.
This figure is likely to be significantly underestimated due to fears of stigma, retaliation, and difficulties in accessing support.
(ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024¹)

"It is adults' responsibility to protect me as a child and as a girl"
Selam, 17 years old*

*Testimonies collected by ChildFund International for the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 in Ethiopia

1 Source: Elaboration on Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), 2023

Economic hardship has driven many families to marry off young girls early, a practice that significantly increases the risk of gender-based violence, early pregnancies, and further exclusion from education (OCHA, 2024d). Education disruption has also been a critical issue for girls in Ethiopia. In times of crisis, girls are often the first to be withdrawn from school due to the loss of household income, displacement, or increased household responsibilities. This significantly reduces their chances of accessing education, which in turn limits their future opportunities and reinforces the cycle of poverty. The closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the destruction of educational infrastructure during the Tigray War have left millions of girls without access to learning, heightening the risk of early marriage and child labour (ibid.).

The Outlook for 2025

Ethiopia's outlook for 2025 is deeply concerning, with over 25 million people potentially requiring humanitarian aid due to ongoing conflicts, climate shocks, and economic instability (ibid.). Women and girls will be disproportionately affected, necessitating gender-sensitive responses, including measures to prevent gender-based violence, ensure education, and improve healthcare. Climate adaptation strategies will also be critical to addressing displacement and building resilience. Continued international support is essential, with a focus on strengthening coordination and delivering aid to the most affected populations, especially women and girls.



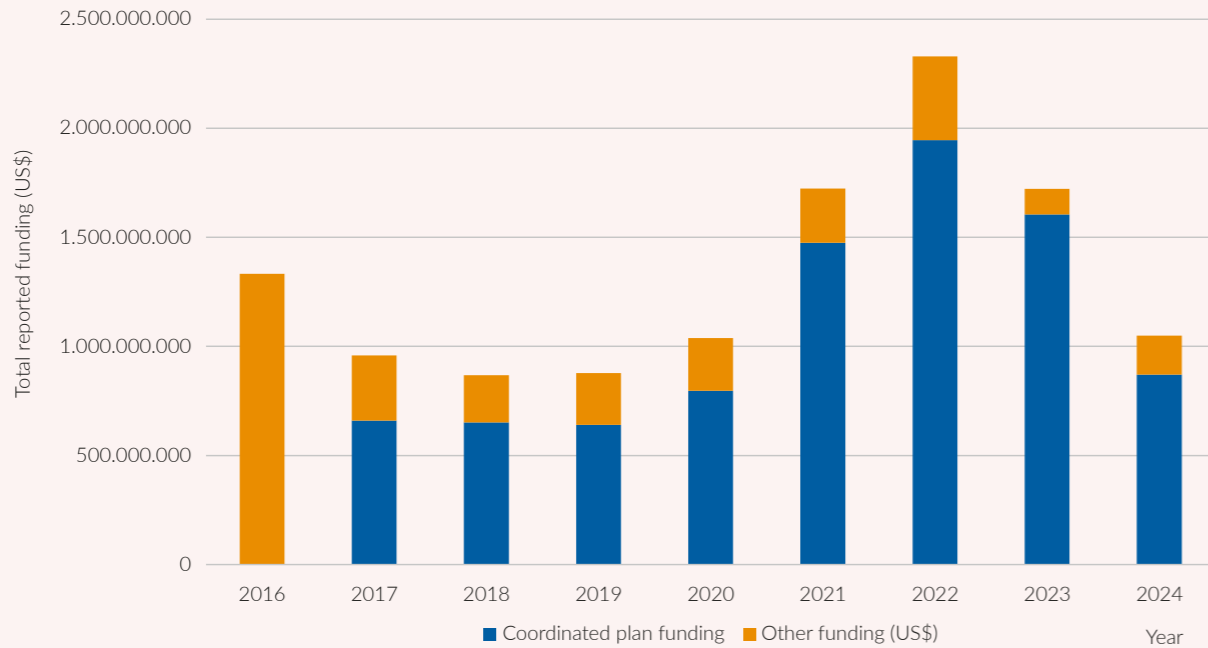
In Ethiopia, more than 1 in 2 women and girls aged 15 to 49 lack access to menstrual materials, whether single-use or reusable.
(WeWorld, 2024²)

2 Source: Elaboration on WHO/UNICEF JMP, 2024.

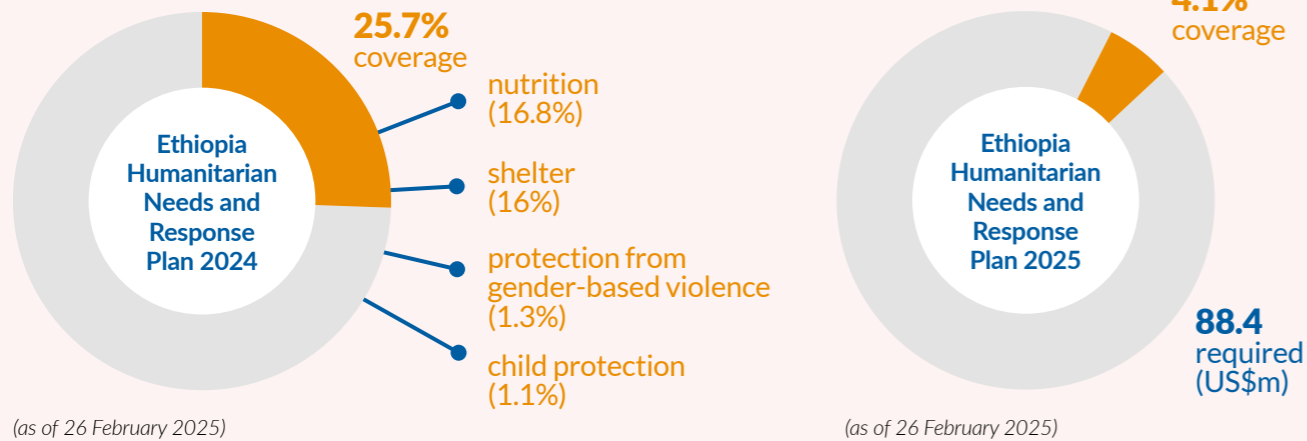
Financial Tracking Service

Trends in reported funding - Ethiopia

Source: OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service (as of 20 December 2024)



OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service



The Ethiopia Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 was funded at only 25.7%. Of the \$3.24 billion required to meet the population's humanitarian needs, only \$832.7 million was raised. The vast majority of the funds were allocated to nutrition projects, followed by food security projects, which together received almost one third of

the collected funds, according to OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (OCHA, 2024b). In contrast, the least-funded initiatives included those dedicated to protection from gender-based violence (1.3% of the total) and child protection (1.1% of the total).

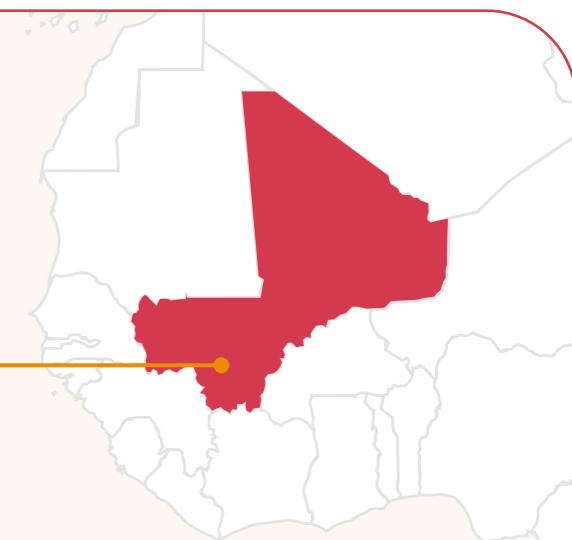
ChildFund Alliance in Ethiopia

ChildFund Alliance members ChildFund International and Children Believe support children and their families in Ethiopia, focusing on child and maternal

health services, nutrition, education, orphan support, livelihoods, water and sanitation, and disaster risk reduction. These initiatives are supported by Child-

Fund Australia, ChildFund Deutschland, ChildFund Korea, Barnfonden, and Un Enfant par la Main.

Mali



Index	World Index		Context Sub-Index		Children's Sub-Index		Women's Sub-Index	
Year	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
2015	156/163	32.7/100	146/163	40.5/100	159/163	29.2/100	153/163	29.7/100
2024	154/157	33.9/100	145/100	44.6/100	154/157	31.3/100	152/157	27.8/100

Human Rights Implementation: MINIMAL

Humanitarian Crisis in Mali: A Decade of Struggles

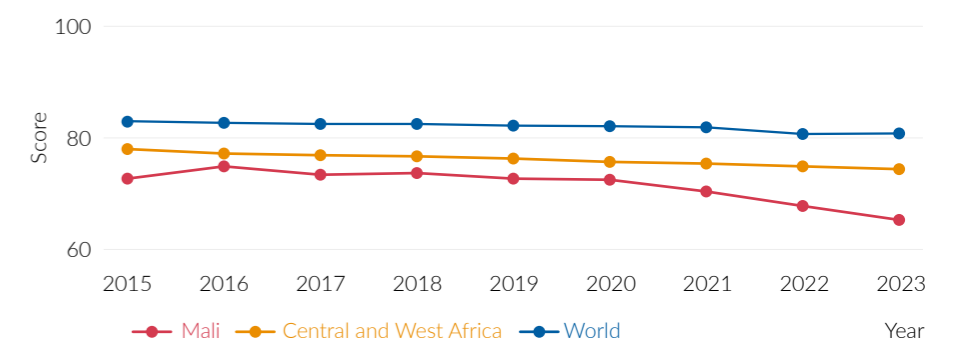
Mali has faced a severe humanitarian crisis for over a decade, driven by armed conflict, political instability, and environmental challenges. The conflict, which began in 2012 following a rebellion in northern regions and the subsequent intervention of French forces, has resulted in widespread violence, displacement, and the collapse of governance. This prolonged instability has led to significant suffering, particularly for women and girls, who have been disproportionately affected.

Since 2012, Mali has been embroiled in a complex conflict involving separatist groups, Islamist militants, and government forces. The security situation continued to worsen by 2023, with escalating attacks from insurgent groups

and militias, particularly in the central and northern regions. As a result, large portions of the country remain beyond the control of the central government, severely hindering humanitarian efforts. This ongoing instability is reflected in the decline in Mali's performance in the "Conflict and Wars Dimension" of the World Index compared to global and

regional averages (Figure 1). In 2023, Mali's score was 65.3, a significant drop from 72.7 in 2015, illustrating the worsening conflict. The continued deterioration of security has compounded the challenges faced by the population, limiting both humanitarian aid and efforts for peacebuilding and recovery.

FIGURE 1. Historical Series of the Conflict and Wars' Dimension: World, Central and West Africa, and Mali Performance (Source: ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024)



Vulnerabilities Amid Ongoing Conflict and Climate Challenges

By the end of 2024, the number of internally displaced persons in Mali had exceeded 378,000. Furthermore, the number of refugees from the sub-region residing in Mali increased by 84% compared to the previous year, reaching a total of 122,992 people (OCHA, 2025). Humanitarian assistance is especially critical in the northern and central regions, where conflict and displacement have heightened vulnerabilities. **Mali remains at the epicentre of the protracted crisis in the Central Sahel, characterised by violent extremism, worsening insecurity in the Liptako-Gourma region, and attacks by non-state armed groups.** The compounded effects of climate change, including recurring floods and droughts, have further exacerbated these challenges. Many rural areas face limited access to essential services due to security threats, and national capacities are stretched in several parts of the country. There is an urgent need for support for host communities, which continue to welcome refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as services to help these populations find durable solutions to their displacement.

The dire situation is further underscored by Mali's poor child health outcomes. In the country, 94 children out of every 1000 live births die before the age of 5 (ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024). This alarming statistic highlights the immense challenges in providing adequate healthcare and nutrition, particularly in conflict-affected areas, and underscores the urgent need for increased humanitarian support to address both immediate needs and long-term development challenges.

In Mali,
94 children out of every
1,000 live births die
before the age of 5

(ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024¹)



The Gendered Impact of the Crisis

Women and girls have borne the brunt of Mali's humanitarian crisis, facing a distinct set of challenges, particularly gender-based violence. Sexual violence has surged, with armed groups using rape and other forms of sexual violence as weapons of war. Many women and girls have also been subjected to forced marriages, abductions, and trafficking. Thousands of GBV cases were reported, though these figures are likely underreported due to the stigma surrounding such violence (UNFPA, 2024).

Displaced women and girls in camps are especially vulnerable to exploitation, including sexual violence and trafficking. Many of the more than 1.5 million women and girls of reproductive age lack access to essential services like healthcare, legal support, and protection, further exacerbating their vulnerability (ibid). In addition, the lack of security in these camps, combined with the destruction of infrastructure, means women and girls face significant barriers to accessing services and support.

"When parents put us in school, we can have a better life because in the future we can protect ourselves from certain risks".

Fatou, 13 years old*

"All that adults can do to improve our lives is end the war in our country and make sure that children are not abused".

Aicha 17 years old*

"Since I am physically impaired, my parents should accompany me wherever I need to go and sometimes ask for my opinion. But since the family doesn't have the means, everyone is looking for themselves".

Adama, 15 years old*

*Testimonies collected by WeWorld for the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 in Mali

Climate Change and Forced Migration

The education of girls has also been severely impacted by the conflict. Schools in conflict zones have been destroyed, and many families are unable to send their children to school due to security concerns or economic hardship. In 2024, more than 1,962 educational facilities remained non-functional, including 1,792 due to insecurity and 570 schools affected by flooding.

In the regions most impacted by the crisis, such as Kidal and Timbuktu, 36% of households did not send their children to school due to an inability to cover the direct costs of education, 26% because education was not seen as a priority or due to lack of interest, 12% because of the absence of appropriate and accessible schools, and 5% because the child had to work at home or on the family farm (OCHA, 2025).

As a result, child marriage has risen, with families marrying off their daughters to reduce financial burdens (Batyra and Pesando, 2023). Furthermore, the lack of educational opportunities increases the risk of early pregnancies and forced domestic and sexual labour for girls.

Mali's humanitarian crisis has been worsened by environmental factors, including recurring droughts, which have led to severe reductions in agricultural productivity. In 2024, the country faced a major natural disaster as torrential rains and rising waters of the Niger River caused widespread flooding, displacing 73,778 people, particularly in the Timbuktu and Mopti regions. This crisis occurs amidst an already volatile security situation, exacerbating vulnerabilities (UNFPA, 2024).

Mali also continues to receive refugees, particularly from Burkina Faso, with over 27,000 new arrivals registered in early 2024 (UNHCR, 2024c). Displaced and host communities remain underserved, heavily reliant on humanitarian aid. The long-term socioeconomic impacts of these crises are expected to affect food security, access to services, and livelihoods, with displaced populations facing the greatest challenges.

The Outlook for 2025

Looking ahead, the humanitarian situation in Mali remains dire. **In 2025, 6.4 million people - or 28% of Mali's population - will require humanitarian assistance, of whom 46% are women and 53% are children** (OCHA HNRP, 2025). Women and girls will continue to bear the greatest burden of these crises, making targeted interventions essential to address their specific needs.

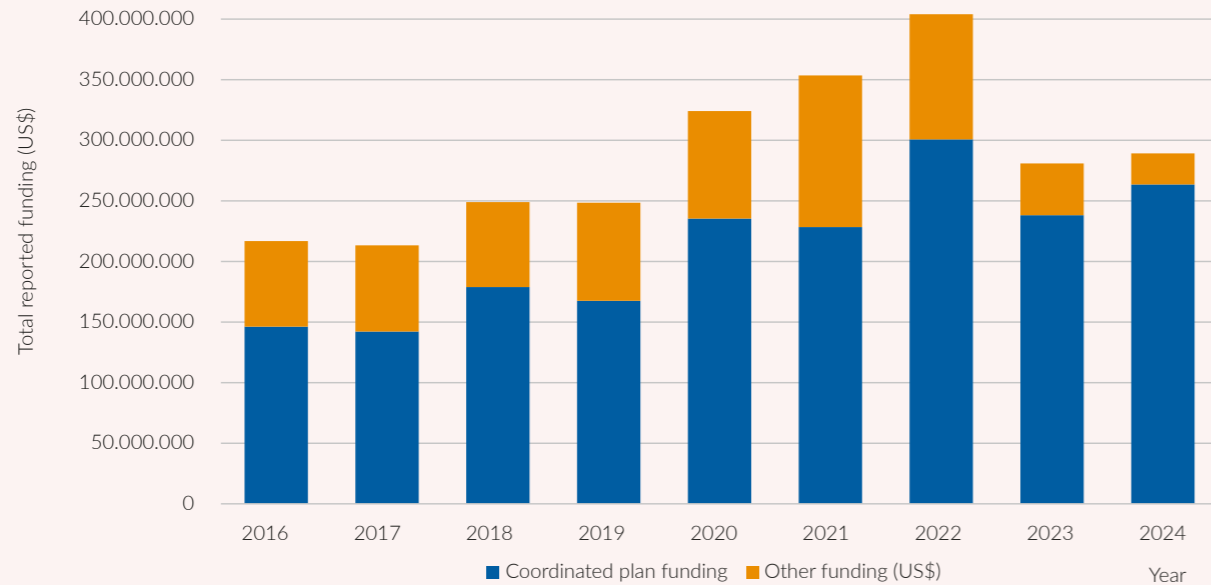
Humanitarian organisations must prioritise gender-sensitive responses to meet the unique challenges faced by women and girls in conflict and displacement. Key areas of focus will include protection from gender-based violence, increased access to education, and improved healthcare services. Additionally, efforts must be made to support women's economic empowerment and ensure their access to sexual and reproductive health services, all critical to building resilience and helping Mali's population recover from this prolonged crisis.

¹ Source: Elaboration on UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, 2022.

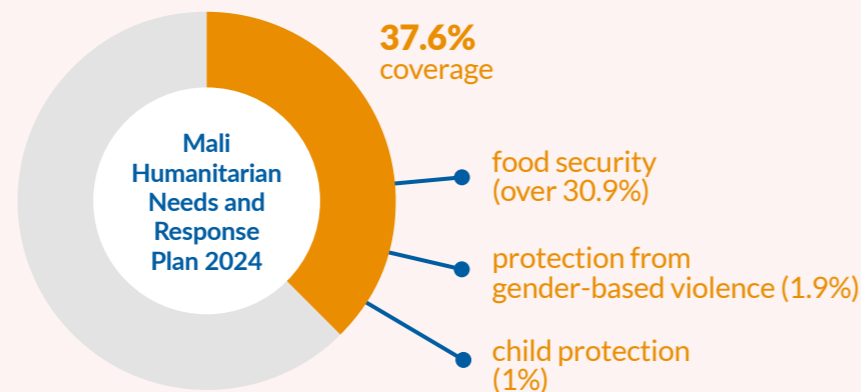
Financial Tracking Service

Trends in reported funding - Mali

Source: OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service (as of 24 December 2024)



OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service



The Mali Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 was funded at only 37.6%. Of the \$701.6 million required to meet the population's humanitarian needs, only \$263.6 million was raised. The vast majority of the funds – over 30.9% – were allocated to food security projects, according

to OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (OCHA, 2024b). In contrast, the least-funded initiatives included those dedicated to protection from gender-based violence (1.9% of the total) and child protection (1% of the total).

WeWorld in Mali

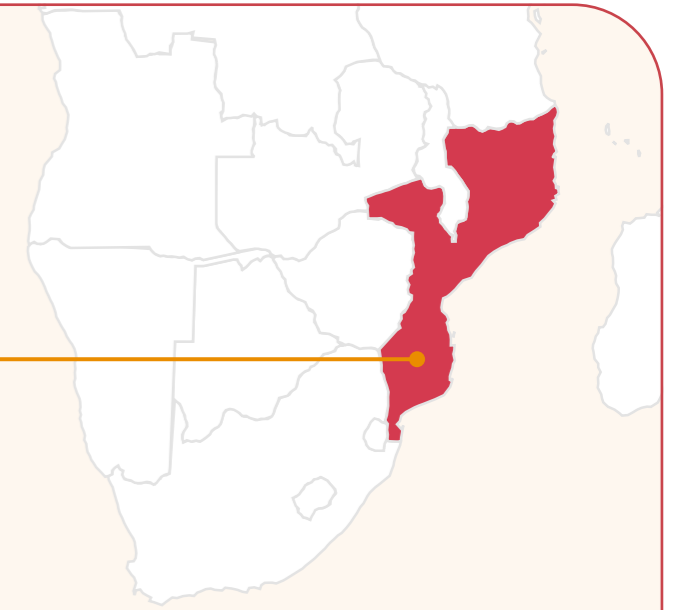
WeWorld has been operating in Mali since 2019, with a solid presence in the Central and Northern regions of the country, as well as in Bamako. We focus on supporting the most vulnerable groups by implementing an Emergency-Development-Nexus approach through food assistance, protection, and socio-economic inclusion interventions. We assist

both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities by providing food and nutrition assistance, strengthening the protection system (including referral and GBV services), creating child-friendly spaces, and promoting urban socio-economic inclusion and protection for the most vulnerable groups, including young people, women, displaced persons, and returning migrants, through TVET and employment programmes.

ChildFund Alliance in Mali

ChildFund Alliance members Educo and WeWorld implement a range of programmes for vulnerable children and families in Mali. This includes ensuring access to quality education, food security, child protection, and providing support to internally displaced people and their host communities.

Mozambique



Index	World Index		Context Sub-Index		Children's Sub-Index		Women's Sub-Index	
Year	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
2015	141/163	38.3/100	144/163	40.9/100	138/163	40/100	144/163	34.3/100
2024	136/157	42.9/100	148/157	43.5/100	127/157	45.5/100	131/157	39.8/100

Human Rights Implementation: MINIMAL

A Multifaceted Humanitarian Crisis in Mozambique

Over the past decade, Mozambique has been engulfed by a complex and multidimensional humanitarian crisis driven by increasingly frequent natural disasters, violent internal conflicts, and political instability, leading to the internal displacement of 850,500 people (UNHCR, 2024d). These overlapping factors have created extreme vulnerability for millions of people. Women and girls, in particular, have been disproportionately affected, facing heightened risks of violence, economic exclusion, and limited access to essential services.

The Climate Crisis: Destruction and Mass Displacement

Mozambique is among the African countries most vulnerable to extreme climate shocks, including droughts, floods, and cyclones, which have caused significant devastation over the past decade and beyond. Between 2000 and 2023, 11 recorded drought events affected over 13.5 million people. Similarly, floods impacted 7.5 million people and caused approximately \$1.1 billion in damage, while storms affected 5.8 million people and caused \$2.7 billion in losses. Epidemics, particularly cholera, are also frequent in Mozambique, affecting over 100,000 people (UNDRR, 2024).

These events have forced thousands of families to migrate to already overcrowded urban areas, exacerbating housing

crises and social tensions. Furthermore, the most severe drought in 40 years has left 1.8 million people in acute food insecurity, with food prices soaring dramatically (OCHA, 2024f).

On 15 December 2024, Tropical Cyclone Chido made landfall in Mecufi District, Cabo Delgado Province. The cyclone brought destructive winds of up to 120 km/h and torrential rainfall exceeding 250 mm within 24 hours, causing widespread devastation across northern Mozambique. Its aftermath has deepened pre-existing vulnerabilities, particularly in Cabo Delgado, which is already contending with conflict-related displacement and a cholera outbreak. The destruction of water and sanitation infrastructure has significantly increased the risk of waterborne diseases, particularly cholera (FAO, 2024).

"When the cyclone hit, I was at home with my family. I remember it started with a light rain, but within minutes, everything changed. The temperature dropped, and strong winds and heavy rain caused our house to collapse. Surprisingly, the wall around our yard remained standing. We had to take shelter at our neighbor's house until things calmed down. I was terrified of losing my family, and in the end, we lost everything—our food, clothes, and other belongings were all gone. Right now, I think adults should focus on giving us emotional support and helping rebuild our village. What worries me the most is the lack of classrooms. Without a place to study, I can't go to school, and the nearest one is 8 kilometers away. Living like this threatens my future. If adults really listened to us, they'd understand how much we love to learn. We don't want to get married early—we're still children with dreams and goals we want to achieve. Adults need to create opportunities for us so we can dream big and work toward our future."

Laurinda, 14 years old*

Internal Conflict and Political Instability

The conflict in Mozambique's central region, which concluded in 2021 or 2022 with the killing of the leader of the Liberation Front, had significant implications for the country's stability. Political tensions, exacerbated by the ruling party's longstanding control over state institutions since the first multiparty elections in 1994, contributed to unrest in the central region (Freedom House, 2022).

Meanwhile, violence in Cabo Delgado Province, which began in 2017, has escalated dramatically. Between 2023 and 2024, attacks by armed groups increased by 400%, resulting in widespread civilian massacres, the destruction of infrastructure, and the displacement of nearly 200,000 people

in the first five months of 2024—more than in the previous three years combined. These groups have employed sophisticated military weapons and improvised explosive devices, further complicating the operational environment and hindering humanitarian efforts (OCHA, 2024f).

The cumulative impact of these conflicts underscores the multifaceted challenges Mozambique faces, with insecurity, displacement, and political instability continuing to undermine the country's resilience.

A particularly harrowing aspect of this crisis is the use of child soldiers, who are coerced into combat and subjected to profound trauma. Girls, often abducted, are exploited for forced la-

bour, violence, and abuse. This practice has devastated social structures, leaving deep scars on communities.

Political instability has compounded the crisis. Contested elections and inter-party tensions have hampered governance and the ability to deliver essential services. Allegations of electoral fraud and deep mistrust between political factions have fuelled public unrest, further weakening state institutions. Recent military operations, supported by Rwandan forces, aimed to reclaim non-state armed groups-controlled areas but have resulted in civilian casualties and new displacements, delaying a return to normalcy in previously recovered areas (ibid.).

In Mozambique, **1 in 5 women report having experienced intimate partner violence.**

This figure is likely to be significantly underestimated due to fears of stigma, retaliation, and difficulties in accessing support

(ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024¹)



¹ Source: Elaboration on Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), 2023

The Gendered Impact of the Crisis

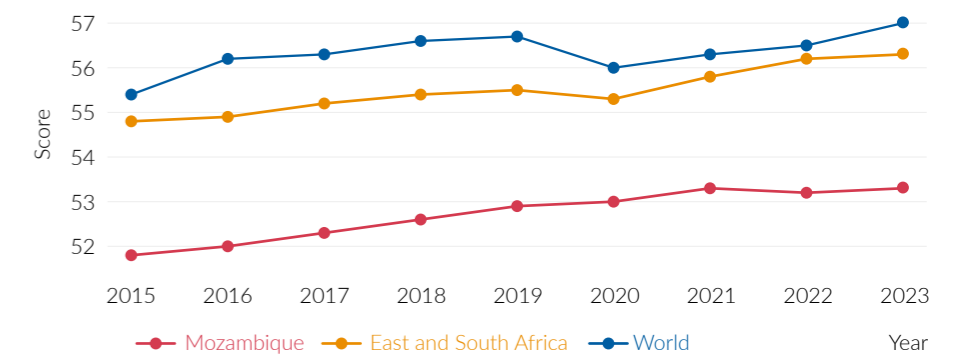
Women and girls are among the primary victims of this humanitarian crisis. In conflict zones, gender-based violence is rampant, with rape used as a weapon of war. In internally displaced persons camps, which are often overcrowded and lack adequate security measures, women are at heightened risk of exploitation and abuse. According to OCHA (2024f), 533,000 women and girls require protection from gender-based violence.

Disruptions to education have disproportionately affected girls, many of whom have been withdrawn from school to assist their families or to avoid the risk of violence. This exclusion perpetuates cycles of poverty and severely limits future opportunities, exacerbating the vulnerability of young women and girls. In Mozambique, 1 in 5 women report having experienced intimate partner violence, though this figure is likely to be significantly underestimated due to fears of stigma, retaliation, and difficulties in accessing support (ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024).

Healthcare conditions are dire, with limited access to maternal and reproductive health services. Pregnant and breastfeeding women are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition, endangering both their lives and those of their children. Hygiene conditions are also poor, complicating menstrual hygiene management and increasing the workload of women.

Economically, women—who form a crucial part of the workforce in agriculture and informal sectors—have suffered massive losses. Many have been forced into precarious jobs or dangerous survival strategies, further diminishing their resilience. The decline in women's economic opportunities is evident when looking at Figure 1, which shows a stagnation in Mozambique's performance from 2015 to 2023. In 2023, Mozambique's score stood at 53.3, only slightly improved from 51.8 in 2015, reflecting ongoing challenges in economic empowerment for women. These compounded issues of violence, exclusion, and economic hardship continue to undermine the well-being and opportunities for women and girls in Mozambique.

FIGURE 1. Historical Series of the Women's Economic Opportunities Dimension: World, Central and West Africa, and Mozambique Performance
(Source: ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024)



"On the day of the cyclone, I was at home with my family. It started with a very light rain, but before long, the temperature changed, and a strong wind began to blow. The sound of the trees falling was deafening, and soon after, the roof and side wall of our house were torn apart. It was a terrifying moment. We had no choice but to leave and look for shelter. Eventually, we found safety at one of the school's temporary learning spaces (TLS). We lost almost everything—our food, documents, clothes, and other belongings were all destroyed. But luckily, no one in my family was hurt. Right now, what we need most from our elders is to rebuild our village and restore the classrooms so we can return to school. We are counting on your support to bring back the joy that the children and the community of Natuco once had. We dream of a brighter day when every child in this village can be happy and carefree again, just like before."

Luisa, 15 years old*

“The cyclone’s destructive impact was devastating and unlike anything we had ever experienced before. The powerful winds took almost everything we had. Right now, my family is living in an improvised tent made from fragile materials salvaged from the rubble of our old house.

I remember that on the day the cyclone struck, and as soon as the walls of our house began to fall, my first thought was to save my children. When we realized the house had completely collapsed, we took refuge in our neighbor’s house, which was sturdier, though its roof had also fallen in. But when their roof gave way, we all fled to the school for shelter. That’s where we found other families in the Temporary Learning Space, and we joined them. As a mother and a resident of this community, I deeply hope to see the rebuilding of classrooms, as well as support for food and agricultural resources, prioritised. Restoring a healthy and sustainable life to this community would be a dream come true.

Right now, my life feels as though it’s at a standstill because my husband, who was the family’s main provider, is seriously ill. This makes rebuilding even harder for us, but I’m still holding on to hope for a brighter future.”

Eliza, 40 years old*

The Outlook for 2025

Mozambique’s future remains uncertain, with forecasts predicting increased climate crises and conflict. It is estimated that over 2.2 million people will be at risk of floods, cyclones, and droughts during the 2024/2025 rainy season. Acute

food insecurity is expected to persist until at least the next harvest, projected for April–May 2025, with 510,000 people facing emergency conditions (OCHA, 2024f). **1.3 million people will require humanitarian assistance, of whom 22% are women and 58% are children** (OCHA HNRP, 2025)

A gender-sensitive approach is crucial, ensuring access to education, health-care, and economic opportunities for women and girls. Without sustained international commitment and concrete action to address the root causes of the crisis, the cycle of vulnerability and instability is likely to continue.

“The storm in our community was nothing short of a nightmare. We witnessed heartbreaking moments as many families, including my own, were left without homes or shelter. More than 400 families were directly affected. Most of the houses in our community are built with fragile materials that couldn’t withstand the powerful winds and heavy rain. One of our greatest concerns is the near-total destruction of the only school we have, which puts our children’s education and future at serious risk. I am a living witness to the cyclone. That morning, I saw the roof of my house ripped away by the wind. My children were terrified, and shortly after, the walls gave in under the pounding rain. It was devastating. We had no choice but to seek shelter at a neighbor’s house. Out of kindness and compassion, she opened her doors to my family, giving us a safe place to stay.

Right now, the priority is to rebuild the classrooms and provide access to water purification products. The water we drink comes untreated from the river, which is also used for mining, making it unsafe. This puts us at high risk of contracting diarrheal diseases or even cholera. We also urgently need support with food and agricultural supplies to help our community recover. With these resources, we can rebuild our lives and ensure a brighter future for our children.”

Julieta, 47 years old*

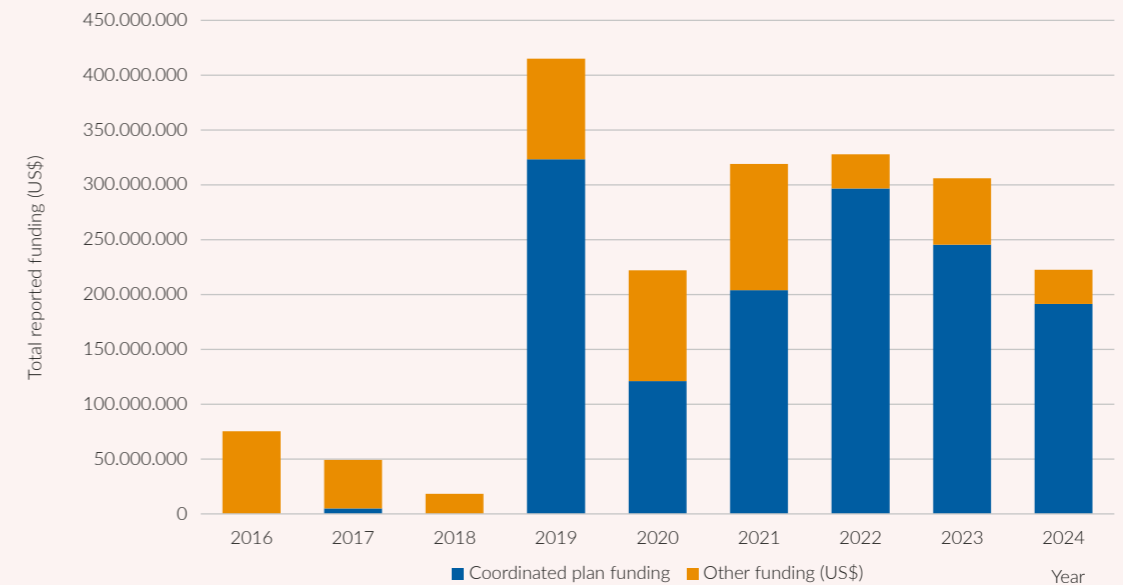
* Testimonies collected by WeWorld in Mozambique in the aftermath of Cyclone Chido



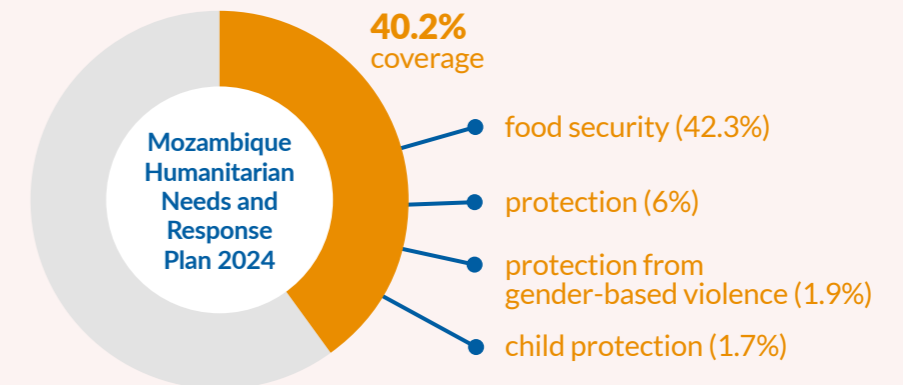
Financial Tracking Service

Trends in reported funding - Mali

Source: OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service (as of 23 December 2024)



OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service



The Mozambique Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 was funded at only 40.2%. Of the \$413.4 million required to meet the population’s humanitarian needs, only \$166.2 million was raised. The vast majority of the funds – 42.3% – were allocated to food security projects, according

to OCHA’s Financial Tracking Service (OCHA, 2024b). In contrast, the least-funded initiatives included those dedicated to protection (6% of the total), protection from gender-based violence (1.9% of the total), and child protection (1.7% of the total).

WeWorld in Mozambique

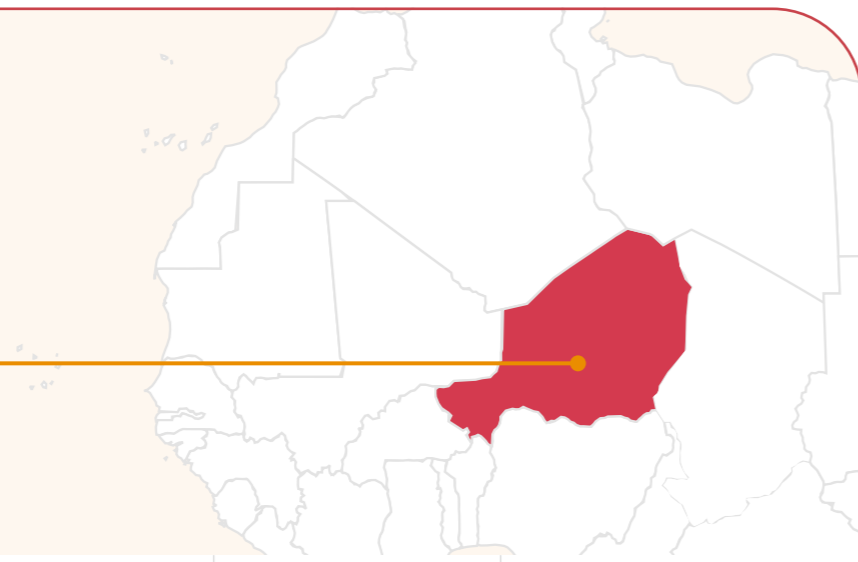
WeWorld has been active in Mozambique since 2000, with offices in Maputo, Pemba, and Tete. Our work focuses on food security, disaster preparedness, climate resilience, education, and peacebuilding, placing women, youth, and children at the heart of our initiatives. We collaborate closely with the government and civil society to ensure access to quality education, psychosocial support, and community-level disaster risk management.

We tackle climate change through mangrove conservation, urban agriculture, and public awareness campaigns. In Cabo Delgado, we foster social cohesion through youth engagement and peace committees. Following cyclones Idai and Kenneth in 2019, Freddy in 2023, and Chido in 2024, we provided emergency assistance and supported affected communities.

ChildFund Alliance in Mozambique

ChildFund Alliance member ChildFund International implements a variety of projects for children and families in Mozambique. These initiatives focus on early childhood development, access to education, youth livelihoods, disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation, and emergency response in the wake of natural disasters. The projects receive support from ChildFund Deutschland and ChildFund Korea.

Niger



Index	World Index		Context Sub-Index		Children's Sub-Index		Women's Sub-Index	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
2015	160/163	38.3/100	157/163	40.9/100	160/163	40/100	159/163	34.3/100
2024	155/157	42.9/100	152/157	43.5/100	155/157	45.5/100	155/157	39.8/100

Human Rights Implementation: MINIMAL

Niger's Ongoing Humanitarian Crisis

Over the past decade, Niger has faced a complex humanitarian crisis driven by armed conflicts, extreme climatic events, political and economic instability. Violence by armed groups, particularly in the border regions, has led to widespread insecurity, while climate change has worsened environmental stress, including desertification, flooding, and droughts. The combination of these factors has resulted in severe shortages of food and water, massive displacement, and the loss of livelihoods, creating a situation of acute humanitarian need. Despite global efforts to address the crisis, Niger remains one of the most fragile countries in terms of human development and security.

Widespread Violence and Forced Migration

Since 2017, Niger has witnessed an increase in violence, particularly in the

Tillabéri region, along the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso. Armed groups affiliated with Islamist movements, such as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), have intensified attacks, including ambushes, killings, and bombings. These attacks have caused the displacement of thousands of people, further exacerbating the already limited resources. **By mid-2024, it is estimated that around 700,000 people were displaced, either internally or as refugees in neighbouring countries** (UNHCR, 2024e). Forced migration has created a continuous cycle of vulnerability for the population, particularly for the most at-risk groups, who struggle to find safe spaces in camps where sanitary conditions are inadequate, and the risk of exploitation is high. The psychological and emotional difficulties have been severe for displaced women, many of whom have been forced into harmful survival practices, such as exchanging sex for food.

The Gendered Impact of the Crisis

Women and girls in Niger are among the most vulnerable groups in the current humanitarian crisis, facing increased risks of gender-based violence, exploitation, and marginalisation. In conflict zones, women and girls are often abducted, subjected to sexual violence, and forced into marriage by armed groups. Gender-based violence is widespread, with many survivors lacking access to support services such as counselling and healthcare (UNHCR, 2024e).



In Niger, every two days and a half a girl under the age of 19 gets pregnant

(ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024¹)

1 Source: Elaboration on UN Population Division, 2022.

In addition, women are disproportionately affected by economic hardship, as they are often excluded from access to land, credit, and other economic resources. In many households, women are primarily responsible for caring for children and the elderly, which adds another burden during periods of displacement. Gender inequalities remain deep, and cultural norms continue to limit opportunities for women, especially in the areas most affected by the crisis (UNHCR, 2024e).

A particularly critical issue is the rise in early pregnancies. **Despite a global decline in the phenomenon, in Niger, 76% of women who married between 2015 and 2021 did so before the age of 18** (Crawford, 2023). Girls, forced to drop out of school, are particularly vulnerable to early pregnancies, which increase the risks for maternal and child health and perpetuate a cycle of poverty and marginalisation.

Health and Nutrition at Risk

The humanitarian crisis has had devastating effects on the health and nutrition of the population, with women and children particularly vulnerable. The combination of armed conflict, displacement, and climate change has overloaded the already fragile healthcare system. Malnutrition is widespread, particularly in regions most affected by insecurity and climate change. **In 2024, approximately 2.4 million children in Niger required treatment for acute malnutrition** (UNICEF, 2024). The lack of access to basic healthcare services has led to an increase in preventable diseases such as cholera, malaria, and respiratory infections. Women, especially those who are pregnant or breastfeeding, are particularly at risk due to the limited availability of maternal health services, leading to higher rates of maternal and infant mortality.

The lack of adequate sanitation facilities further exacerbates the vulnerability of women and girls. In Niger, only 1 in 2 women and girls aged between 15

"I don't want adults to impose a husband on me"

Amina, 15 years old*

and 49 have access to a private place to wash and change during menstruation, while 2 out of 5 lack access to reusable menstrual products. A staggering 8 out of 10 women and girls do not have access to single-use menstrual materials (WeWorld, 2024). This scarcity of essential menstrual products and facilities not only affects the dignity and health of women and girls but also further isolates them from social and economic opportunities.



In Niger, only 1 in 2 women and girls aged between 15 and 49 have access to a private place to wash and change during menstruation.

2 out of 5 lack access to reusable menstrual products, while 8 out of 10 do not have access to single-use menstrual materials

(WeWorld, 2024²)



In Niger, 40% of primary school age children are out of school

(ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024³)

"Let girls go to school"

Chanze, 10 years old*

"Many children, especially young girls, are forced to leave school because they are married off, so we need to make our parents very aware of child marriage"

Samia, 12 years old*

* Testimonies collected by Educo for the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 in Niger

2 Source: Elaboration on WHO/UNICEF JMP, 2024.

3 Source: Elaboration on UNESCO, 2023.

The Outlook for 2025

The crisis in Niger continues to evolve, with millions of people suffering from persistent insecurity, epidemics, hunger, and natural disasters. Protecting human life and fundamental rights remains the most urgent priority. **In 2025, 2.7 million**

people will require humanitarian assistance (OCHA HNRP, 2025). Gender inequalities and the vulnerability of women and girls are set to increase, hindering progress towards long-term development. Solutions must focus on empowering women, providing education, and offering protection, alongside promoting

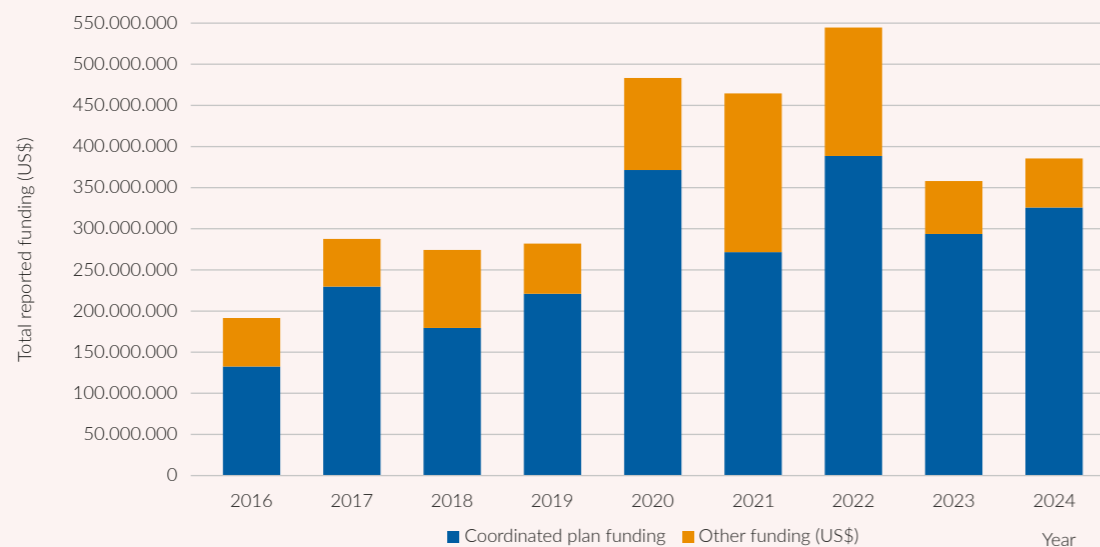
climate change adaptation strategies and improving access to healthcare and education. Addressing the root causes of displacement and conflict, promoting climate change adaptation, and ensuring greater resilience are essential components of a global approach to alleviating suffering in Niger.



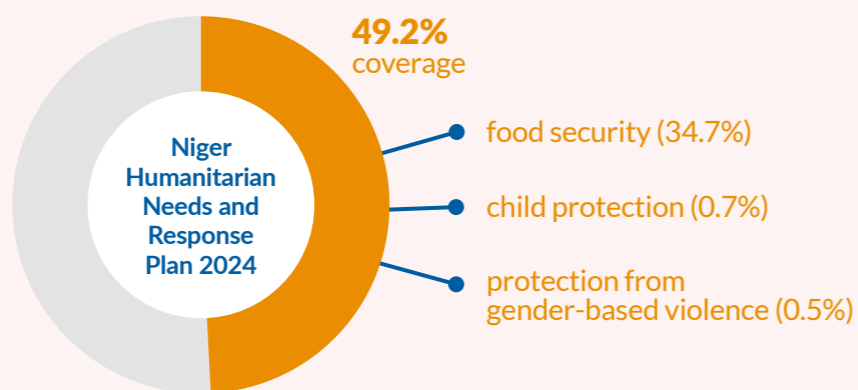
Financial Tracking Service

Trends in reported funding - Niger

Source: OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service (as of 23 December 2024)



OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service



The Niger Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 was funded at only 49.2%. Of the \$662.2 million required to meet the population's humanitarian needs, only \$325.9 million was raised. The vast majority of the funds – 34.7% – were allocated to food security projects, according

to OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (OCHA, 2024b). In contrast, the least-funded initiatives included those dedicated to child protection (0.7% of the total) and protection from gender-based violence (0.5% of the total).

ChildFund Alliance in Niger

ChildFund Alliance members Educo and WeWorld implement a range of projects in Niger, focusing on food security, ma-

ternal health, and the right to education for children and families. Their work continues throughout both peacetime and periods of conflict and insecurity, aiming to address the challenges faced by com-

munities in vulnerable and marginalised conditions and provide essential support to those in need.

Palestine

Index	World Index		Context Sub-Index		Children's Sub-Index		Women's Sub-Index	
Year	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
2015	97/163	58.5/100	70/163	65.4/100	102/163	56.3/100	96/163	54.4/100
2024	93/157	62.3/100	68/157	70.1/100	102/157	58.5/100	92/157	58.9/100

Human Rights Implementation: BASIC*

*The ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 data refer to 2023.

Before October 2023

Over the past decade, Palestine has faced an escalating humanitarian crisis driven by a combination of blockades, military operations, settler violence, and systematic violations of human rights. Before October 2023, while the population's living conditions were extremely challenging, especially in the Gaza Strip, they were not yet at the crisis levels seen after that date. Palestinians lived under a prolonged Israeli military occupation, with significant restrictions on movement, access to services, and daily life. Basic infrastructure like healthcare and education was functional to some extent, though often underfunded and stretched thin. In this context, life for many Palestinians was marked by a persistent state of insecurity and limited opportunities, particularly for those in the Gaza Strip. However, the situation did not reach a point of total societal breakdown. This

changed dramatically after October 2023, when the situation escalated, and the systematic violations of human rights intensified, further exacerbating the dire living conditions, especially for women, children, and vulnerable groups.

The situation is clearly reflected in the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024, as shown in Figure 1, which tracks the historical series of the Conflict and Wars dimension. Palestine's score has consistently been well below both the global average and the regional average for the Middle East and North Africa. With a score of just 64.5 out of 100 in 2015, compared to 74.3 for the region and 83 globally, the country has persistently underperformed, reflecting a context of protracted crisis, ongoing conflict, and widespread human rights violations. While the situation has always been critical, in recent history, it had not escalated into the full-scale humanitarian crisis we are witnessing today.

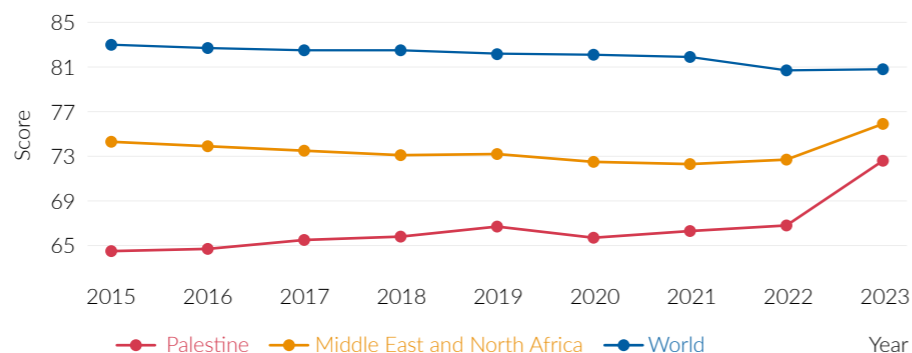
From 2022, there were signs of slight improvement. However, the data in the World Index 2024 edition captures a period prior to October 2023. The full impact of Israel's war on the Gaza Strip and the ongoing humanitarian crisis will only be accounted for in the next edition of the World Index.

In 2023, 10% of Palestinian primary school-aged children were out of school and 28% of youth were not in education, employment or training

(ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024¹)

1 Source: Elaboration on UNESCO, 2023.

FIGURE 1.
Historical Series of the Conflict and Wars Dimension: World, Middle East and North Africa, and Palestine Performance
(Source: ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024)



"We have no money to buy food, we lost our income, our jobs. I think we are lucky, we are able to receive one or two meals per day now, before we dreamed about having one meal"

Amal, age unspecified, Gaza Strip*

*Testimony collected by WeWorld

Systematic Violations of Human Rights

The human rights situation in Palestine was already critical before October 2023. **Palestinians endured Israeli military occupation, settlement expansion, and restrictions on freedom of movement, alongside tactics such as house demolitions, arbitrary arrests, and limitations on access to healthcare, education, and employment.** Settler violence, frequently carried out with impunity, was widespread, especially in the West Bank. Israeli settlers regularly attacked Palestinian civilians and their property, including homes and sources of livelihood (such as crops, grazing lands, etc.), while policies encouraging settlement expansion systematically violated international law.

After the escalation started in October 2023, Israel launched an intensive military campaign in the Gaza Strip, further exacerbating an already dire situation. Conditions in the Gaza Strip deteriorated rapidly, with access to clean water, sanitation, and food items reaching catastrophic levels.

Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip have left civilian infrastructure devastated. Homes, schools, hospitals, and clinics have been targeted. Over half of Gaza healthcare facilities are either damaged or non-functional, leaving millions without access to lifesaving treatment (WHO, 2025). As of 30 January 2025, 670 health attacks in the Gaza Strip and 721 in the West Bank, including

East Jerusalem, had been documented (ibid.). More than 1.2 million people across Palestine are in need of lifesaving nutrition intervention and malnutrition prevention services² (State of Palestine Nutrition Cluster, 2025). Many children are denied education as schools have been damaged or used as shelters due to large-scale population displacement. **The destruction of schools in the Gaza Strip has been particularly devastating, with more than 600,000 children unable to attend classes, a phenomenon described as "scholasticide"** by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East - UNRWA³ - (2024). Many schools have been damaged or repurposed as shelters for displaced families, further disrupting education and leaving long-term impacts on children's futures.

² Data is update as of 17 February.

³ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA): Established in 1949, UNRWA provides humanitarian aid and services to Palestinian refugees and their descendants, primarily in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Its work includes education, healthcare, emergency relief, and social services. Unlike other UN refugee agencies, UNRWA focuses exclusively on Palestinian refugees, a group defined as those displaced by the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict and their descendants. For more information see <https://www.unrwa.org/>

Settler Violence and International Humanitarian Law Violations in the West Bank

In the West Bank, Palestinian communities face daily violence and harassment from Israeli settlers, often without accountability from Israeli authorities. Settler violence has escalated to alarming levels, including attacks on civilians, property, and farmland. In addition to violence, Israeli military and settler activities in the West Bank have resulted in the further appropriation of Palestinian land. Settlements in areas like Hebron and East Jerusalem continue to expand, displacing families and undermining the livelihoods of Palestinians. **Despite international law prohibiting settlement expansion, Israel persists in this policy with full government support, including military protection for settlers engaging in violent acts.**

The year 2024 recorded the highest numbers of forcible transfers and destruction in nearly two decades, with approximately 4,250 Palestinians forcibly transferred, 1,760 structures destroyed,

and about 1,400 settler-related incidents across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem (OCHA, 2024h).

The Gendered Impact of the Crisis

The humanitarian crisis in Palestine has disproportionately impacted women and girls, who face compounded challenges from occupation, violence, and restricted access to basic services. Women in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, including physical abuse, sexual violence, and domestic abuse, which has escalated due to the conflict and worsening social conditions (UN Women, 2024).



In Palestine, before the war, 1 in 5 women reported having experienced intimate partner violence. This figure is likely to be significantly underestimated due to fears of stigma, retaliation, and difficulties in accessing support

(ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024⁴)

⁴ Source: Elaboration on Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), 2023

Humanitarian assistance, already sparse, fails to meet the needs of women and girls. **In this context, women-headed households represent a uniquely vulnerable group. These households now bear sole responsibility for feeding, protecting, and providing for their families amid severe food shortages, lack of protection, and limited income opportunities.** Approximately 85% of Gaza's workforce has been unemployed since the conflict began, with women disproportionately affected (ibid.).

Generational trauma poses a profound challenge, as the psychological scars of violence, displacement, and loss are passed down through families. Children born into this conflict experience significant emotional distress, including PTSD, anxiety, and depression (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2024). More than 1 million children are traumatized and require mental health and psychosocial support. For girls, early marriage rates have risen as families attempt to secure protection amid insecurity.

As of 30 January 2025, in the Gaza Strip over 500,000 women of reproductive age lack access to essential maternal and reproductive health services (WHO, 2025). Approximately 50,000 women were pregnant, and 5,500 were due to give birth within the month (ibid.). Mental health resources for women are scarce, compounding the psychological toll of violence, displacement, and constant conflict.

Women in the West Bank face similar struggles, balancing caregiving responsibilities with the impact of violence, displacement, and economic hardship. Rural women are particularly vulnerable to settler violence and home demolitions. Women and girls are also at risk of sexual violence during military operations, harassment at checkpoints, and abuse during detention (ActionAid, 2024).

The Outlook for 2025

The humanitarian crisis in Palestine is worsening on an unprecedented scale, leaving millions in urgent need of aid. **In 2025, 3.3 million people will require humanitarian assistance in Palestine – 2.1 in the Gaza Strip and 1.2 in the West Bank** (OCHA HNRP, 2025). The situation has been further exacerbated by Israel's decision to cease all activities of UNRWA, a move that came into effect at the end of January 2025. **While UNRWA has not yet completely halted its operations, the risk of a full shutdown threatens to deprive millions of people of a vital source of support.**

As of January 2025, it is estimated that approximately 46,645 people have been killed in Gaza, 806 in the West Bank, and around 1,000 in Israel. More than 107,764 individuals have been injured, and 1.9 million Palestinians have been displaced (OCHA, 2025a). However, a study published in *The Lancet* (Jamaludine et al., 2024) estimates that the actual death toll may be 40% higher than reported, suggesting fatalities could exceed 70,000.

At the beginning of January 2025, the Israeli government and Hamas reached a ceasefire agreement, which came into effect on 19 January. As a result of this agreement, humanitarian aid has begun reaching the Gaza Strip, and civilians who had been forced to flee the northern region are now returning to their homes under extremely difficult conditions. As they return, they face serious risks from explosive remnants of war (ERW), unexploded ordnance (UXO), and the dangers posed by debris and unstable buildings. Since the ceasefire, the Ministry of Health has reported 574 fatalities, 479 of whom were bodies recovered from the rubble, and 838 injuries (WHO, 2025).

However, in the days following the ceasefire, the Israeli military intensified its operations in the West Bank to an un-

precedented level, leading to the highest displacement of Palestinians in the region since 1967. Large-scale military operations have been ongoing across the northern West Bank, particularly affecting Jenin since 20 January 2025 and Tulkarem since 28 January 2025, with smaller operations taking place in refugee camps in Nablus (ibid.). The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported that nearly all 20,000 residents of the Jenin refugee camp have been displaced over the past two months, with most now being sheltered within the host community in Jenin City and its surrounding towns.

In late February 2025, Israel deployed tanks to Jenin for the first time in over twenty years, signalling a major escalation in military operations in the region. Then, shortly after midnight on Sunday,

2 March, Israel suspended the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip in an effort to pressure Hamas into accepting terms for extending the truce.

The decision, which coincides with the start of Ramadan, has severely impacted over two million people in Gaza. Hamas swiftly rejected Israel's proposal, denouncing it as "blackmail" and calling on mediators such as Egypt and Qatar to intervene. Meanwhile, the situation on the ground has further deteriorated due to Israeli attacks, underscoring the fragility of the current ceasefire.

Despite some progress in the initial phase of the truce, including the release of hostages and prisoners, both sides have yet to reach an agreement on a second phase that could pave the way for a lasting ceasefire.

After sixteen months of war and an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, there had been hope that sustained stability could lay the groundwork for the long and arduous process of reconstruction. However, the inauguration of the new Trump administration raises concerns about further disruption to the peace and reconstruction process. On one hand, the US administration has suggested that the population leave Gaza to accelerate the region's reconstruction, calling on other Arab countries, such as Egypt and the Gulf states, to accept them as refugees. On the other hand, the intensification of military operations in the West Bank suggests a potential acceleration of Israel's plans for the full annexation of the territory. **Amid all this, the needs of the civilian population remain urgent, yet their voices continue to go unheard.**

"What we are currently going through is pain and humiliation.

Since the beginning of the war, the Gaza Strip has been suffering from a water shortage. This crisis is escalating. We waited for more than 3 hours to fill 14 litres of water for the whole 6 family members. What pains me the most is the violation of the citizens' dignity. A 12-liter water bottle is sold at a high price due to the scarcity of water. The designated filling areas are unclean, and what we get is desalinated water.

Bread, the staple of life, became a luxury. We wait between five and seven hours under bombardment, heat, and thirst. Your body is exhausted, and then you fail to get a loaf of bread and try again the next day. The price of a loaf of bread, which suffices for a small family, has tripled.

In the refugee centres, the situation is no less dire. Hygiene is poor. We struggle to use the public toilets. Washing clothes is a daunting task amid population pressure and water scarcity. The cold nights showed no mercy, wrapping the children in its chilly embrace, leading to coughs and colds, while infections played a cruel game of tag among the inhabitants.

Preparing food is an impossible task. There is no gas for cooking, and we prepare food intermittently to try to satisfy our children's hunger. The children's nights were restless; they always scream, and their sleep was irregular amidst the renewed bombing. Their dreams are filled with recurring nightmares.

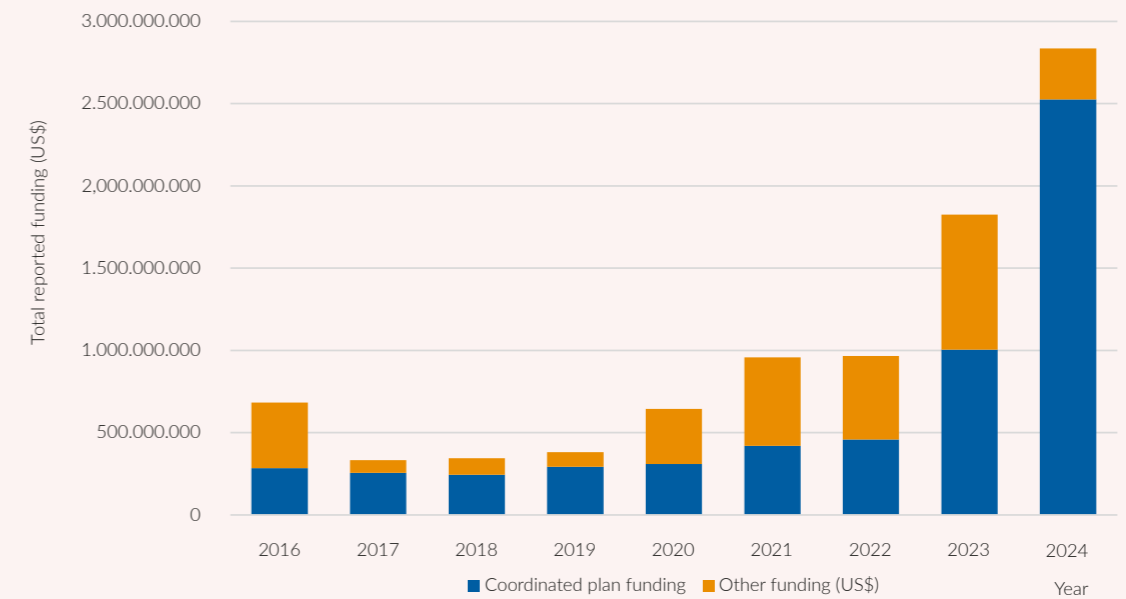
Before the war, my daughter had a domestic accident that caused severe burns. We were in the advanced stages of treatment, but since the war began, she hasn't received the necessary treatment, and her condition is worsening. Hospitals are focusing on injuries, and there's a shortage of medicines. Imagine how many people with similar cases are at risk."

* Testimony from a member of WeWorld humanitarian staff

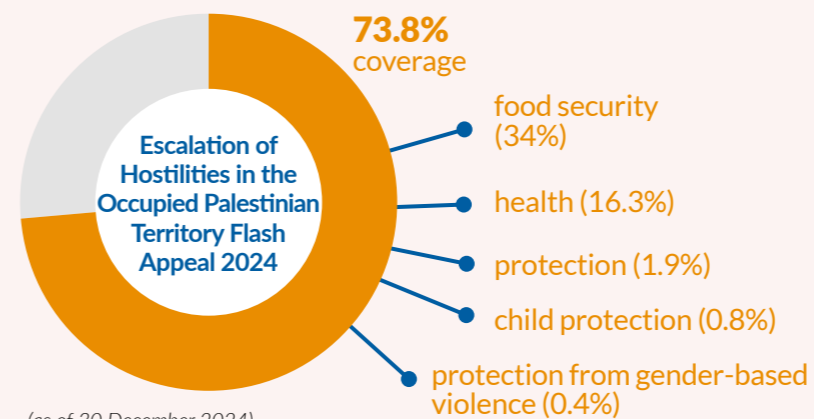
Financial Tracking Service

Trends in reported funding - Palestine

Source: OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service (as of 23 December 2024)

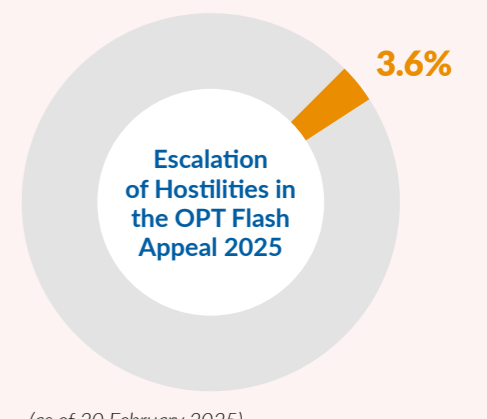


OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service



(as of 30 December 2024)

The Escalation of Hostilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Flash Appeal 2024 was funded at only 73.8%. Of the \$3,422.9 billion required to meet the population's humanitarian needs, only \$2,526.4 was raised. The vast majority of the funds – one-third – was allocated to food security projects,



(as of 20 February 2025)

followed by health projects (16.3%), according to OCHA's Financial Tracking Service. In contrast, the least-funded initiatives included those dedicated to protection (1.9% of the total), child protection (0.8% of the total) and protection from gender-based violence (0.4% of the total).

WeWorld in Palestine

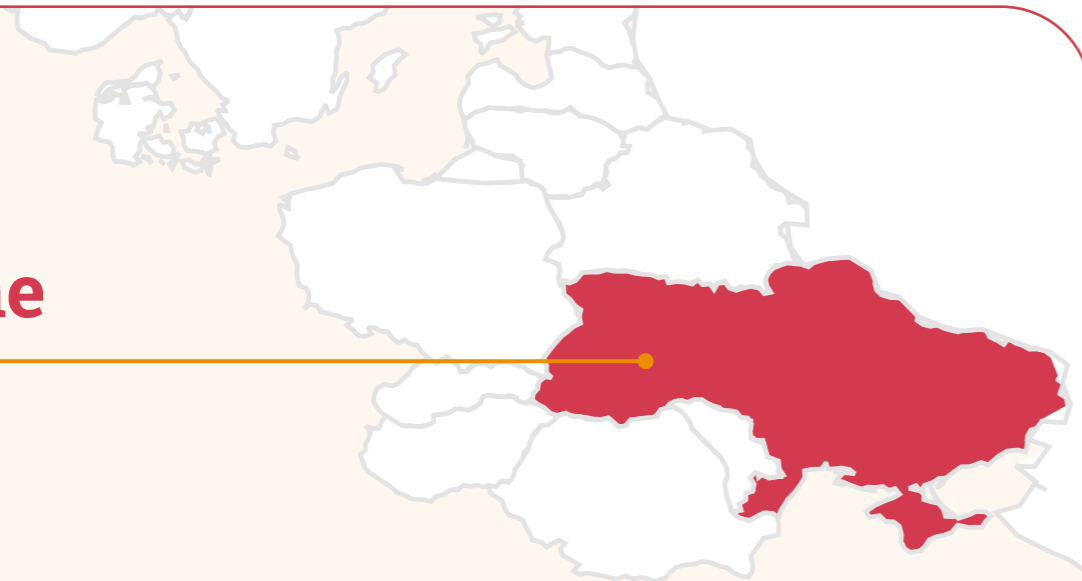
WeWorld has been active in Palestine since 1992, providing humanitarian aid and emergency assistance to meet the critical needs of vulnerable communities, particularly in Area C of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Our efforts focus on lifesaving support for children and their families, tackling urgent challenges such

as access to education and water scarcity through the construction and rehabilitation of essential infrastructure.

Beyond emergency response, WeWorld is committed to fostering economic and social development, as well as implementing capacity-strengthening initiatives to ensure the sustainable management of resources, helping communities

build resilience in the face of ongoing crises. Since the outbreak of the latest war in Gaza, we have expanded our humanitarian operations, working closely with partners from the ChildFund Alliance – including ChildFund Deutschland, ChildFund Korea, and Barnfonden – to provide targeted support where it is needed most.

Ukraine



Index	World Index		Context Sub-Index		Children's Sub-Index		Women's Sub-Index	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
2015	48/163	71.4/100	57/163	68.9/100	57/163	71.4/100	36/163	73.9/100
2024	61/157	69.6/100	100/157	63.3/100	70/157	70.1/100	41/157	76/100

Human Rights Implementation: MODERATE*
*The ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 data refer to 2023.

The Precarious State of Human Rights before 2022

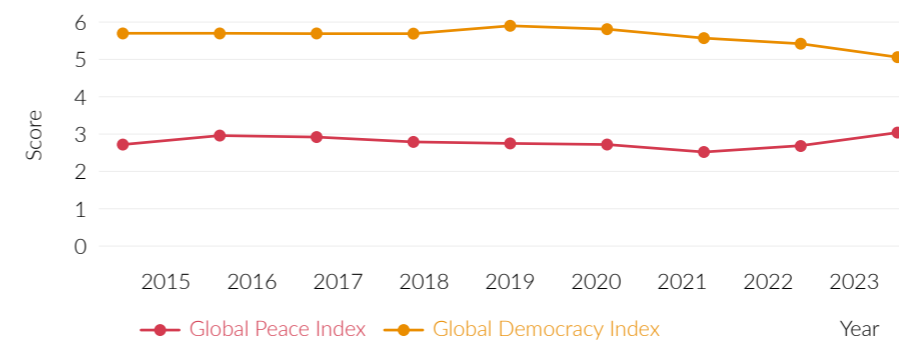
The human rights situation in Ukraine was already fragile before Russia's invasion in 2022. Systemic issues, such as corruption within the judiciary and law enforcement, severely undermined the rule of law, while marginalised groups faced significant barriers to justice. In particular, gender-based violence and child exploitation were widespread but often overlooked issues. The country had one of the highest rates of domestic violence in Europe, with around 1.1 million women survivors annually (UNFPA, 2017). Child labour was prevalent in rural and economically disadvantaged areas, and human trafficking of women and children for exploitation in neighbouring countries was a documented issue (ILO, 2017).

Furthermore, despite legal protections, the media landscape was under constant pressure. Journalists who reported on corruption or government policies were subject to harassment, threats, and violence, limiting press freedom (Reporters Sans Frontières, 2021). The eastern region of Donbas, embroiled in conflict since 2014 and forcibly annexed by Russia, has been particularly affected by human rights violations, including torture, enforced disappearances, and attacks on civilian infrastructure. These pre-existing issues created a vulnerable foundation for the country and its institutions when conflict resurfaced in 2022, driven by Russia.

Ukraine's performance in global indicators reflects this fragility and the challenges faced by its institutions. As reported in the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 (Figure 1), Ukraine's Global Peace Index and Global Democracy

Index scores have consistently lagged behind global benchmarks, illustrating long-term instability. For instance, its Global Peace Index score worsened from 2.72 in 2015 to 3.04 in 2023, indicating a decline in safety and security. Similarly, its Global Democracy Index dropped from 5.7 in 2015 to 5.06 in 2023, underscoring the deterioration in democratic governance amidst ongoing conflict and institutional weaknesses. The data reveals that even before the 2022 escalation, Ukraine was grappling with significant challenges to peace and democracy. The worsening scores in both indices highlight the compounded impact of pre-existing issues and the ongoing conflict, further underscoring the urgency for robust institutional reforms and international support.

FIGURE 1.
Historical Series of Ukraine's Performance in the Global Peace Index (Indicator 5) and Global Democracy Index (Indicator 7) from 2015 to 2023
(Source: ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024¹)



The Escalation of the Conflict and its Broader Impact

Russia's large-scale invasion in 2022 exacerbated the already precarious human rights situation in Ukraine, forcing millions to flee and leaving widespread destruction in its wake. The refugee crisis was devastating. **As of August 2024, 3.7 million people were displaced inside the country, while an additional 6.7 million refugees from Ukraine were seeking safety beyond Ukraine's borders, including 6.2 million in countries across Europe.** Millions sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia, while many others remained within Ukraine's borders (UNHCR, 2024f). Internally displaced persons faced overcrowded shelters, limited access to healthcare, education, and basic services, and continued insecurity, particularly in conflict zones near the front lines.

The destruction of essential infrastructure hampered displaced families' ability to access basic necessities, such as food, clean water, and healthcare. This situ-

ation disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, including children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and marginalised ethnic minorities. The war also caused a severe economic slowdown, worsening poverty and deepening inequalities across the country.

The Gendered Impact of the Crisis

The humanitarian crisis has had a devastating impact on women and girls, exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities and creating new challenges. As of 2024, over 2.5 million women and girls were in need of specialised support to address gender-based violence, including sexual violence perpetrated in conflict zones (OCHA, 2024i).



As of 2024, over 2.5 million women and girls were in need of specialised support to address gender-based violence, including sexual violence perpetrated in conflict zones

(OCHA, 2024i)

Trafficking of women and girls has increased, particularly in border regions, where displaced populations are particularly vulnerable. Cases of sex for survival, exploitative labour, and sexual slavery have emerged, with traffickers taking advantage of the desperation of displaced women (IOM, 2023). Single mothers and female-headed households have faced particular difficulties, being forced to navigate the chaos of displacement while struggling with unemployment, a lack of social services, and limited access to childcare.

Moreover, the war has had a severe impact on women's health, particularly in terms of reproductive and maternal health. The destruction of healthcare facilities and the disruption of services have made it harder for many women to access essential care. In displacement camps, the lack of menstrual hygiene supplies has exacerbated women's and girls' health challenges, compromising their health and dignity (UNFPA, 2024a).

The psychological and emotional toll has been equally severe. Many women, often the primary caregivers in their families, are burdened with managing trauma and caring for their children while facing the uncertainty of the conflict. Mental health services remain underfunded, leaving many women without the critical support they need (Save the Children, 2024).

The Fragile Future of Children in Ukraine

Children, particularly girls, have been the hardest hit by the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, with dramatic disruptions to their lives, health, education, and safety. **As of November 2024, 2.9 million children inside Ukraine were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, and more than 3.6 million children had had their educational opportunities disrupted due to the destruction of infrastructure and ongoing insecurity** (UNICEF, 2024a). Girls have been

¹ The source of the Global Peace Index is Vision of Humanity 2024. It quantifies the absence of violence or the fear of violence to evaluate a nation's level of peace. This absence of violence is referred to as Negative Peace. A higher GPI score indicates a higher level of violence in a country, with scores ranging from 5 to 1. The source of the Global Democracy Index is the Economist Intelligence Unit 2024. The Democracy Index is based on 60 indicators grouped into five categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation, and political culture. Scores range from 0 to 10.

disproportionately affected by these disruptions, facing unique challenges related to their gender.

The presence of landmines and unexploded ordnance has made daily life dangerous for children. By the end of 2024, potentially 23% of Ukraine's territory could be contaminated with mines and unexploded ordnance, posing a serious threat to children's safety (UNDP, 2024a).



By the end of 2024, potentially **23% of Ukraine's territory could be contaminated with mines and unexploded ordnance**, posing a serious threat to children's safety (UNDP, 2024a).

The psychological impact on children, particularly those exposed to violence, has been profound. Many have witnessed horrific scenes, such as the loss of family members, destruction of homes, and attacks on civilian infrastructure. This trauma has left many children grappling with mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Access to mental health services has been scarce, with many displaced children experiencing the compounded stress of living in unsafe, overcrowded conditions while also trying to cope with the emotional fallout from their experiences (UNICEF, 2024b). The long-term effects of this trauma threaten to affect an entire generation of children, leaving them at risk of further socio-economic hardship in the future.

The Outlook for 2025

This year marks the third anniversary of the conflict in Ukraine, and the situation has reached a worrying stalemate. With winter worsening already dire conditions, civilians are finding it increasingly difficult to cope. **In 2025, 12.7 million people—31% of whom are women and 20% children—will require humanitarian assistance** (OCHA HNRP 2025).

The inauguration of the new Trump administration has marked a turning point in the conflict, leading to the rehabilitation of Putin's image and a rewriting of the war's narrative. The United States has initiated negotiations with the Russian Federation, excluding both Ukraine and the European Union. These negotiations are expected to impose highly unfavourable conditions on Ukraine².

The protection of human rights must remain a top priority, ensuring that vulnerable populations, particularly women and children, receive the support they need. Without a sustained commitment to peace and an end to hostilities, the humanitarian crisis will persist, with long-term repercussions for individuals and communities across Ukraine.

² After weeks of tension between Trump and Zelensky, along with various attempts by European leaders to mediate and lay the groundwork for a peace agreement, in early March 2025, US President Donald Trump decided to temporarily suspend the delivery of new military aid to Ukraine.

"Adults need to be sensitive to children's emotional state, provide them with opportunities to express their feelings and take care of their mental stability. Creating a safe, supportive environment at home and at school is very important."

Kateryna, 12 years old*

*Testimonies collected by WeWorld in Ukraine

For now, it remains unclear whether these initial diplomatic meetings will lead to a cessation of hostilities—something the international community has long been calling for. What is certain, however, is that if an agreement is reached, efforts must focus on recovery. After years of war, the population has become dependent on humanitarian aid; men have been forced into conscription, women have been left to manage households alone, and children have been deprived of education.

The social fabric of a country that was already undergoing a complex transition towards democracy—caught between Russia and the European Union—must now be rebuilt. Today, much of Ukraine's infrastructure lies in ruins, public discontent is widespread, and trust in institutions has eroded, further exacerbated by the imposition of martial law.

WeWorld in Ukraine

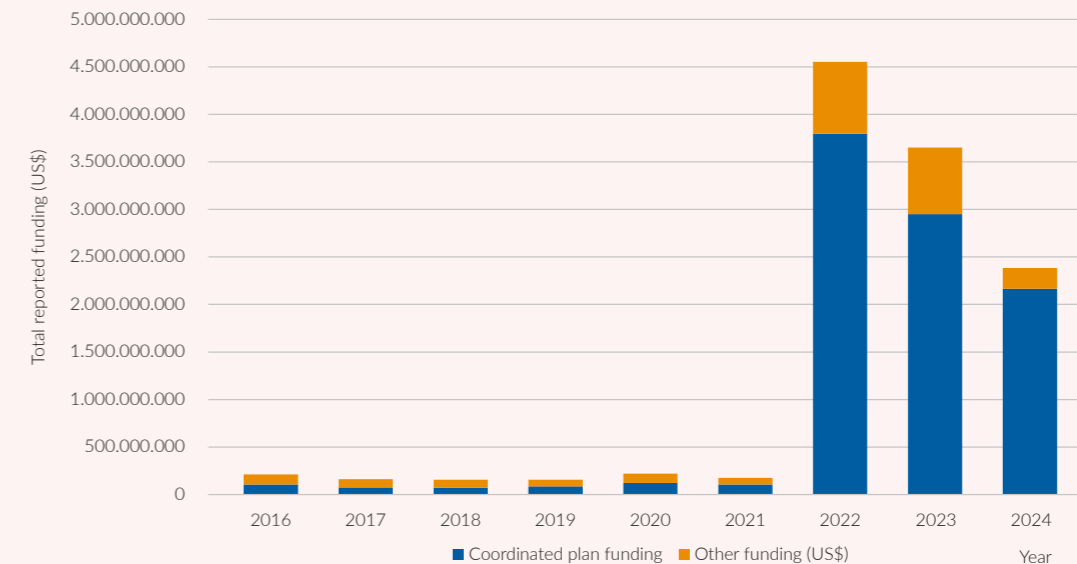
WeWorld immediately intervened in Ukraine in March 2022 - thanks to our ChildFund Alliance partner ChildFund Deutschland - to assist people forced to leave their homes in the eastern regions of the country. We quickly activated local partners and, shortly thereafter, established a permanent presence to respond to the emergency. This included distributing food, water, and essential goods, while also launching a sustaina-



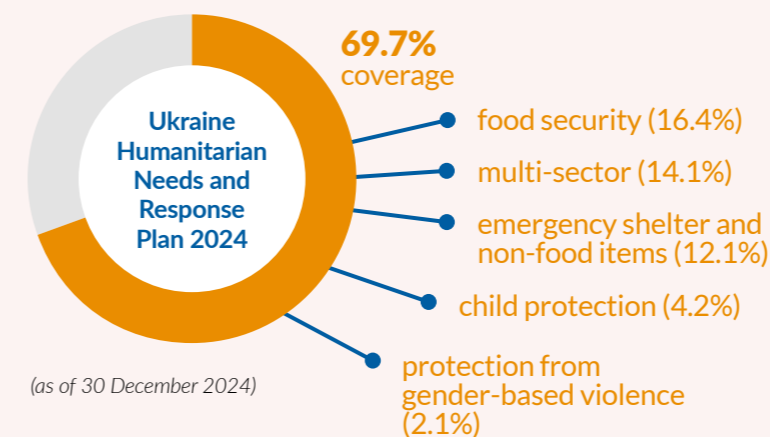
Financial Tracking Service

Trends in reported funding - Ukraine

Source: OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service (as of 23 December 2024)



OCHA 2024, Financial Tracking Service



The Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024 was funded at only 69.7%. Of the \$3,107.7 billion required to meet the population's humanitarian needs, only \$2,167.0 was raised. The vast majority of the funds were allocated to food security (16.4%) and multi-sector (14.1%) projects and



emergency shelter and non-food items (12.1%), according to OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (OCHA, 2024b). In contrast, the least-funded initiatives included those dedicated to child protection (4.2% of the total) and protection from gender-based violence (2.1% of the total).

ble, long-term humanitarian project to support women and children.

Currently, our operational offices in Ukraine are located in Kyiv, Kherson, Mykolayiv, and Kharkiv. We work alongside those who, despite the ongoing conflict, have chosen to stay, as well as those who have returned after abandoning their homes under attack. We are also active

in Moldova, where we provide shelter to people who have decided to leave Ukraine.

ChildFund Alliance in Ukraine

ChildFund Alliance members ChildFund Deutschland, Educo, and WeWorld are present in Ukraine, implementing projects to support children and families

impacted by the conflict. This includes cash assistance programmes, migration advice, psycho-social support, and humanitarian assistance.

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FOCUS Afghanistan's Dual Crisis: Humanitarian Needs and the Future of Women's Rights



1. Introduction

Afghanistan's recent history has been shaped by decades of conflict, political instability, and economic hardship. The country's ongoing struggles have resulted in persistent food insecurity, malnutrition, displacement, and the devastating effects of natural disasters and climate change. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, efforts to rebuild have seen some progress; however, these gains have often been modest and short-lived, leaving many people vulnerable to continued deprivation, limited access to basic services, and precarious livelihoods.

Beneath these well-documented humanitarian crises lies a hidden yet deeply ingrained issue—the systematic erosion of women's rights. Since the rise to power of the De Facto Authorities (DfA) in 2021, even the limited progress that had been achieved has been entirely undone. What makes this crisis particularly unique is that it does not exist in isolation; it is intrinsically connected to the broader humanitarian landscape, intensifying the struggles faced by women and girls every day. The barriers to educa-

tion, healthcare, freedom of movement, and political participation are not simply obstacles—they represent a deliberate effort to suppress women's fundamental freedoms, making this both a humanitarian and a profoundly political crisis.

This paper focuses on the dual nature of Afghanistan's current crisis, emphasising the intersection between humanitarian suffering—characterised by food insecurity, poor health, and displacement—and the ongoing denial of women's rights. By addressing these interconnected challenges, we aim to illuminate how the restriction of women's freedoms exacerbates the humanitarian situation, perpetuating a cycle of vulnerability that leaves countless women and girls without access to the resources they need to survive and contribute to the future. This dual crisis—overlooked for far too long—must be recognised as a central aspect of Afghanistan's continued struggle for stability and justice.

The paper begins by examining Afghanistan's dual crisis, which combines the

ongoing humanitarian emergency with the erosion of women's rights. This analysis draws upon data from the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024, which evaluates the global implementation of human rights for women and children, as well as insights from various secondary sources¹, to construct a more comprehensive understanding of this intersecting crisis.

Subsequently, the paper shifts focus to a case study of WeWorld, showcasing a project aimed at addressing food security and livelihoods. Through the voices of the communities we work with—women, girls, and households directly impacted by the initiative—the paper illustrates the tangible impact of targeted, rights-based interventions.

¹ A particularly valuable source, noted for its comprehensive information, is UN Women (2024), *Afghanistan Gender Country Profile*, which is available at <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/Gender-country-profile-Afghanistan-en.pdf>

Finally, the paper looks ahead to the future prospects for Afghan women, presenting their stories through interviews with humanitarian personnel from WeWorld and refugee activists now living abroad. These firsthand accounts provide a powerful insight into the resilience and agency of Afghan women in the face of adversity. The paper concludes with actionable recommendations aimed at fostering sustainable, long-term solutions that prioritise the rights and well-being of women and girls in Afghanistan, while also addressing the broader humanitarian challenges.

Afghanistan's Crisis Examined Through the ChildFund Alliance World Index

Afghanistan is currently grappling with multiple, interconnected crises—economic, humanitarian, climate, and political. Each of these challenges is made worse by the growing crisis surrounding women's rights. The DfA are implementing policies and practices that discriminate against women and girls, which, combined with long-standing gender inequality, further intensifies the impact of these overlapping crises.

Afghan women are being affected on every level, with restrictions limiting their personal autonomy and dignity, such as the denial of independent mobility and access to education. Additionally, their role in both the public sector (e.g., through bans on women working for NGOs) and the private sector (e.g., by removing women's images from TV and their voices from radio) is being systematically undermined.

The dual crisis in Afghanistan—encompassing both women's human rights and a broader humanitarian emergency—has deep roots. To analyse, contextualise, and understand this situation, we draw upon data from the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 (updated to 2023) as well as more recent insights from reputable secondary sources.

The ChildFund Alliance World Index—formerly known as the *WeWorld Index*—assesses the state of human rights for women and children globally. The overall index is derived from the aggregation of three sub-indexes (Context, Children, and Women), each comprising five dimensions, totalling 15 dimensions. Each dimension includes two indicators, amounting to 30 indicators overall. This methodology enables the creation of four global rankings (Overall Index, Context Sub-Index, Children's Sub-Index, and Women's Sub-Index), as well as analyses by geographic region, rankings across 15 dimensions, and individual country profiles.

The ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 evaluates 157 countries, ranking them globally based on their progress in implementing human rights for women and children on a scale from 0 to 100.

In 2024, the top five countries in the overall ranking are primarily from Northern Europe (Sweden, Iceland, and Norway), Continental Europe (Switzerland), and Australia. Conversely, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa affected by wars and prolonged crises (Mali, Niger, Central African Republic, Chad) and Afghanistan continue to occupy the lowest positions.

According to the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024, at the current pace, it will take **113 years** for women and children worldwide to experience the full implementation of their human rights².



A girl born in Afghanistan today will need to wait 210 years to see her human rights fully implemented, according to the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024³.

² Comparing values calculated for the different time steps, we can assess a rough projection of the variation rate of the Index and the Sub-indexes at the world level. We compute the average variation rate between 2015 and 2023 and then assess the number of years still needed to reach a score value of 100 from the present situation. It is important to note that this method assumes the variation rate as constant over time and, especially, cannot provide an estimate if the variation rate is negative.

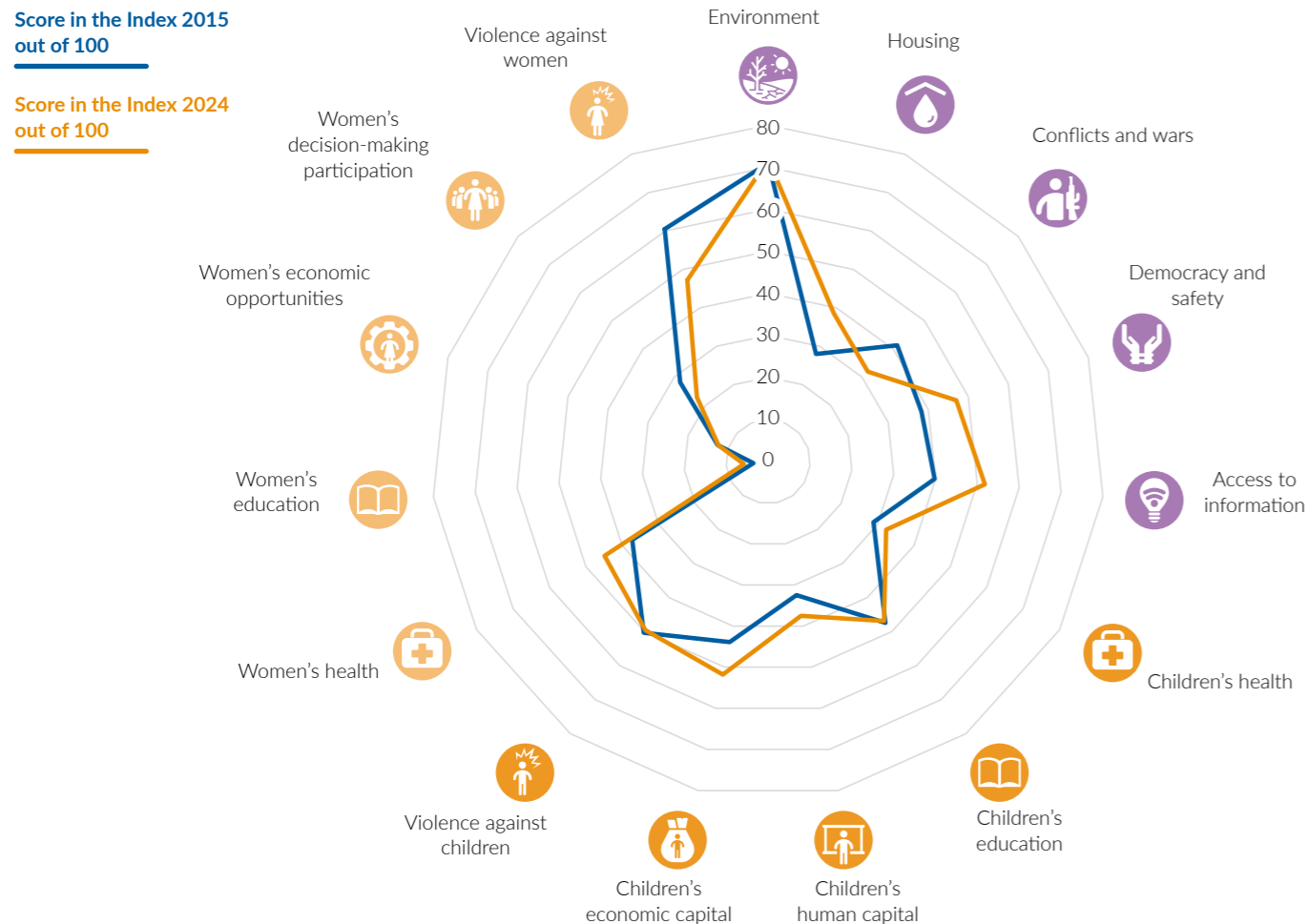
³ See footnote 2

When focusing on the Women's Sub-Index, Afghanistan stands out as the country with the poorest performance in the historical data since the inception of the World Index (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1.
The Bottom 5 Countries in the Women's Sub-Index 2024 and 2015

Country	INDEX 2024 (157 countries considered)		INDEX 2015 (163 countries considered)	
	Rank	Score out of 100	Rank	Score out of 100
Central African Republic	153	27.2	161	21.2
Yemen	154	26.4	158	27.2
Niger	155	24.4	159	23.2
Chad	156	22.1	162	20.3
Afghanistan	157	20.3	163	19.5

FIGURE 2.
Afghanistan's Performance in Each Dimension of the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 and 2015⁴



4 The radar chart allows us to understand if the dimensions relating to the context, women, and children have improved or worsened over time. To read it, one has to look at how the trajectories approach or move away from zero. The closer the radar trajectory gets to zero, the worse that dimension gets; the closer it gets to 100, the better.

The level of human rights implementation in the country remains critically low, as evidenced by trends in the dimensions considered by the World Index (Figure 2).

Examining the dimensions within the Context Sub-Index (Environment, Housing, Conflict and Wars, Democracy and Safety, Access to Information), there has been a slight improvement in the Environment dimension and significant progress in Housing—addressing WASH-related aspects—Access to Information, and Democracy and Safety. However, the latter may see changes in the next assessment due to policies introduced by the DfA. Unsurprisingly, the dimension of “Conflict and Wars” has worsened.

Turning to the dimensions of the Children's Sub-Index (Health, Education, Human Capital, Economic Capital, Violence against Children), it is crucial to note that the initial scores are extremely low, given the index measures human rights implementation on a scale from 0 to 100. The same applies—as will be seen—to the Women's Sub-Index. That said, a slight improvement has been recorded in the Health dimension, while significant progress has been noted in Human and Economic Capital. However, the ongoing crisis risks jeopardising these gains, which cannot be taken for granted in Afghanistan's fragile economy unless adequately supported. The dimensions of Children's Education and Violence against Children have deteriorated.

Looking at the dimensions of the Women's Sub-Index (Health, Education, Economic Opportunities, Decision-Making Participation, Violence against Women), the only substantial improvement has been in the Health dimension. The Education dimension shows a very slight improvement, moving from an outrageously low score of 3.51 out of 100 to 5.74 out of 100. All other dimensions, however, have worsened.

From Reform to Repression: The Erosion of Women's Rights

The marginalisation of Afghan women is a systemic issue with deep historical roots, compounded by current discriminatory policies. **The ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024 starkly illustrates this reality, as Afghanistan remains the lowest-ranking country globally in the Women's Sub-Index, with deeply entrenched gender inequalities affecting all aspects of life.** This crisis is not only humanitarian but also economic and political, perpetuating cycles of deprivation for generations to come.

Afghanistan's socio-political landscape has long been shaped by patriarchal values. Between 1978 and 1992, under the communist government, significant reforms were introduced to advance gender equality. These included compulsory education for girls, setting a minimum marriage age of 16, abolishing the bride price, and signing (but not ratifying) the Convention on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEDAW)⁵. Women gained some representation in politics and increased participation in education, healthcare, and government roles, particularly in urban areas, where women came to represent a large proportion of teachers, doctors, and civil servants. However, these advancements largely failed to challenge deep-rooted structures of gender inequality.

The Taliban's seizure of power in 1996 reversed these achievements. Women were barred from education and employment, subjected to strict dress codes, and excluded from nearly all aspects of public life. International outrage over women's oppression under the Taliban became a prominent justification for the US-led military intervention in 2001, which ousted the regime following the September 11 attacks.

From 2001 to 2021, efforts to empower women and girls gained momentum under Afghanistan's democratically elected government. Notable milestones included ratifying CEDAW, introducing gender quotas in the 2004 Constitution, passing the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW Law)⁶, and creating institutions such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. National Action Plans focused on gender equality, leading to significant improvements in women's visibility in public decision-making, legal protections, and access to services.

The Taliban's return to power in 2021 marked a sharp reversal of these gains. Legal frameworks and institutions promoting gender equality have been dismantled, and women are once again excluded from education, employment, and public life. **The Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice has been reinstated to enforce strict interpretations of sharia law. Afghan women have been banned from working for NGOs and the UN, while women-owned businesses were shut down.** These measures have returned the country to conditions reminiscent of the 1996–2001 Taliban era.

Since August 2021, the DfA has been governing without a defined legal framework, having suspended the 2004 Constitution and any laws they consider “incompatible with sharia law.” **The Taliban's resurgence has entrenched institutionalised discrimination, erasing decades of progress and subjecting Afghan women to systematic oppression and exclusion.**

5 See https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?Treaty=CEDAW&Lang=en

6 Ministry of Justice of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. 2009. Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW). Official Gazette. Extraordinary Issue. Issue No. 989. 1 August.

Timeline of Decrees Restricting Women's Rights in Afghanistan (2021–2024)

The following highlights key developments in the DfA's systematic restrictions on the rights of Afghan women and girls, though it is not an exhaustive list:



2021

September

- Women are prohibited from participating in sports.
- The Ministry of Women's Affairs is dissolved and replaced by the Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.
- Female government employees are instructed to remain at home and cease working.

November

- Women presenters and journalists are mandated to cover their entire face while appearing on television.

December

- Women must be accompanied by a *mahram* (male relative) when traveling distances exceeding 77 kilometers.

2022

March

- Girls' secondary education is suspended beyond grade six.

May

- Women are required to adhere to a "proper hijab," preferably wearing a burqa, and are instructed not to leave their homes without a valid reason ("the first and best form of observing hijab").

August

- Female employees in the Ministry of Finance are directed to send male relatives to take over their jobs.

November

- Women are banned from accessing public baths, parks, gyms, sports facilities, and amusement parks.

December

- Afghan women are prohibited from working with national and international NGOs.
- Women and girls are barred from higher education and university enrollment.

2023⁷

April

- Afghan women are prohibited from working for United Nations entities.

May

- Female doctors are banned from registering for specialization exams under the authority of the Ministry of Public Health.

July

- Beauty salons are ordered to shut down within one month.

December

- NGOs are prohibited from engaging in projects involving awareness-raising, conflict resolution, advocacy, or peacebuilding.

2024⁸

March

- The Taliban reinstates flogging and stoning as punishments for women accused of adultery.

August

- Women are prohibited from traveling without a male guardian (*mahram*).
- Full-body veiling becomes mandatory, including covering the face. Clothing must not be short, thin, or tight.
- Gender mixing between unrelated men and women is strictly forbidden.

- Women are banned from reciting, singing, or reading aloud in public. They are also prohibited from looking at men they are not related to, and vice versa.

December

- Women are banned from pursuing medical education, including nursing and midwifery programmes.

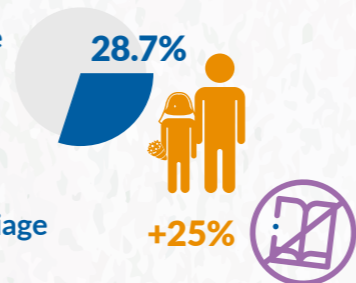
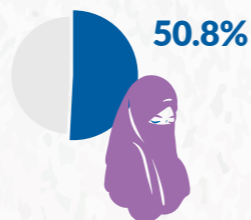
⁷ For information related to 2021–2023 see UN Women, 2024.

⁸ See Human Rights Watch, 2025.

The Status of Women's Rights in Afghanistan: Key Data

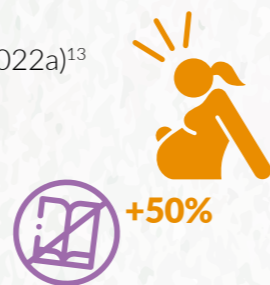
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- **50.8%** of Afghan women aged **15–49** report having **experienced violence** at least once in their lives. In the provinces of Ghor and Herat, this figure rises to 92% (UN Women, 2024⁹)
- **28.7%** of women aged **20–24** were **married before the age of 18**, while 9.6% of women aged 20–24 were married before the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2023¹⁰).
- The **ban on education** for Afghan girls beyond grade six has been linked to a **25% increase in the rate of child marriage** (UN Women, 2024)¹¹.



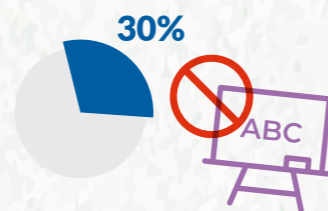
HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

- In 2022, only **10%** of women were able to meet their **basic health needs**, compared to 23% of men (WHO, 2022)¹²
- In 2020, Afghanistan had one of the **highest maternal mortality rates** globally, with **620 deaths** per 100,000 live births (WHO, 2022a)¹³
- The **ban on education** for girls and women beyond primary school is estimated to **increase the risk of maternal mortality by at least 50%** (UN Women, 2024)¹⁴.



ACCESS TO EDUCATION

- As of April 2023, **80%** of school-aged girls and young women—equivalent to 2.5 million individuals—were **out of school**, including 1.1 million secondary school-aged girls (UNESCO, 2023)¹⁵
- In December 2022, over **100,000** female university students were **banned from education** (ibid.)
- Nearly **30%** of girls in Afghanistan have **never entered primary education**, primarily due to prevailing sociocultural norms and access challenges (ibid.).



9 Estimates made in 2017 by the Central Statistics Organization in Kabul are captured in the UN Women Global Database on Violence against Women, available at: <https://evawglobal-database.unwomen.org/en/countries/asia/afghanistan#1>

10 For further information see UNICEF (2023), Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey 2022-2023, <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/reports/afghanistan-multiple-indicator-cluster-survey-mics-2022-2023>

11 Statistical modeling (UN Women, 2024).

12 For further information see Ground Truth Solutions (2022), Protecting and improving healthcare: Community insights from Afghanistan. Awaaz Afghanistan, WHO, June., https://static1.squarespace.com/static/62e895bdf6085938506cc492/t/63a40d4d9b98870aac88e2b/1671695769228/GTS_Afghanistan_Health_June2022_EN.pdf

13 2020 is the most recent year for which data are available: WHO (2022), Maternity Mortality Ratio, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.MMRT?locations=AF-AF>

14 Statistical modeling (UN Women, 2024).

15 For further information see UNESCO (2023), *Let girls and women in Afghanistan learn!*, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/let-girls-and-women-afghanistan-learn>

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

- In 2021, women constituted only **23.3%** of Afghanistan's **labour force** (World Bank, 2022)¹⁶. However, in response to widespread poverty, this rate has reached an all-time high, with **45%** of women reporting participation in the labour market (World Bank 2023)¹⁷. It is important to note that this increase is largely driven by the dire economic and humanitarian situation in the country, rather than any meaningful shift in social norms or attitudes.



- Between June 2021 and the end of 2022, **employment rates dropped by 25%** for women and 7% for men (ILO, 2023)¹⁸.

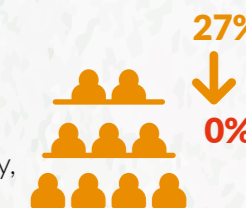


- The **ban on education** for girls and women, combined with the shrinking pool of jobs available to Afghan women, is estimated to have **reduced Afghanistan's annual gross domestic product by 2.5%** - equivalent to USD 500 million - in the first year of Taliban control (UNICEF, 2022)¹⁹.



EQUAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

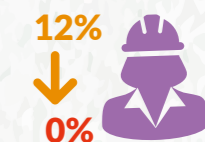
- Previously, **27%** of seats in the lower house of the **Afghan Parliament** were reserved for women.²⁰ Today, that number has **fallen to zero**.



- Women made up **26%** of **employees** in the Afghan civil service. Today, that number has **fallen to zero**.



- Women held **9–12%** of **top leadership positions** across various sectors. Today, that number has **fallen to zero**.



INTERSECTIONAL VULNERABILITIES

- An estimated **80%** of girls with disabilities in Afghanistan are **unable to attend school** (Human Rights Watch, 2020)²¹
- The **literacy rate** in Afghanistan is **16%** for women in **rural** areas, **40%** for women in **urban** areas, and 55% as the national average for men (OCHA, 2023)²².



16 For further information see World Bank (2022), Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey, <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099060523132512650/p16835704a54570c60aded0ff5644d7a90a#:text=The%20World%20Bank%20conducted%20the%20wide%20range%20of%20welfare%20indicators>.

17 For further information see World Bank (2023), Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey: Round 3, <https://theDocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/975d25c52634db31c504a2c6bee44d22-0310012023/original/Afghanistan-Welfare-Monitoring-Survey-3.pdf>

18 For further information see ILO (2023), Employment in Afghanistan in 2022: A rapid impact assessment. ILO Brief, March 2023, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/brief/employment-afghanistan-2022-rapid-impact-assessment>

19 For further information see UNICEF (2022), Depriving girls of secondary education translates to a loss of at least US\$500 million for Afghan economy in last 12 months, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/depriving-girls-secondary-education-translates-loss-least-us500-million-afghan>

20 For further information see National Statistics and Information Authority of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2021), Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2020 44, April, pp. 29–31. Kabul: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

21 For further information see Human Rights Watch (2020), Afghanistan: Women with Disabilities Face Systemic Abuse, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/27/afghanistan-women-disabilities-face-systemic-abuse>

22 For further information see OCHA (2023), Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 Response Overview, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-response-plan-2023-response-overview-1-january-31-december-2023#:text=In%202023%2C%20FSAC%20reached%2026.3.12.51%20million%20received%20livelihood%20support>.

Afghanistan's Humanitarian Crisis: The Outlook for 2025

In 2025, 22.9 million people will require humanitarian assistance, of whom 25% are women and 53% are children (OCHA HNRP, 2025). Women, girls, and children are disproportionately affected due to restrictive policies, economic hardships, and recurring natural disasters.

Afghanistan's economy has contracted sharply since August 2021, driven by political instability, an isolated financial system, and a significant reduction in development funding. This economic collapse has led to widespread unemployment, underemployment, and poverty, affecting roughly 48% of the population. Women-led households are particularly vulnerable, struggling to afford basic goods and services amidst seasonal shocks, natural disasters, and an ongoing water crisis.

The humanitarian situation remains critical. Millions face food insecurity, and malnutrition rates, especially among chil-

dren and pregnant women, are alarmingly high. The restrictive policies of the De Facto Authorities (DfA), such as the 'Morality Law,' further exacerbate the crisis by severely limiting women's access to services, freedom of movement, and public life. These restrictions also intensify gender-based violence and hinder the delivery of humanitarian aid to women.

Women, particularly those in rural areas, female-headed households, and young girls, endure the greatest hardships. **Many are forced to adopt harmful coping strategies, such as child labour or early marriage, due to limited access to food, clean water, and eco-**

conomic opportunities. Rural households, reliant on agriculture, are further disadvantaged by structural barriers to healthcare, education, and markets, leaving them highly vulnerable to environmental risks like droughts and floods.

The restrictive policies of the DfA further isolate women and girls, heightening risks of violence and limiting access to essential services such as healthcare and education. Restrictions on women-led organisations and female humanitarian workers exacerbate this isolation, making it increasingly difficult for women to obtain vital assistance.



In 2025,
22.9 million people—nearly half
of Afghanistan's population—will require
humanitarian assistance.

Key Data from OCHA's Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025:

WOMEN AND GIRLS

- Gender-based violence (GBV) now affects 14.2 million people, up from 13.3 million in 2024, driven by displacement, restrictive policies, and climate shocks.
- The prohibition on girls' secondary education impacts 1.5 million teenage girls, restricting economic opportunities and increasing reliance on harmful coping mechanisms like child marriage and labour.
- Women-led households saw a 40% decline in income in 2024, forcing many to resort to emergency strategies such as begging.
- The "Morality Law" and restrictive *mahram* requirements (male guardianship rules) further marginalise women and girls, limiting their access to healthcare, education, and essential services.

CHILDREN

- 3.5 million children under the age of five suffer from acute malnutrition, requiring urgent nutritional support.
- Nearly one in five children is engaged in labour, often under hazardous conditions, due to household economic pressures.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

- 7.8 million women and children require nutrition assistance.
- Limited access to reproductive and maternal healthcare disproportionately affects women, particularly those in rural areas or lacking civil documentation.
- 57% of households report psychological distress, with children and women most affected.

NATURAL DISASTERS AND CLIMATE IMPACT

- La Niña exacerbates drought conditions in key agricultural areas, worsening the ongoing water crisis and food insecurity.
- In 2024, floods displaced 173,300 people and damaged or destroyed 21,800 homes, disproportionately affecting women and girls in vulnerable shelters.

2. WeWorld Humanitarian Response in Afghanistan

Since August 2021, the operational space for national and international organisations across all sectors has been severely restricted, with DfA decrees continuing to curtail women-focused and gender-related programming. These measures have also obstructed efforts to integrate gender considerations into interventions that are not specifically targeted at gender issues. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in the scope of action for civil society organisations led by women or focused on gender-related concerns (UN Women, 2024).

Humanitarian actors operating in Afghanistan face a complex and hostile environment as they strive to ensure access to essential services and life-saving programmes for women and girls, while also preserving the possibility for these groups to one day fully reclaim their rights.

Despite these challenges, humanitarian actors remain resolutely committed to delivering critical assistance to Afghanistan's most vulnerable populations. Their efforts go beyond technical or logistical interventions, embodying a deeply human and adaptive approach that addresses immediate needs without losing sight of core principles of dignity and rights. This includes the implementation of adaptation and mitigation measures to ensure that women and other vulnerable groups can access essential services, even in a context where their social and civic space is increasingly restricted. Equally important is the creation of conditions that enable Afghan women to participate in humanitarian responses in a safe, meaningful, and compre-

hensive manner, directly contributing to community resilience and the possibility of positive change.

These humanitarian interventions are not merely temporary relief efforts; they represent a vital strategy for securing the "right to the present," an essential precondition for safeguarding the "right to the future."²³ Without the ability to survive today, to access life-saving services, and to

maintain a space for dignity and rights, there can be no prospect of change tomorrow. Humanitarian work on the ground—through presence, adaptation, and steadfast defence of international standards and human rights—not only addresses immediate emergencies but also serves as a concrete safeguard of the minimum conditions needed for society to continue imagining and building a future, even in the most challenging circumstances.

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²³ In the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024, we have extensively discussed the concept of the right to a future. This concept is gaining increasing attention from the international community: the debate incorporates fundamental concepts and principles for the protection of human rights, focusing on how the rights of today's children and youth are essential prerequisites for building resilient communities in the face of present and future threats. For us, the right to a future is understood as the right of individuals and communities—present and future, and particularly of girls, boys, and young people—to live in and be part of a world that offers fair and sustainable opportunities for their growth, well-being, and development. Our call, therefore, is to consider the complexity and interconnection of the challenges that present and future generations must face, in order to build a new intergenerational social pact. The concept of the right to a future is not (yet) legally recognised, but it can be derived from various international instruments that have progressively adopted a forward-looking perspective over the years. Foremost among these is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, also known as the CRC (UN, 1989). In the case of Afghanistan, the concept of the right to a future extends to the future that is denied to women, starting from the present that is denied to them through the violation of their rights. By depriving them of their agency, they are denied the opportunity to build a future.

WeWorld in Afghanistan

WeWorld has been active in Afghanistan since 2002, operating in both urban and peri-urban areas as well as rural districts across the country.

We operate in Afghanistan with two offices, a coordination office in Kabul and a field office in Herat. WeWorld intervention takes place mainly in the district of Kushk Robot-e-Sangi, Province of Herat, Western Region. The area of intervention is progressively expanding to further 40 villages.

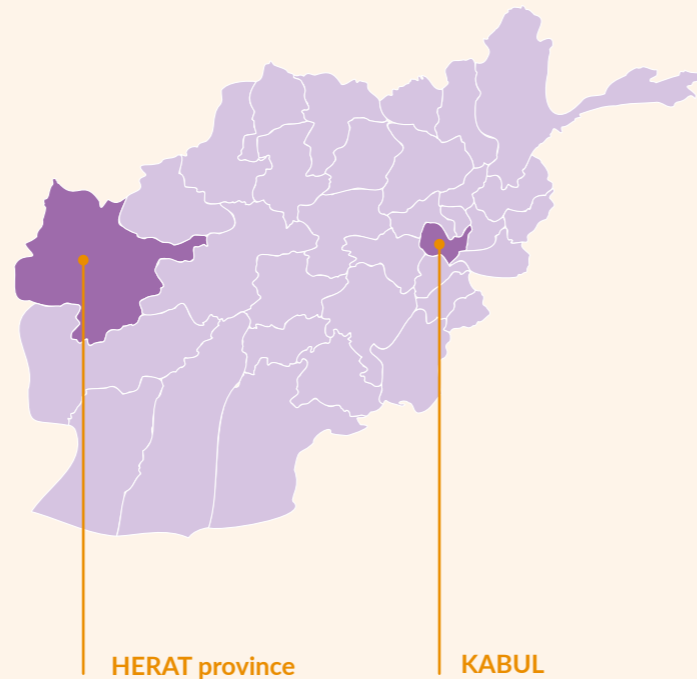
WeWorld has established productive partnerships with key local institutional stakeholders, particularly the Departments of Rehabilitation and Rural Development, Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, and Economy. Recent initiatives have also fostered collaborations with the District of Koshk Robot-e-Sangi and Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA).

Since 2002, WeWorld has undertaken diverse programmes focusing on:

- **Youth empowerment:** Supporting the two largest orphanages in Kabul, addressing school dropout rates, and providing career guidance.
- **Agriculture:** Supporting approximately 1,500 families with infrastructural improvements.
- **Food security:** Distributing 2,000 pregnant goats to over 600 internally displaced families in the Arirod Valley.
- **WASH initiatives:** Constructing a gravity-fed aqueduct and a floodwater channelling system for irrigation in Karukh District, with funding from the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), FAO, and UNHCR.

WeWorld resumed its activities in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of international forces from the country in August 2021. Since March 2022, WeWorld has been actively involved in humanitarian response efforts, implementing four lifesaving emergency cash distribution initiatives in Herat Province to address food insecurity in the Kushk Robot-e-Sangi district.

The organisation also provided support in the aftermath of the October 2023 earthquake, with funding from the Child-Fund Alliance, of which WeWorld is a member.



The programme included:

- **Cash-for-Food initiatives** targeting female-led households (mainly widows), carried out in partnership with the Afghan NGO Rural Rehabilitation Association for Afghanistan (RRAA) or through direct implementation:
 - Six distributions (March–August 2022) supported 180 families.
 - Eight distributions (August 2022–March 2023) assisted 240 families.
 - Five distributions (September 2023–January 2024) provided aid to 130 families.
- **Earthquake response measures:**
 - One cash distribution for non-food items/shelter (winterisation).
 - Three cash-for-food distributions (December 2023–February 2024) supported 155 families.



WeWorld's Gender Inclusion Efforts

Women are central to the WeWorld Programme in Afghanistan, not merely as recipients of support but as active participants and contributors to the design and implementation of projects. This ensures that their voices are heard, and their needs addressed. While the recent escalation of risks faced by women and girls in Afghanistan has rightly drawn significant attention, the vulnerabilities of men and boys, particularly unaccompanied returnee boys and those in female-headed households, should not be overlooked. Restrictive socio-political and economic conditions have often exacerbated their hardships. Recent data highlights that boys are more likely than women to be part of the working population within households, shedding light on the compounded challenges faced by adolescent boys, particularly in female-headed households.

WeWorld's gender inclusion initiatives are rooted in globally recognised frameworks, including the IASC Gender and Age Marker and Sphere standards, ensuring all programming supports gender-responsive humanitarian action. In 2023, the IASC established minimum criteria to address gender exclusion under the restrictions imposed by the DfA. These criteria emphasise needs-based responses with the involvement of both male and female workers, addressing protection and GBV, retaining female staff, prioritising accountability, and ensuring gender-responsive programming.

WeWorld extends these principles to diverse groups, such as boys in female-headed households and women with disabilities. By incorporating resilience-building activities, psychoeducation, and leadership development, the organisation empowers individuals to rebuild confidence and navigate post-crisis challenges. Gender-sensitive monitoring, featuring disaggregated data and participatory evaluations, ensures that all voices are heard and included.

Through community mobilisation systems, supported by women mobilisers and volunteers, WeWorld enables the meaningful participation of women, even in highly restrictive environments. Risk management and bespoke negotiation strategies with local authorities help navigate cultural and operational hurdles, ensuring humanitarian principles are upheld. Moreover, WeWorld's strong community engagement approach facilitates trust-building and acceptance by community members, that very often cooperate to ensure that women and girls can be involved and gain access to aid. In Afghanistan, WeWorld is an active member of the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GiHA WG) and follows the recommended approaches to encourage female staff engagement within the country mission, as the recruitment of Afghan women faces numerous obstacles due to the socio-cultural barriers imposed by the government.



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THE VOICE OF

Fabio Checcacci

Country Representative for Afghanistan, WeWorld



Fabio Checcacci serves as the Country Representative for WeWorld in Afghanistan. He shares insights into the organisation's ongoing operations in the country, as well as those undertaken in the past, beginning in 2002.

"At the time, access to the communities was far more challenging because Afghanistan was a country at war. Reaching people was complex, especially in areas where the Taliban were active. Most of our activities were concentrated in Kabul and other major cities. Field visits were conducted, but much of the work had to be done remotely. As for women's conditions, the situation was markedly different: they had access to opportunities that are no longer available today. Women could study and work. However, it must also be said that, even during those twenty years, the freedoms afforded to women were not universally exercised. For instance, many heads of families did not allow women to enrol in university, particularly in more remote and conservative provinces. Cultural factors played a significant role. In any case, in 2017, we were forced to suspend our operations in the country."

In 2021, international forces withdrew from Afghanistan. *"At that point, we resumed our operations. It had become evident that a humanitarian catastrophe was looming. Thanks to the support of the ChildFund Alliance – the international network of which WeWorld is the sole Italian member – we were able to restart our work and provide assistance to the population. This on-the-ground presence also enabled us to respond swiftly to the October 2023 earthquake. Today, we have a team of around 20 people operating in the country."*

Fabio shares his perspective on the current state of Afghanistan and the population's most pressing needs: *"Essentially, the country is divided between those who have a salary and can somehow survive – as the cost of living is not excessively high – and those who are literally starving. It's important to note that one-third of the population is experiencing food insecurity. Cases of families resorting to selling their children just to survive are, unfortunately, not uncommon."*

Fabio goes on to describe the organisation's current activities: *"At the moment, we are focusing on projects related*

to food security and livelihoods. However, while these efforts are aimed at addressing immediate needs, we are also trying to adopt a longer-term perspective. Achieving this would require multi-year financial planning, particularly as Afghanistan is now experiencing a protracted crisis. It is essential to move beyond a purely emergency-driven approach."

Since 2002, WeWorld's projects in Afghanistan have always emphasised a gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive approach, and this remains the case today. *"Our current projects place a strong focus on women, particularly in the context of our Cash for Food programme, where the vast majority of recipient households are headed by women. We will soon be implementing a livelihoods and financial empowerment initiative for small groups of women, in partnership with our local partner, RRAA. We are able to carry out these activities with women thanks to the inclusion of four female community mobilisers on our field staff, specifically recruited to facilitate interactions with women. I must emphasise that all our work complies with the edicts issued by the De Facto Authorities. Female staff are always accompanied by their mahram – a male relative – ensuring that no rules are violated. This woman-to-woman interaction is absolutely crucial."*

Fabio concludes with some reflections on the future of Afghanistan: *"Overall, there is a pervasive sense of distrust among the population. These are people who have lived through nearly 50 years of conflict, all of which, in one way or another, have been driven by external forces. The population is fearful. Even men are subjected to the directives of the DfA, not just women. There is a general atmosphere of resignation, although many men are also dissatisfied with how women are being treated, particularly their exclusion from education. Yet, there are numerous civil society organisations that refuse to give up and are determined to keep working. But they need resources, and sustained international attention is vital. This country has been neglected for far too long. What Afghanistan needs is a long-term vision. Instead, the country repeatedly falls in and out of the international spotlight, and with it, the funding necessary for humanitarian aid. Families here need to be supported over the course of years to create a pathway out of vulnerability and towards a sustainable future."*



Case-study: Strengthening the Preparedness, Prevention, and Response Capacity to Food Insecurity and Disaster Risks of the Afghan Population Affected by the Humanitarian Crisis

The project aims to enhance the preparedness, prevention, and response capacity of Afghanistan's most vulnerable population to food insecurity and disaster risks, with a particular focus on female-headed households. **Through a multisectoral approach (Agriculture, Food Security, and Disaster Risk Reduction) and an integrated approach (Relief-Resilience), the initiative addresses both immediate and long-term needs in line with the humanitarian response plan outlined by OCHA.**

The intervention strategy focuses on the link between immediate food assistance (cash distributions and emergency livelihood support) and the promotion of climate-sensitive agricultural production activities, serving as a proactive response to recurring crises triggered by climate shocks.

The project began in April 2024 and will run until May 2025, and is financed by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS).

ACTIVITIES

To achieve these objectives, WeWorld will implement several impactful strategies, including:

- **Food assistance through the Cash for Food programme**, providing immediate relief to vulnerable households.
- **Distribution of livelihood assets**, such as goats and fodder, with accompanying veterinary support and training courses to enhance livestock management skills.
- Promotion of **entrepreneurial and financial literacy counselling to empower women and young people**, fostering economic independence.

In addition, WeWorld will strengthen community resilience by:

- Organising **awareness actions** on environmental risks and emergency response.
- **Rehabilitating community infrastructure**, involving 432 families through the Cash for Work approach.
- Distributing 500 **kits of drought-resistant seeds** and conducting **training courses on cereal production**, aimed at improving food security and tackling the challenges of climate change.

IMPLEMENTATION²⁴

The first six months of the project have progressed smoothly, with all key activities completed on schedule. Our established presence in Herat Province has enabled us to navigate local challenges, such as obtaining permits from authorities, with minimal difficulties.

By mid-June, approval was secured for essential preliminary activities, including staff recruitment, procurement, and beneficiary selection, prior to the formal signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 23 July. Local staff were recruited, introductory training sessions conducted, and village mapping and community data collection were completed.

By 31 July, Community-Based Selection Committees were formed. Between 4 August and 29 August, a survey of 2,761 households was carried out, identifying 1,100 of the most vulnerable female-headed households for the Cash for Food programme. Monthly cash distributions commenced in September 2024, with each household receiving 5,250 AFN (approximately \$75). By November 2024, three distributions had been completed.

²⁴ Data is updated as of 31 December 2024.

Concurrently, Cash for Work activities focused on clearing 44 kilometres of canals obstructed by debris, employing 262 workers—both skilled and unskilled—equipped with safety kits. Workers have been paid 5,250 AFN per month (approximately \$75), and this activity is scheduled to conclude in December.

Our partner, RRAA, signed the MoU with the Ministry of Agriculture (MAIL) on 22 October and conducted a baseline survey from 1 September to 15 September. The survey identified 1,000 disaster-vulnerable farmers, leading to the selection of 500 farmers who received agricultural kits in November, alongside technical training in wheat cultivation, irrigation, and climate resilience. These activities spanned 40 remote localities across 29 villages.

Throughout the project, we have conducted rigorous monitoring to ensure compliance and address challenges. The communities have expressed high levels of satisfaction, recognising that the project effectively meets their needs while upholding their safety, dignity, and well-being.

Gender considerations have been central to the project, with 100% of the recipients of cash and small ruminant distribution activities being female-headed households. To comply with the mahram law, four women community mobilisers have worked alongside male family members (husbands or fathers), facilitating access for women without incurring additional costs.

This project is delivering significant and sustainable impact through an integrated approach to food security, water restoration, and agricultural development.



The Story of Anis Gul



Anis Gul, aged 10, attends school and is currently in the third grade. Her favourite subject is Dari Language. She comes from a family of seven, including two sisters, three brothers, and both her parents. Through WeWorld's Cash for Food intervention programme, her family has received financial assistance.

As Anis Gul explains, "We are part of this initiative because many families in our community, including ours, are economically weak. Since we became part of this programme, we have experienced a significant improvement in our overall well-being. We feel more at ease both mentally and physically. We are now able to meet our basic needs independently and have

acquired essential materials to prepare for the winter season, ensuring our health and comfort."

When asked about her dreams for the future, Anis Gul shares, "I dream of becoming a doctor one day. My goal is to address the health challenges faced by my village, offering medical assistance and care to improve the well-being of our community."

"I dream of becoming a doctor one day. My goal is to address the health challenges faced by my village, offering medical assistance and care to improve the well-being of our community."



The Story of Farzana



Farzana, aged 11 years, does not attend school because there is no school in her village. In the absence of formal education, Farzana spends her time helping her mother with household chores and caring for their goat. Additionally, she takes on the difficult task of fetching water from neighbouring areas, as the village wells are contaminated. This water is so polluted that it is unfit for consumption, even for their livestock. Despite these challenges, Farzana remains resilient, contributing significantly to her family's daily survival.

"I dream of attending school and becoming a teacher, with the goal of offering educational opportunities within our village."

Farzana comes from a family of 13 members. Her family consists of her parents, five sisters—Donya Gul, Rokhshana (who is visually impaired), Zarmina, Saheba, and Amina—and five brothers—Ewaz, Nesar, Jaweed, Mustafa, and Sodais. The family has struggled to make ends meet, and Farzana's mother has successfully accessed WeWorld's Cash for Food intervention programme, which has had a significant impact. Through this programme, they receive essential food supplies such as rice, oil, and flour, ensuring their nutritional needs are met. The programme also addresses

their healthcare requirements, resolving health issues within the family. Additionally, it provides winter clothing, helping to ensure their comfort and well-being during the colder months.

Since joining the programme, there have been significant improvements in their lives. As one family member expressed, "We were able to pay off our loans and debts, which had been a significant burden on us. Moreover, our basic needs are now being met adequately."

Farzana describes the activities they have taken part in, saying, "We feel grateful for the opportunities we have received because many deserving individuals in our community have not yet received any form of assistance."

Farzana's dreams and aspirations for the future are clear—she shares, "I dream of attending school and becoming a teacher, with the goal of offering educational opportunities within our village."



The Story of Gul Biddin



Gul Biddin, aged 22 years, does not attend school due to familial responsibilities. He explains, "I do not have the opportunity to pursue education as I am the sole caretaker for my family. My elderly father is unable to work, and he also has vision impairments that require my attention and support. Instead, my days are consumed by hard labour to sustain my family. I long for a stable job to support my loved ones, but the struggle persists. I have contemplated travelling to Iran for work opportunities, but the lack of financial resources hinders this. Crossing the border illegally is a risky option that could result in tragedy, leaving me torn between the desperation for livelihood and the fear of risking my life."

Gul Biddin's family consists of eight members, including his parents, two sisters, two brothers, and his grandmother. He has been enrolled in WeWorld's Cash for Work intervention programme due to the severity of his circumstances.

Since joining the programme, Gul Biddin emotionally expresses, "It has been a lifeline that prevented me from considering migrating abroad in search of work. The support I received has transformed our lives,

allowing me to provide for my family's basic needs with dignity and hope."

The programme has not only provided financial stability but also a renewed sense of security and possibility for their future. "I aspire to resolve my family's financial struggles and to pursue education in the future."

I aspire to resolve my family's financial struggles and to pursue education in the future.



The Story of Mulla Bakhshullah



Mulla Bakhshullah, aged 69 years, has children who attend school. He feels proud that his children have this opportunity, saying, "Education is important for their future, and I hope it will help them build a better life."

Mulla Bakhshullah's family consists of ten members, including his wife, four daughters, and four sons.

He has accessed WeWorld's Agricultural Kit Distribution programme through our partner RRAA. This programme aims to support and improve his agricultural activities, ultimately helping his family's livelihood.

Since joining, Mulla Bakhshullah has experienced a significant transformation. The programme has provided him with the tools to enhance his farming, leading

to increased productivity and income. He says, "The programme has helped me greatly by giving me the tools and knowledge to increase my crop yields. It has made a real difference in how I manage my land and secure food for my family."

Through this programme, he has been able to actively participate in various agricultural activities, from sowing seeds to tending crops. "It has been a rewarding experience, allowing me to witness firsthand

the positive impact of these interventions on my farming practices and overall livelihood."

Mulla Bakhshullah's dreams are focused on creating a stable and secure environment for his family. He says, "I wish to ensure my family has a comfortable life, even in my later years. My dream is to build a future where my children can continue their education, and my grandchildren have access to opportunities."

I wish to ensure my family has a comfortable life, even in my later years. My dream is to build a future where my children can continue their education, and my grandchildren have access to opportunities.



The Story of Safia



Jafar Mosavi

Safia is 50 years old. Her children attend school—her oldest child is in the fourth grade, while the younger one is in the first grade. Her family consists of six members, including her son, two daughters, and two step-wives.

Safia has accessed WeWorld's Agricultural Kit Distribution programme, while her step-wife, Shah Koko, has been selected for the Cash for Food intervention by WeWorld. She participates in the programme because she is a widow, and with no breadwinner in the family, she and two other widowed women work tirelessly in farming, laundry, and other demanding tasks to sustain the household.

Since joining the programme, Safia says, *"The assistance we received has been a lifeline, helping us meet our family's basic needs. We've found relief from our daily struggles and have experienced a newfound sense of happiness and well-being, both mentally and psychologically."*

Safia's dreams and aspirations for the future are centred around providing a better life for her children. She shares, *"I envision a future where my children lead better lives, dressed in finer clothes and living in a more comfortable place. This hope sustains me through the challenges, fuelling my desire to create a brighter tomorrow for my family."*

"I envision a future where my children lead better lives, dressed in finer clothes and living in a more comfortable place. This hope sustains me through the challenges, fuelling my desire to create a brighter tomorrow for my family."



The Story of Shirin



Jafar Mosavi

Shirin, a 40-year-old mother of five, takes immense pride in the fact that three of her children currently attend school. Although she is illiterate, she is a passionate advocate for her children's education, recognising its transformative potential to break the cycle of poverty that has long affected her family.

Shirin lives in a dilapidated house with her five children and elderly mother-in-law. She cares for a household of seven, shouldering the responsibilities of her family, which includes one son and four daughters, as well as her ailing mother-in-law. She says, *"My eldest child, Angila,*

aged 15, was married off early due to severe economic hardships. My only son, Belal, aged 11, struggles with mental health, which requires monthly medical expenses. My other children—Roghaia, Royeena, and Azita—also need my care, and my 75-year-old disabled mother-in-law, who can't walk and has respiratory problems, depends on me for her medications."

Shirin was selected for WeWorld's Cash for Food intervention, because of the overwhelming challenges she faced after becoming the sole caregiver for her children following a family tragedy. The lack of a steady income made it extremely

difficult to meet basic needs and sustain their livelihoods.

Since joining the programme, Shirin recalls, *"Upon receiving the initial sum, I immediately paid off debts and bought essential food items like rice, oil, flour, and even treats for my children. I also used part of it to buy medications for my son and mother-in-law, relieving a heavy burden. The relief and joy I felt were overwhelming, reflected in the happy faces of my children when I returned home."*

Shirin acknowledges that earlier participation in the programme could have prevented her daughter's early marriage and resolved her financial troubles sooner. Shirin's aspirations go beyond immediate relief. *"I dream of a future where my children receive quality education, my son's mental health improves, and I can achieve financial independence."*

"I dream of a future where my children receive quality education, my son's mental health improves, and I can achieve financial independence."

3.

The Right to The Future of Women and Girls in Afghanistan

The crisis that Afghanistan is currently facing has deep roots in its history, but it has intensified significantly since 2021, with the withdrawal of international forces from the country and the return of the Taliban. Afghan women and girls are being denied not only access to education and employment, but also the very right to make decisions about their own lives.

The Taliban's rule enforces a system that targets women through restrictive policies and violent repression, cutting them off from the freedom to pursue their aspirations, contribute to society, and shape their own futures. This is a form of gender discrimination that seeks to erase their identity, deny them public presence, and control their basic rights. It is an institutionalised oppression that deprives women not only of economic opportunities, but of their ability to act, to resist, and to live with dignity²⁵.

The Taliban's rule enforces a system that targets women through restrictive policies and violent repression, cutting them off from the freedom to pursue their aspirations, contribute to society, and shape their own futures.

²⁵ As recognised by the international community, this constitutes gender persecution, which could be classified as a crime against humanity under article 7.1 (h) of the Rome Statute. This has serious legal implications but also provides grounds for Afghan women to seek refuge, as many EU states have begun granting asylum based solely on gender persecution (UN Women, 2024a).



The Role of Afghan Men and Boys

While the Taliban's strict interpretation of the Sharia law imposes significant restrictions on women, it is important to recognise that not all Afghan men support these policies. Many Afghan men, particularly those who are not aligned with the Taliban, do not condone the Morality Law imposed by the DfA. These men can play a crucial role in challenging gender discrimination and promoting gender equality, even in the face of adversity.

However, in the context of Afghanistan, open dialogues about gender-based violence and female empowerment cannot always occur due to the prevailing patriarchal and restrictive environment. Instead, strategies such as community engagement and trust-building are essential. Collaborating with local community leaders and grassroots organisations allows for more discreet efforts to address gender inequality. For instance, local leaders, including men, can facilitate consultations with women, offering their homes as safe spaces to hide from the Taliban or act as mediators to help bridge the gender divide.

WeWorld, in its work across Afghanistan, has adopted a gender-inclusive approach that involves both men and women, ensuring that the voices of women, including those from marginalised groups, are heard and amplified. By employing female community mobilisers, paired with male family members (*mahram*), the organisation promotes the active participation of women while ensuring that they are not put at risk of violating restrictive regulations. Male relatives involved in project implementation can help create a safer space for women to engage in discussions and share their feedback.

Additionally, engaging young boys in discussions about the challenges they face, especially in female-headed households, helps to address their perspectives and vulnerabilities. By acknowledging the burdens they bear, such as potential involvement in child labour, interventions can be designed that support both male and female youth in vulnerable situations.

In this complex and challenging context, Afghan men, particularly those who oppose the Taliban's gender policies, can be key allies in the fight for gender equality by providing support, amplifying women's voices in safer spaces, and working to transform societal attitudes.



The Debate over "Gender Apartheid"

The term "gender apartheid" has emerged as a crucial framework in addressing the severe violations of women's rights in Afghanistan. In June 2023, the UN Special Rapporteur and the Chair of the Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls highlighted that the decrees issued by the Taliban, particularly the suppression of women's freedoms, constitute a form of "gender persecution." This institutionalised system of oppression is characterised by large-scale, systematic abuses of women and girls' fundamental rights, enforced through discriminatory policies and harsh methods. Although "gender apartheid" is not explicitly codified in international law, it has gained recognition as a way to describe the unprecedented and state-driven violence against women in Afghanistan. UN Member States at both the Security Council and the Human Rights Council have adopted the term to illustrate the gravity of the situation, emphasising the connection between the abuse and the exercise of state power to perpetuate misogyny (UN Women, 2024).

In this section of the paper, the voices of Afghan women—whether those working in humanitarian efforts with WeWorld, or refugees who have escaped the country—are shared, offering first-hand insights into their experiences, perspectives on being women in Afghanistan, and their hopes for the future of their nation. **Their stories speak powerfully of resilience, hope, and the unyielding desire to reclaim what has been taken: their right to dream, their right to resist, and their right to shape a future where they are no longer silenced. It is a call for justice, for recognition, and for the world to see the full extent of the harm being done—an attack not just on their freedoms, but on their very ability to live as active, empowered individuals in society.**

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THE VOICE OF

Rahel Saya



Rahel Saya is an Afghan freelance journalist and activist for women's and children's rights. She has won multiple journalism awards, including the Biagio Agnes Award (2021) and Donne in Corsa Award (2024). Her work highlights the struggles of Afghan women, featured in international publications and her chapter "My Life" in *Guarda come una Donna*. She has spoken at global forums, including the Austrian and Catalan parliaments. Now 24, Rahel studies Global Humanities at Sapienza University, Rome, while continuing to amplify the voices of Afghan women through journalism and documentaries.

Reflecting on her life in Afghanistan, Rahel says: "My life before I left was a tapestry of contrasts, woven with warmth, tradition, and a constant pull toward an uncertain future. As a child, I heard whispers of wars and conflicts that felt distant but deeply real. Growing up, I began to understand the weight of living in a country torn apart by violence. We lived in the tension between the dream of a better life and the harsh reality around us. It wasn't a perfect life, but it was full of possibilities. I could imagine a tomorrow where peace would prevail. But that hope was ripped away from us, along with the life we had built."

In 2021, like many of her compatriots, Rahel made the difficult decision to leave Afghanistan. "Leaving was not a choice I made lightly—it was born out of survival, a response to fear, violence, and the erosion of my rights. Every moment was overshadowed by danger, and the future held no promise. The journey was heartbreaking; leaving behind my country, my home, and my identity felt like tearing apart pieces of my soul. Yet, there was a flicker of hope that kept me going. Arriving in Italy brought both relief and challenges. Being a refugee is never easy—the unfamiliar culture, language, and isolation were overwhelming. But Italy gave me a refuge, a chance to rebuild my life, and the hope that peace, joy, and a future are still possible."

Since arriving in Italy, Rahel has dedicated herself to amplifying the voices of Afghan women and girls who remain in the country. She shares stories of resistance, like Leila, a young girl risking her safety to attend secret classes, and women who continue to teach in underground schools despite the Taliban's bans. "These stories reflect the unyielding strength of Afghan women. Their desire for education is not just about opportunity—it's a lifeline, a way to reclaim their futures, and a weapon against oppression."

The Taliban's strict edicts, such as banning women from education and public life under so-called "morality laws," have deeply affected Rahel, particularly the "voice ban," which prohibits women from being heard in public. "The 'voice ban' is not just an attack on free speech—it's an attempt to erase our existence. For someone like me, who has always believed in the power of words to bring change, it feels like an assault on the soul. When women are silenced, it's not just a personal loss but a collective one. It's a blow to freedom, a stark reminder that when one voice is taken, the whole community suffers."

Rahel believes that Afghan men and boys play a critical role in advancing gender equality. "They are not bystanders—they are key to dismantling the systems of oppression that have silenced women for generations. True allyship means listening to women, amplifying their voices, and challenging harmful traditions. Men must confront their privileges and advocate for women's rights at every level, from their families to the government. No society can thrive when half its population is held back."

In addressing Western societies, Rahel challenges the perception of Afghan women as helpless victims. "Western societies often reduce Afghan women to stereotypes of victimhood, erasing their strength and resilience. Yes, Afghan women face immense challenges, but they are not powerless. They fight every day in ways the world often ignores. From

young girls studying secretly to women leading underground movements, they are not waiting to be saved—they are fighting for themselves. If the West truly wants to support them, it must see Afghan women as leaders and warriors of hope, not as symbols of pity."

Rahel also shares a heartfelt message for Afghan women: "Your strength is immeasurable. Even in the darkest moments, know that you are not invisible. Your dreams and your voices matter. You are daughters of a land rich in history and resistance. Every act of defiance—every girl who picks up a book, every woman who speaks out—is shaping the future. Hold on to your courage. The world will one day know that Afghan women fought not just for themselves but for all women everywhere."

Now in Italy, Rahel works tirelessly to raise awareness through her writings, speeches, and advocacy. "Finishing my education is a defiance against those who tried to silence me. It's not just for me—it's for every girl in Afghanistan denied this right. My activism is rooted in the stories of Afghan women and girls. They are not voiceless victims; they are warriors of resilience and strength. I will continue to fight for their voices to be heard and their rights to be restored."

“ Afghan women face immense challenges, but they are not powerless. They fight every day in ways the world often ignores. From young girls studying secretly to women leading underground movements, they are not waiting to be saved—they are fighting for themselves.

“ The 'voice ban' is not just an attack on free speech—it's an attempt to erase our existence. For someone like me, who has always believed in the power of words to bring change, it feels like an assault on the soul. When women are silenced, it's not just a personal loss but a collective one.

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THE VOICE OF

Parasto Hakim



Parasto Hakim is an Afghan activist dedicated to championing women's and girls' rights and access to education in Afghanistan. She leads SRAK, a covert network of schools that provides education to girls across the country, even amidst significant challenges.

Parasto Hakim has been vocal in her criticism of the silence from the International Community and particularly criticising the Taliban's oppressive policies. This outspoken stance forced her to leave Afghanistan, but her advocacy continues on the global stage. She firmly believes that education is a fundamental human right, not a privilege, and tirelessly highlights the devastating impact of denying Afghan girls their right to learn. In recognition of her relentless efforts, she was nominated for the Sakharov Prize in 2023.

Through her unwavering efforts, Parasto Hakim remains committed to securing a future where Afghan women and girls can pursue education and personal growth without fear or limitation. Her dedication stems from her own childhood in Afghanistan, where she recalls the harsh realities of her schooling. "When I was a child, we sat on the ground in a tent at school, barely protected from the cold winter and snow. On days when I couldn't hold my pen to write the answers to the exam questions, I promised myself that I would do something to ensure the next generation wouldn't face the same hardships," she reflects.

After completing her education, Parasto began addressing the systemic issues within Afghanistan's education system. In 2021, following the collapse of the Afghan government, she took more decisive steps by establishing SRAK, an organisation named after the Pashto phrase for "the first light of the morning." SRAK began with a single secret school for girls, but Parasto's vision and the eagerness of the girls to study allowed the organisation to grow rapidly. "Now we have expanded to 15 schools across Afghanistan, educating 2,000 girls, employing 31 teachers, and providing an online

university for 700 female students after the Taliban banned universities for girls. We also have a range of skill-building programmes for these girls in the field to empower them so they can earn money from home. SRAK also facilitates education for women who were deprived of education in 1996 when the Taliban took power for the first time" she proudly shares".

Parasto's mission goes beyond simply providing education—it's about creating systemic change. "In the wake of the government's collapse, I felt responsible to use the education I had received, as my country had invested in me for over 20 years. I wanted to make a difference," she says. Her experiences growing up in Afghanistan's broken education system have motivated her to challenge the status quo. "I witnessed the lack of resources and quality in the schools, and I knew I had to do something to change it."

Through SRAK, Parasto and her team travelled across Afghanistan, often in secret, to establish schools in communities where girls have been denied the right to learn. Despite the dangers, she drew strength from the hope she saw in the faces of the girls and their families. "I saw their eagerness to learn, and that kept me going," she says.

Parasto's decision to leave Afghanistan was one of the hardest choices she's ever made. Her outspoken advocacy put her at odds with the Taliban, who viewed her as a threat. "To make education accessible to every girl in Afghanistan, I had to speak out. It was essential to show the world that Afghan women don't agree with the Taliban's policies, and that the girls themselves refuse to be labelled victims," she explains. However, this work put both her and her family at great risk, leading to repeated threats and, eventually, her evacuation. "I left behind my family, students, and dreams," she reflects, acknowledging the trauma of leaving so abruptly. "But I knew I had to keep going for those who were relying on me."

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In the wake of the government's collapse, I felt responsible to use the education I had received, as my country had invested in me for over 20 years. I wanted to make a difference

Even after her departure, Parasto felt the emotional weight of being separated from her students and team. "I didn't tell anyone I was leaving. I couldn't bear to see their reaction. I was more than just a teacher to them; I was their support," she says. Despite the emotional strain, she found new opportunities to expand SRAK's reach, leveraging resources unavailable to her in Afghanistan.

Her advocacy continues, with daily communication with her team and students back home. Parasto's message to the world is clear: "Everyone deserves access to their basic human rights without having to beg or negotiate for them. No one has the right to dictate another person's basic rights."

Reflecting on the challenges she has faced since leaving Afghanistan, Parasto highlights the struggle to raise awareness and mobilise support for Afghan women and girls: "After the collapse of the government in 2021, I thought many people around the world—those who understand human values and human rights—would stand with us, as they have fought for these causes before. But at the time, we were too consumed with fighting to stop and see who was actually there for us. When I left the country, I realised that in August 2021, the whole world had left us behind. We were alone in this fight against a group trying to normalise gender persecution. While we had platforms to speak about the ongoing situation in Afghanistan, it was not as much as we had hoped for. We were in pain, and being a direct victim of gender persecution is no joke—yet it felt like the world was not taking it seriously. Now, after three years of suffering, we finally have an arrest warrant for the leader of the Taliban issued by the International Criminal Court. These actions should have been taken in 2021 when girls were first banned from schools. Still, we admire these efforts, even if delayed. Many Afghan advocates who left the country faced immense challenges. Immigration procedures prevented many from travelling, silencing their voices as representatives of the women still inside Afghanistan. Worse, Afghan women who have continued to advocate for women's

rights—both inside the country and in exile—have been attacked and threatened by the Taliban."

She also highlights the resilience of Afghan women. "When our schools were banned, we established secret ones. When our universities were closed, we created online universities. When our work was restricted, we built businesses through secret channels." However, this resilience comes at a great cost. "Many women have been detained and tortured by the Taliban for their activism, and their families have suffered too."

Parasto is also determined to challenge the stereotypes surrounding Afghan women. "When I first left the country, people were shocked by my fluent English. It shows how underestimated Afghan women are," she says. "We were born and raised to be leaders, not followers." She urges the world to stop listening to the Taliban's narrative and recognise Afghan women as the leaders they truly are.

She ends with a powerful plea to the international community: "The silence of the international community has led to girls being sold, forced into early marriages, and subjected to unbearable trauma. This fight is not just for women in Afghanistan; it's for human rights worldwide."

Parasto's call to action is clear: "The world must stand in solidarity with Afghan women. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation should condemn the Taliban's policies, and international organisations must hold the Taliban accountable. Gender persecution must be treated as a crime against humanity. Politicians must make wise decisions to prevent further suffering. The fight for human rights is not limited to Afghanistan—it is a global struggle."

WOMEN IN HUMANITARIAN.

The voices of

Khadijah Azizi and Somaia Sediqi

Khadijah Azizi and Somaia Sediqi, Community Mobilisers at WeWorld since summer 2024, shared their experiences working in the humanitarian sector in Afghanistan. They spoke about the daily challenges women face, particularly under the restrictions imposed by the Taliban government.

"Women face significant challenges, particularly exacerbated by recent developments under the Taliban government," Khadijah explains. "A primary risk factor is the prohibition of women's employment, a policy that not only curtails their economic opportunities but also undermines their autonomy and financial independence."

Somaia echoes this sentiment, adding that these economic constraints force many women into cycles of dependence, stripping them of their agency. "Without meaningful work, many women struggle to sustain themselves and their families, leaving them highly vulnerable during crises," she says. The inability to access job training and economic opportunities exacerbates the plight of women in conflict or crisis contexts, making it difficult for them to secure their basic needs and live independently.

Both Khadijah and Somaia highlight how these economic barriers intersect with other pressing needs. One of the most critical issues is the denial of education for girls. "The severe restrictions imposed on girls' access to education by the Taliban regime are a grave concern," Khadijah emphasizes. "The denial of educational opportunities to young girls not only deprives them of fundamental rights but also hampers the collective progress of society." Somaia adds, "The Taliban's severe restrictions on girls' education will have devastating long-term effects."

Moreover, the lack of access to mental health services further compounds the struggles women face. Both Khadijah and Somaia stress that the psychological toll of violence, oppression, and displacement remains largely unaddressed. "Despite the pervasive psychological impact of these experiences, the lack of adequate mental health support perpetuates the neglect of women's emotional well-being in crisis settings," Khadijah points out. "The trauma women endure from violence and oppression has lasting psychological impacts. But mental health support remains vastly inadequate, leaving

many women without the resources to cope with the stress and trauma they face," Somaia agrees.

Protection from gender-based violence is another crucial yet often neglected issue. Both women highlight how domestic abuse and sexual violence have surged, but effective support mechanisms are lacking. "Many women are subjected to domestic abuse and sexual violence, but they have limited access to protection or justice," Somaia explains. "The humanitarian response fails to adequately address this issue, leaving women at greater risk." Khadijah adds, "Ensuring protection from gender-based violence is essential yet inadequately addressed within humanitarian efforts. Many women continue to lack sufficient protection and support mechanisms against various forms of violence, including domestic abuse and sexual assault."

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The lack of safe spaces is yet another gap that both women see in the humanitarian response. "Access to safe spaces holds significant importance for women in crisis contexts," Khadijah says. "These safe environments offer women opportunities to gather, share experiences, access resources, and foster community resilience. However, the absence of such spaces diminishes women's ability to seek support and solidarity, underscoring a critical gap in humanitarian interventions."

In the face of these overwhelming challenges, both women stress the barriers that women face in participating meaningfully in the humanitarian sector. "Cultural norms and the Taliban's restrictive laws limit women's ability to en-

gage in meaningful humanitarian roles," Somaia observes. "Safety concerns, lack of access to education, and limited professional development opportunities all hinder women from contributing effectively to humanitarian efforts." Khadijah adds, "The imposition of restrictive laws by the Taliban restricts women's rights and employment opportunities within humanitarian roles. Cultural norms that confine women to traditional domestic roles limit their ability to pursue work outside the home."

Despite these challenges, women's involvement in humanitarian interventions has led to significant positive change. "The integration of women into humanitarian interventions has brought about a significant transformation, characterized by the enhancement of community trust and engagement," Somaia highlights. "Through the active participation of women in these endeavours, communication channels have been notably enriched, facilitating the effective recognition and addressing of the specific needs of marginalized groups within the community." Khadijah agrees, "The valuable insights provided by women have played a crucial role in the development of interventions that are not only more effective but also culturally sensitive, ensuring that aid efforts resonate with the local context and yield maximum impact."

Moreover, the presence of women in key roles serves as a source of inspiration. "The presence of women in key roles within humanitarian initiatives can instil a sense of empowerment among individuals and encourage more women to step into leadership positions," Khadijah says. "This has a ripple effect on community dynamics, promoting gender equality and encouraging greater inclusivity." Somaia adds, "Women in key roles contribute to community empowerment and inspire others to engage in leadership, which fosters more inclusive efforts toward gender equality."

The presence of women in key roles within humanitarian initiatives can instil a sense of empowerment among individuals and encourage more women to step into leadership positions.

Somaia and Khadijah both stress that the humanitarian sector must prioritize women's participation in decision-making processes. "A critical priority for the humanitarian sector over the next decade should be ensuring the meaningful participation and leadership of women in all decision-making processes within humanitarian initiatives," Somaia states. "The inclusion of women brings forth a diverse range of experiences and perspectives that are essential for understanding the specific needs of affected communities." Khadijah agrees, adding, "Promoting women's leadership roles within the humanitarian sector fosters empowerment among women and has the potential to instigate transformative shifts in societal norms, encouraging a more equitable distribution of participation across all spheres of society."

Transforming the concept of gender into an opportunity, rather than a risk, is central to their vision. "Initiating comprehensive gender analysis at the onset of planning helps in understanding diverse gender roles and needs, ensuring interventions are both relevant and equitable," Khadijah explains. "By promoting women's leadership, empowering local women's groups, and allocating resources for gender-sensitive programmes, we can create effective, inclusive, and lasting responses," Somaia adds.

Being a woman in the humanitarian sector, both Somaia and Khadijah see as a unique blend of responsibility, resilience, and opportunity. "It entails serving as a vocal advocate for marginalized individuals, particularly women and girls, championing their rights and addressing their needs within crisis contexts," Khadijah explains. "It's about building connections with diverse communities, understanding their challenges, and working collaboratively to develop solutions. Women in this field challenge stereotypes, lead with resilience, and work to create safe spaces where everyone's voice, especially women and girls, is heard and valued."

Through their combined efforts, Somaia and Khadijah envision a more inclusive humanitarian sector, where women play a central role in driving positive change. "When women are empowered to take on leadership roles, they can help build stronger communities, advocate for their rights, and contribute to sustainable solutions," Somaia concludes. "This is the path toward a more equitable and resilient future for all," Khadijah adds. "Ultimately, being a woman in the humanitarian sector means leveraging personal experiences and insights to enact positive change, promote equality, and contribute to cultivating a more equitable and compassionate global community."

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Afghanistan is currently facing a dual crisis: a deeply entrenched denial of women's rights and a widespread humanitarian emergency. Discriminatory policies and restrictive decrees have severely curtailed women's access to education, participation in public life, leadership roles, and decision-making processes. Simultaneously, the country is grappling with urgent humanitarian needs, driven by conflict, economic instability, and the impacts of natural disasters and the climate crisis. To address these interconnected challenges, it is essential to adopt transformative, gender-sensitive approaches that not only respond to immediate humanitarian needs but also lay the groundwork for long-term gender equality and resilience.

At the heart of this response must be the prioritisation of the agency and empowerment of Afghan women and girls. It is imperative to embed the “for women, by women” principle into all phases of intervention, ensuring their active involvement in the design and implementation of programmes (UN Women, 2024a). This requires the development of gender-sensitive strategies, underpinned by robust data and evidence-based research, while aligning with the “Do No Harm” principle to prevent further marginalisation. **Effective responses must safeguard women from violence, provide equitable access to education and economic opportunities, and ensure that women's voices are central to shaping solutions that address both immediate needs and long-term sustainability.**

Furthermore, **the international community must not forget Afghanistan.** The crisis facing the country demands sustained and multifaceted engagement, with continued support for both immediate

humanitarian relief and long-term development efforts. Global actors must remain committed to advocating for Afghan women's rights, ensuring that aid reaches the most vulnerable, and holding those in power accountable for upholding international standards of human dignity. A coordinated and consistent approach from the international community is crucial in preventing further deterioration and enabling lasting change. Only through collective action can the necessary resources and political will be mobilised to address the deep-rooted challenges Afghanistan faces, ensuring that the voices of Afghan women are heard and that their rights are respected on the global stage.

Based on the data collected and analysed in the literature and presented in this paper, the information gathered from stakeholders and key informants, and the experience gained on the ground through years of operations conducted in the country, WeWorld has formulated the following recommendations:

FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND DONORS:

- **PROVIDE FLEXIBLE, LONGER-TERM, AND PREDICTABLE FUNDING:** Commit to funding mechanisms that are flexible, long-term, and predictable, enabling sustainable planning and implementation. These funding models should allow local actors, including Women's Civil Society Organisations (WCSOs), to respond effectively to evolving needs while addressing systemic gender inequalities (OCHA, 2024).
- **PRIORITISE GENDER-RESPONSIVE FUNDING:** Allocate at least 30% of all funding to initiatives that directly

target gender equality and women's rights. Globally recognised Gender Equality Markers should guide these allocations, ensuring no gender-blind interventions are supported (UN Women, 2024).

- **RECOGNISE AND ADDRESS THE DUAL CRISIS:** Acknowledge the intertwined nature of Afghanistan's women's rights and humanitarian crises. Interventions must integrate gender equality as a central objective to ensure that humanitarian aid does not perpetuate or exacerbate systemic inequalities.
- **STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS (WCOS):** Provide long-term, flexible funding to both registered and unregistered WCSOs, enabling them to effectively address local challenges and advocate for women's rights (UN Women, 2024).

FOR LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ACTORS:

- **ADOPT GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES:** Embed gender as a cross-cutting theme across all programming to address both immediate humanitarian needs and structural inequalities that marginalise women and girls.
- **MITIGATE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION:** Include specific costs in project budgets to create an enabling environment for women's engagement. This includes *mahram* allowances, childcare facilities, designated office spaces for women-only areas, and other necessary accommodations.

- **ENGAGE MEN AND BOYS AS ALLIES:** Promote positive masculinities and actively involve men and boys in challenging harmful gender norms. Their support is critical to fostering societal change and reducing gender-based violence.
- **ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY IN PROGRAMMING:** Develop rigorous mechanisms among international actors to prioritise projects where gender is a principal objective. Implement measures to mitigate security, reputational, and ethical risks while avoiding actions that reinforce discriminatory structures.



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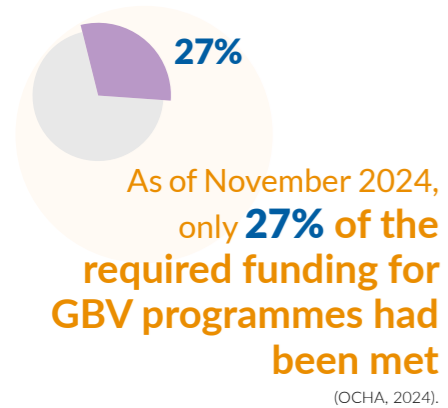
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Conclusions and Recommendations

1. An Uncertain Future: The Crisis Facing Women's Rights

Humanitarian crises continue to disproportionately impact women and girls, often exacerbating pre-existing gender inequalities and creating new barriers to their rights and well-being. Women and girls face compounded vulnerabilities—stemming from socio-political instability, economic collapse, and underfunded humanitarian responses—that undermine their potential for empowerment. Despite efforts from donors and humanitarian organisations, gender-sensitive initiatives remain severely underfunded. For example, gender-based violence, one of the most pressing concerns in crisis settings, is still among the most underfunded sectors in global humanitarian aid. As of November 2024, only 27% of the required funding for GBV programmes had been met (OCHA, 2024). **This is an urgent call for rethinking global humanitarian investments with a focus on gender-responsive, transformative approaches.**



A key issue to address is the deepening funding gap in the coming years. With 92 million people expected to require protection from and services for GBV, including 11 million pregnant women in need of aid, the global community must urgently scale up financial commitments to meet these needs (UNFPA, 2024). The urgency of this issue is amplified by restrictive socio-political policies, which only exacerbate

gender inequalities in already fragile contexts.

With 92 million people expected to require protection from and services for GBV, including 11 million pregnant women in need of aid
(UNFPA, 2024)

A pivotal moment in the trajectory of international humanitarian response occurred early in Donald Trump's presidency in January 2025. In his first days in office, Trump implemented significant cuts to humanitarian funding and took actions that might reshape the global aid landscape. He moved to withdraw the U.S. from the World Health Organization (WHO) and imposed a halt on USAID activities, blocking all agency funds for 90 days while assessing which programmes aligned with the agenda of his new administration. Although it is too early to fully assess the actual impacts of these decisions, both measures risk directly affecting the ability to address global health and humanitarian needs, particularly for vulnerable populations, including women and girls.

Trump's cuts to the WHO and his challenge to multilateral cooperation represent a broader shift away from global solidarity and human rights commitments, including the gender equality agenda that had been promoted in previous years. One of the most controversial policies enacted during his presidency was the reinstatement and expansion of the Global Gag Rule (officially known as the Mexico City Policy). This rule prohibited foreign organisations receiving U.S. funding from providing, promoting, or even discussing abortion services as part

of their healthcare programmes, even with their own non-U.S. funds. Initially reinstated in his first days in office in 2017, Trump doubled down on this policy during his second mandate, making the decision to reinstate it yet again in the early days of his second term. This demonstrated a consistent and deliberate prioritisation of an agenda that curtailed reproductive health rights globally.

The Global Gag Rule had a chilling effect on sexual and reproductive health services worldwide, forcing many organisations to shut down or scale back essential services such as family planning, maternal healthcare, and support for survivors of gender-based violence. Gender-focused programmes, especially those targeting sexual and reproductive health and rights, were particularly imperilled, further deepening gender disparities in crises. **With the global funding gap for gender-based violence and women's health continuing to widen, these shifts had a lasting impact on the ability of international actors to prioritise women's needs during humanitarian crises.** The repeated reinstatement of the Global Gag Rule exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, leaving vulnerable populations—particularly women and girls—without access to critical care and protection in times of crisis, and further eroding the progress made in advancing gender equality on the global stage (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2025).

These actions, combined with ongoing geopolitical tensions and rising nationalism globally, have created a precarious situation for women's rights and humanitarian responses. The future of humanitarian action now faces not only a financial crisis but also a political one—one in which gen-

der equality is increasingly sidelined. This makes the need for gender-transformative humanitarian approaches—which go beyond mere mitigation of harm to fundamentally challenge gendered power structures—more urgent than ever.

At the heart of these gender-transformative approaches is feminist humanitarianism¹. Feminist humanitarianism challenges the existing structures of power and inequality that underpin humanitarian crises, advocating for an approach that is inclusive, participatory, and focused on the agency of women and girls. It seeks to address the root causes of gender-based violence and inequality, working not just to alleviate immediate harm but also to shift the systems that perpetuate it. Feminist humanitarianism promotes women's leadership, participation, and accountability in humanitarian processes, ensuring that responses are both gender-sensitive and culturally relevant.

Despite these challenges, the potential for transformative change remains. By rethinking the humanitarian system with feminist humanitarianism at its core—prioritising women's leadership, agency, and gender-responsive policies—global actors can reverse these setbacks and pave the way for a more just and equitable future.

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¹ For further information see <https://www.feministhumanitarian-network.org/a-feminist-humanitarian-system>

2. Key Findings

The study identified persistent challenges and opportunities for advancing gender equality within humanitarian contexts. These findings draw on the analysis of global reports, quantitative data, and literature on gender and humanitarian action.

- **GENDER INEQUALITIES PERSIST IN CRISIS RESPONSE:** Humanitarian crises exacerbate existing gender inequalities, leaving women and girls disproportionately vulnerable to social, economic, and political marginalisation. Structural barriers limit women's access to resources, decision-making power, and tailored humanitarian assistance.

- **WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IS INSUFFICIENT BUT CRITICAL:** Globally, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions across humanitarian organizations. Studies and programmes have shown that the inclusion of women in decision-making leads to more inclusive, effective, and sustainable outcomes in humanitarian programming. However, systemic barriers prevent their full participation at leadership levels.

- **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE REMAINS A CRISIS WITHIN A CRISIS:** GBV is a pervasive issue in crisis settings, with women and girls facing heightened risks of sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse. Gaps in prevention and response services—such as the lack of safe spaces and inadequate funding for survivor-centred initiatives—compound the impact of GBV on affected populations.

- **GENDER-RESPONSIVE FUNDING IS CRITICALLY LACKING:** The gender funding gap continues to hinder the effectiveness of humanitarian efforts. Women's rights organisations, particularly at the grassroots level, get just 0.34% of total global aid flows (Global Fund for Women, 2024). This chronic underfunding prevents the implementation of long-term, gender-transformative interventions.



- **INTERSECTIONAL VULNERABILITIES WORSEN GENDER INEQUALITIES:** Women and girls who experience compounded vulnerabilities—such as those based on displacement, disability, or minority status—face even greater challenges in accessing humanitarian assistance. Climate-related crises have further deepened gendered inequalities, disproportionately affecting women's livelihoods and their ability to recover from disasters.
- **MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (MHPSS) IS OVERLOOKED:** The mental health needs of women and girls in crisis settings remain underfunded and under-prioritised. Survivors of trauma, particularly GBV, often lack access to comprehensive mental health services, which are critical for fostering resilience and recovery.
- **GENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE:** Crises do not affect only the present generation—they create long-term cycles of trauma and inequality that impact girls' futures. The inability to access education, economic opportunities, and protection from violence results in generational trauma that perpetuates disadvantage. Addressing these challenges is not only about responding to immediate needs but ensuring intergenerational justice for girls, so they can grow up in safer, more equitable conditions.
- **WOMEN ARE CENTRAL TO BUILDING RESILIENCE:** Despite the barriers they face, women are key agents of resilience in crisis-affected areas. Evidence highlights the effectiveness of women-led initiatives in areas such as community resource management, conflict resolution, and livelihood development. Empowering women is essential not only for advancing gender equality but also for strengthening the overall impact of humanitarian responses.
- **INSTITUTIONAL GAPS IN GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING:** Many humanitarian organisations lack the frameworks and capacity to implement effective gender-responsive programming. Barriers such as insufficient gender-disaggregated data, limited gender expertise, and weak accountability mechanisms impede progress toward gender equality in crisis settings.
- **DONOR PRACTICES REINFORCE INEQUALITIES:** Rigid donor practices, including inflexible funding agreements and excessive conditionalities, often hinder the ability of humanitarian organisations to address gender-specific needs. Moreover, donors seldom prioritize long-term support for locally led women-focused initiatives, further marginalizing grassroots efforts.

Empowering women is essential not only for advancing gender equality but also for strengthening the overall impact of humanitarian responses.

- **FEMINIST HUMANITARIANISM AS A TRANSFORMATIVE FRAMEWORK:** The concept of feminist humanitarianism offers a transformative approach by centring gender equality and women's rights in all aspects of crisis response. This framework emphasises addressing the root causes of gender inequality, promoting systemic change, and ensuring that women's voices and leadership are at the forefront of humanitarian action.

“The concept of feminist humanitarianism offers a transformative approach by centring gender equality and women's rights in all aspects of crisis response.”

Key Findings from Interviews with WeWorld Humanitarian Staff

In-depth interviews with WeWorld's humanitarian staff members from various crisis-affected regions provided valuable insights into the realities on the ground. These staff, many of whom are women from national staff with direct experience in managing humanitarian efforts, shared their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities in integrating gender equality into humanitarian action. Some of the key findings that emerged from these interviews include:

- **ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IS KEY TO REDUCING DEPENDENCY:** Empowering women economically was a major theme across the interviews. Economic independence is seen as a crucial factor in reducing aid dependency and male dependency in humanitarian settings. Respondents called for more investment in income-generating activities, vocational training, and microfinance programmes that can help women regain their agency and resilience in crisis environments.
- **CONTEXT-SPECIFIC GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES ARE ESSENTIAL:** A clear takeaway from the interviews was the need for tailored strategies that are adaptable to the specific socio-political and cultural contexts of each crisis. Effective gender-transformative actions must reflect local realities and prioritise the voices of women from the affected communities. A one-size-fits-all approach was widely seen as inadequate, as it often fails to address the nuanced needs of different groups of women and girls.
- **PROTECTION FROM GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE REMAINS A TOP PRIORITY:** Across all crisis contexts, protection from GBV was consistently highlighted as one of the most urgent needs. Women's safety in crisis zones is often compromised due to displacement, lack of legal protection, and economic vulnerability. Respondents emphasised the importance of not only providing immediate protection services but also developing long-term strategies to address the root causes of gender-based violence.
- **HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT ARE CRITICAL:** Several interviewees noted the urgent need for increased support in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and mental health. Crisis situations amplify the psychological trauma women and girls experience, often leading to long-term mental health challenges. Psychosocial support was highlighted as a necessary complement to other humanitarian services, ensuring women's holistic well-being.
- **NEED FOR MORE WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AND PEACE-KEEPING:** Despite progress, the humanitarian field remains predominantly male-dominated, particularly in peace-keeping and decision-making roles. Many of the interviewees emphasised the importance of increasing women's representation in leadership positions, as their perspectives are essential in shaping more effective, inclusive responses to crises.
- **ADDRESSING PATRIARCHAL NORMS AND CULTURAL BARRIERS:** In several contexts, patriarchal norms continue to be a major barrier to the full participation of women and girls in humanitarian aid efforts and decision-making. Respondents pointed out that any humanitarian response must include strategies to challenge these norms through community engagement, education, and male allyship to break down the cultural barriers that limit women's freedom and access to resources.

3. Recommendations

In light of the key findings from the interviews and the broader analysis of the humanitarian landscape, the following recommendations are put forward to ensure that gender equity and women's empowerment are meaningfully integrated into humanitarian action. These recommendations are directed toward donors, humanitarian partners (international and national organisations), and policymakers, each of whom plays a critical role in shaping the future of humanitarian aid.



Methodology

The recommendations in this section were developed based on a combination of primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was collected through interviews with WeWorld's female humanitarian staff working in crisis-affected regions, including Afghanistan, Mali, Palestine, and Ukraine. The lived experiences and insights from these women on the ground highlighted the real-world challenges and opportunities for promoting gender equality in humanitarian action. In addition to interviews, quantitative data from field reports and impact assessments were analysed, providing further depth and supporting evidence to the findings. Secondary data such as global funding reports, humanitarian evaluations, and existing literature on gender and crisis response provided a broader context to these interviews, enriching the understanding of the systemic issues and gaps in addressing women's needs in humanitarian crises.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS

- **PRIORITISE FUNDING FOR GENDER-SENSITIVE PROGRAMMES:** Donors should commit to allocating a minimum of 15% of total humanitarian aid to gender-responsive initiatives, as outlined by gender equality markers². This includes programmes that address gender-based violence, reproductive health, and women's economic empowerment, in alignment with established gender equality markers. Adequate funding should be provided for initiatives that promote women's leadership and autonomy, ensuring that women are not merely recipients of aid, but also active agents of change.
- **SUPPORT WOMEN-LED, WOMEN-FOCUSED AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS:** It is essential that donors direct funding toward

women-led and women-focused organisations, particularly those that are locally based and have a proven track record of addressing the needs of women and girls in crisis settings. Long-term, flexible funding is necessary to build the capacity of these organisations, enabling them to respond sustainably to gendered needs.

- **SUPPORT THE UN'S INVEST-IN-WOMEN GLOBAL CAMPAIGN:** Donors should actively support global initiatives like the UN's Invest-In-Women Global Campaign³, which aims to raise \$300 million by the end of 2025 to address the gender funding gap. Such initiatives are critical to ensuring that the needs of women and girls in humanitarian crises are not overlooked and are given the priority they deserve in global funding frameworks.

² For further information see <https://gendercoordinationandmainstreaming.unwomen.org/building-block/gender-equality-marker#:~:text=The%20PBF%20implemented%20the%20GEM,Plan%20on%20Gender%20Responsive%20Peacebuilding>.

³ For further information see <https://wphfund.org/invest-in-women/#:~:text=This%20bold%20global%20financial%20commitment,by%20the%20end%20of%202025>.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN PARTNERS

- **ADOPT GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES:** Humanitarian actors must integrate the principles of feminist humanitarianism into their operations, prioritising gender equality and women's rights at every stage of response. Comprehensive gender analyses should inform all planning, ensuring interventions are inclusive, equitable, and culturally sensitive. Addressing the root causes of gender inequality is essential, alongside challenging harmful norms and promoting systemic change. Gender equality markers must be consistently applied across all programmes to enhance accountability and ensure meaningful impact.
- **EMPOWER WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION:** The meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes is critical to creating inclusive and effective humanitarian responses. Women should be actively recruited and supported in leadership roles at all levels of intervention. Collaborating with women-led local organisations is essential, as their expertise and lived experiences are invaluable in tailoring responses to the specific needs of their communities. Humanitarian organisations must also implement strategies to reduce structural and logistical barriers that limit women's ability to participate fully in leadership and decision-making roles.
- **WORK WITH MEN AND BOYS TO FOSTER GENDER EQUALITY:** Humanitarian actors should actively engage men and boys in efforts to challenge harmful gender norms and promote positive and caring masculinities. Male engagement programmes should focus on fostering

allyship and accountability for advancing gender equality while ensuring that women's leadership and autonomy are not undermined. These programmes must adopt a "Do No Harm" approach, addressing harmful power dynamics while empowering men and boys to be part of the solution in preventing gender-based violence and supporting women's and girls' rights.

- **ADDRESS OVERLOOKED NEEDS AND EMERGING RISKS:** Humanitarian responses must prioritise the overlooked needs of women and girls, including mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), protection from gender-based violence, and access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services. Emerging risks such as climate change and migration must also be addressed through gender-responsive programmes. These efforts should aim to create a holistic and sustainable support system that responds to the evolving challenges faced by women and girls in crisis settings.
- **PROMOTE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS:** Economic independence is vital to reducing women's reliance on external aid and fostering long-term resilience. Humanitarian organisations should invest in programmes that provide women with income-generating opportunities, vocational training, and access to financial resources such as microfinance schemes. These efforts should be designed to align with broader development goals, ensuring that women are empowered to participate fully in rebuilding their communities and shaping sustainable futures.

- **STRENGTHEN LOCALISATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** Local women-led organisations must be central to humanitarian planning and implementation, as they are best positioned to understand and address the needs of their communities. Humanitarian actors should focus on genuine localisation of aid, providing flexible, long-term funding and reducing administrative burdens to empower grassroots organisations. Community engagement efforts must prioritise the inclusion of women and girls to ensure that their voices and perspectives are reflected in all stages of response.
- **INVEST IN MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY:** Establishing robust monitoring mechanisms is critical to ensuring gender equality outcomes in humanitarian programming. Gender-disaggregated data should be collected and analysed to track progress, identify gaps, and inform adjustments to interventions. Regular audits and evaluations, conducted in partnership with gender experts, will enhance accountability and foster continuous improvement in gender-transformative approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

- ENFORCE GENDER EQUALITY IN PUBLIC DEBT AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION:** Policy-makers must ensure that women have a leadership role in decisions related to public debt and resource distribution. Financial policies have profound gendered impacts, and it is critical that women's voices are heard when these decisions are made. Strong accountability mechanisms should be in place to ensure that gender equality is integrated into all public finance policies.
- DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICIES:** National governments should prioritise the integration of gender-transformative policies into their humanitarian and development frameworks. This includes upholding international commitments to gender equality and ensuring that all policies reflect an intersectional understanding of women's needs, particularly in relation to climate change, migration, and peace processes. Gender-responsive policies should be applied across all levels of governance, from crisis management to post-crisis recovery.
- COMBAT LEGAL AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS:** Governments must take immediate action to combat legal and structural barriers that restrict women's access to education, employment, and public life, particularly in contexts where women's rights are under direct threat. Efforts should be made to repeal discriminatory laws and align national legislation with international human rights standards. Strong protections for women's rights must be enforced, particularly in regions facing acute humanitarian crises.
- PROMOTE INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION FOR GENDER-EQUITABLE HUMANITARIAN AID:** Governments should support global efforts to increase funding for gender-sensitive humanitarian aid and ensure that humanitarian funding is allocated equitably, with a significant portion directed toward gender-based violence prevention, health care, and economic empowerment. International cooperation must be enhanced to ensure that women's needs are prioritised, especially in countries where gender equality is still a work in progress.

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