

# Her Future at Risk

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

Focus.  
Afghanistan's Dual Crisis





# Executive Summary

This study examines how humanitarian crises exacerbate existing gender and generational inequalities, particularly in fragile contexts and protracted crises, highlighting the importance of empowering women and girls in crisis response and recovery. It focuses on eight countries—Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Palestine, and Ukraine—where WeWorld and ChildFund Alliance operate, emphasising the urgent need for gender-transformative interventions.

Using data from the *ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024* and other reputable sources, the study provides country-specific factsheets assessing the state of women's and girls' rights in ongoing humanitarian crises. These findings are enriched by qualitative testimonies from women and girls collected directly from the field, offering a human-centred perspective on their experiences.

A dedicated section on Afghanistan highlights systemic violations of women's rights under Taliban rule, examining WeWorld's cash-for-food programme, which has provided critical support to women and their families. This section also amplifies the voices of Afghan refugee activists who continue to advocate for women's rights from abroad.


**The report concludes with actionable recommendations, stressing the need to address systemic inequalities and integrate women's and girls' voices at every stage of humanitarian response to drive peace, recovery, and long-term resilience.**

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## CHAPTER 1. The Gendered and Generational Consequences of Humanitarian Crises

By 2025, over 305 million people across 72 countries will require humanitarian aid due to escalating crises, with regions like Southern and Eastern Africa, the Middle East, and Asia being particularly affected (OCHA, 2024). These crises expose the fragility of societies, where women and children face increased risks, as the disruption of essential services and infrastructure deepens existing gender inequalities. Women may encounter challenges accessing healthcare and education, while children, especially girls, may experience disruptions to their learning and protection.

These impacts have long-term effects, perpetuating cycles of hardship across generations. Furthermore, uneven media coverage and international responses can leave some communities under-supported, hindering their recovery. Addressing these issues requires recognizing the fragility of these contexts and ensuring equitable, sustained support to foster resilience and recovery.

 **By 2025, over 305.1 million people across 72 countries will require humanitarian aid**  
(OCHA, 2024)

### Intersectional Vulnerabilities: Women, Children, and the Lasting Impact of Crises

#### ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT VULNERABILITIES

Women in crisis settings face economic hardships due to:

- High engagement in informal, low-wage jobs.
- Limited access to education and resources.
- Increased caregiving responsibilities, restricting employment opportunities.
- Survival strategies that may expose them to exploitation.

#### HEALTH AND MENSTRUAL HYGIENE CHALLENGES

- During conflicts, natural disasters, and public health emergencies, the health needs of women and girls are often deprioritised.
- 60% of preventable maternal deaths occur in conflict, displacement, or disaster settings (UN Women & UNFPA, 2020).
- Women and girls often struggle to manage menstruation safely and with dignity due to inadequate access to pads, underwear, water, and toilets.

#### CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND SAFETY

- Over 85 million children in crisis zones are out of school, with girls disproportionately affected (ECW, 2025).
- Schools often serve as safe spaces but are frequently attacked or used for military purposes.
- Conflict settings expose children to recruitment as child soldiers, forced labour, and exploitation.

#### GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

- 70% of women in crisis zones experience GBV, including intimate partner violence and sexual exploitation (UN Women, 2024).
- In 2023, the UN recorded 3,688 verified cases of CRSV, a 50% increase from the previous year (OCHA, 2024).
- 18 of the 20 countries with the highest child marriage rates are affected by crises (Girls Not Brides, 2020).

#### BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

- Women remain underrepresented in peace processes, making up only 9.6% of negotiators (UN Women, 2024a).
- Women's activism and contributions are often ignored, and issues affecting women are frequently treated as peripheral to peacebuilding agendas (CARE International, 2018).
- Women's inclusion improves crisis response effectiveness and long-term peacebuilding.

#### BREAKING THE CYCLE OF TRAUMA AND NEGLECT

- Children's right to the future is at risk due to trauma, interrupted education, and a lack of economic opportunities. Involving them in peacebuilding and conflict prevention can help foster long-term stability. Gender-transformative and community-led approaches are crucial in addressing humanitarian challenges.

### The Role of Women in Humanitarian Work

Interviews with WeWorld humanitarian staff working across Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Palestine, and Mali shed light on the challenges they face and the urgent need for gender-inclusive policies. Their insights underscore several key priorities:

- **The necessity of context-specific, gender-transformative approaches** to ensure interventions effectively address the unique needs of women and girls.

- **Protection from gender-based violence as a top priority**, with stronger measures needed to prevent and respond to violence in crisis settings.
- **Access to healthcare and psychosocial support as critical needs**, particularly for women and girls affected by conflict and displacement.
- **Economic empowerment as a fundamental tool for reducing dependency**, enabling women to achieve financial independence and resilience.
- **Greater inclusion of women in leadership and peacekeeping efforts**, ensuring their voices shape humanitarian responses and long-term recovery.
- **Challenging patriarchal norms and cultural barriers** that restrict women's participation in decision-making and limit their access to rights and opportunities.





## CHAPTER 2. Country Profiles

Below are key figures from the ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024—updated until 2023—along with qualitative testimonies from women and girls collected in the field by WeWorld and ChildFund Alliance partners. Additionally, the section includes data from secondary sources on funding gaps for 2024 and the projected humanitarian needs for 2025 for each country considered in this analysis. For further details on country-specific information, please refer to the report.

### AFGHANISTAN

- In 2021, only 5% of Afghan girls were enrolled in secondary school and only 1 in 5 women were employed (ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024)
- In 2025, 22.9 million people will

*"My eldest daughter is only 15, but severe economic hardships forced us to marry her off early to ease our financial burdens."*

Shirin, 40 years old

require humanitarian assistance, of whom 25% are women and 53% are children (OCHA HNRP, 2025).

- The Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 was funded at just 47.4% (OCHA, 2024b).

### BURKINA FASO

- In Burkina Faso, every three days and a half a girl under the age of 19 becomes pregnant (ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024)

*"Adults should let me freely choose my future spouse"*

Mariam, 17 years old

- In 2025, 5.9 million people will require humanitarian assistance, of whom 25% are women and 56% are children (OCHA HNRP, 2025).
- The Burkina Faso Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 was funded at only 43.8% (OCHA, 2024b).

### ETHIOPIA

- 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, 2024)

*"Adults should promise not to do war and conflicts"*

Fana, 15 years old

- In 2024, 21.4 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance (OCHA HNRP, 2025). Data still has not been made available for 2025.
- The Ethiopia Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 was funded at only 25.7% (OCHA, 2024b).

### MALI

- In Mali, 94 children out of every 1,000 live births die before the age of 5 (ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024)

*"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

- In 2025, 6.4 million people will require humanitarian assistance, of whom 46% are women and 53% are children (OCHA HNRP, 2025).
- The Mali Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 was funded at only 37.6% (OCHA, 2024b).

### MOZAMBIQUE

- In Mozambique, almost 1 in 5 women (19%) 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, 2024).

*"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."*

Eliza, 40 years old

- In 2025, 1.3 million people will require humanitarian assistance, of whom 22% are women and 58% are children (OCHA HNRP, 2025).
- The Mozambique Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 was funded at only 40.2% (OCHA, 2024b).

### NIGER

- In Niger, every two days and a half a girl under the age of 19 gets pregnant (ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024)

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

Amina, 15 years old

- In 2025, 2.7 million people will require humanitarian assistance (OCHA HNRP, 2025).
- The Niger Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 was funded at only 49.2% (OCHA, 2024b).

### PALESTINE

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

- 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 Escalation of Hostilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Flash Appeal 2024 was funded at only 73.8% (OCHA, 2024b).

### UKRAINE

- In 2025, 12.7 million people will require humanitarian assistance, of whom 31% are women and 20% are children (OCHA HNRP, 2025).

*"I am worried about getting an education. Now and in the future."*

Sofia, 14 years old

- The Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024 was funded at only 69.7% (OCHA, 2024b).

 In Niger, every two days and a half a girl under the age of 19 gets pregnant  
(ChildFund Alliance World Index, 2024)



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

Afghanistan is grappling with an unprecedented dual crisis: a deteriorating humanitarian emergency compounded by the systematic suppression of women's rights under the Taliban-led De Facto Authorities (DfA). The crisis is not just a matter of economic collapse and food insecurity but an active dismantling of the rights and freedoms of Afghan women and girls.

This section examines Afghanistan's dual crisis. It argues that the restriction of women's freedoms and rights exacerbates the humanitarian emergency, trapping women and girls in a cycle of vulnerability. Drawing on data from the *ChildFund Alliance World Index 2024* and other sources, the section first analyses this interconnected crisis. It then presents a case study of WeWorld, highlighting a project focused on food security and livelihoods, with testimonies from affected women and households.

The report also features firsthand accounts from humanitarian workers and refugee activists, offering insight into the resilience of Afghan women. It concludes with recommendations for sustainable solutions that prioritise women's rights and well-being while addressing wider humanitarian challenges.

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## WeWorld's Humanitarian Response

WeWorld has been active in Afghanistan since 2002, working in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, including Kabul and several districts in Herat Province. The organization collaborates with local institutions, such as the Departments of Rehabilitation, Agriculture, and Economy, as well as the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority. After resuming operations in 2021, WeWorld has focused on humanitarian efforts, including emergency cash distributions in Herat to combat food insecurity and providing earthquake relief in 2023 with support from the ChildFund Alliance.

The WeWorld Programme in Afghanistan places women at the heart of its projects, not just as recipients of support, but as active contributors to their design and implementation, ensuring their voices and needs are heard and amplified. Following global frameworks like the IASC Gender and Age Marker, WeWorld ensures gender-responsive humanitarian action, addressing gender exclusion under restrictive conditions. It focuses on resilience-building, psychoeducation, and leadership for both women and vulnerable communities. Gender-sensitive monitoring ensures all voices are included.

Through community mobilisation, supported by women mobilisers and volunteers, WeWorld ensures the meaningful participation of women, even in restrictive environments. Risk management and tailored negotiation strategies with local authorities help overcome cultural and operational challenges, upholding humanitarian principles. WeWorld's strong community engagement approach builds trust and acceptance, enabling women and girls to access aid. In Afghanistan, WeWorld is an active member of the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GiHA WG) and follows recommended practices to encourage female staff involvement, despite the socio-cultural barriers limiting the recruitment of Afghan women.

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## A Human-Centered Approach: The Voices of Afghan Women and Communities

- **Anis Gul (10 years old):** A young girl who dreams of becoming a doctor, but her future is uncertain due to increasing restrictions on education.
- **Farzana (11 years old):** Forced to forgo schooling due to lack of facilities, she now spends her days fetching water and doing household labour, her aspirations held hostage by systemic gender discrimination.
- **Gul Biddin (22 years old):** A young man who contemplated illegal migration to Iran in search of work but was able to remain with his family thanks to WeWorld's cash-for-work programme.
- **Safia (50 years old):** A widow who, through agricultural support and food assistance, has been able to provide for her children despite oppressive restrictions on women's employment.
- **Rahel Saya and Parasto Hakim:** Prominent Afghan refugee activists – now living abroad – who continue to fight for the education and rights of women in Afghanistan, sharing firsthand insights into the resilience of Afghan girls attending secret schools and defying Taliban decrees.

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 2024.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 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:** Women and girls face systemic barriers in crisis response, limiting access to resources and decision-making.
- **Women's Leadership is Essential:** Despite proven benefits, women remain underrepresented in humanitarian leadership.
- **GBV is a Crisis Within a Crisis:** Sexual violence and exploitation escalate in crises, yet response efforts remain underfunded.
- **Severe Gender-Responsive Funding Gaps:** Women's rights groups receive only 0.34% of global aid, hindering transformative change.
- **Intersectional Vulnerabilities Worsen Inequality:** Displaced, disabled, and minority women face compounded challenges.
- **Mental Health is Overlooked:** Trauma survivors lack access to essential psychosocial support.
- **Generational Trauma Perpetuates Inequality:** Barriers to education and safety create lasting cycles of disadvantage.
- **Women Drive Resilience:** Women-led initiatives strengthen crisis recovery and community stability.
- **Institutional Gaps Remain:** Many humanitarian organisations lack gender-responsive frameworks.
- **Donor Practices Reinforce Inequality:** Rigid funding structures sideline locally led women's initiatives.
- **Feminist Humanitarianism is Key:** Gender-transformative approaches are essential for systemic change.

### Recommendations

#### FOR DONORS

- **Prioritise Gender-Sensitive Funding:** Allocate at least 15% of humanitarian aid to gender-responsive programmes, including GBV prevention, reproductive health, and women's economic empowerment.
- **Support Women-Led Organisations:** Provide long-term, flexible funding to grassroots organisations addressing the needs of women and girls in crisis settings.
- **Back Global Gender Initiatives:** Contribute to campaigns like the UN's Invest-In-Women Global Campaign to bridge the gender funding gap.
- **Invest in Economic Empowerment:** Fund income-generating activities, vocational training, and microfinance schemes to foster women's resilience and independence.

#### FOR HUMANITARIAN PARTNERS

- **Adopt Gender-Transformative Approaches:** Integrate feminist humanitarian principles, conduct gender analyses, and apply gender equality markers across programmes.
- **Empower Women's Leadership:** Ensure women are actively recruited and supported in decision-making roles.
- **Engage Men and Boys in Gender Equality:** Promote positive masculinities and male allyship while maintaining a "Do No Harm" approach.
- **Address Overlooked Needs:** Prioritise mental health, GBV protection, and sexual and reproductive health services, while considering climate and migration risks.
- **Strengthen Localisation:** Support women-led organisations with flexible funding and reduce administrative burdens.
- **Improve Monitoring & Accountability:** Collect gender-disaggregated data and conduct regular evaluations to enhance programme effectiveness.

#### FOR POLICYMAKERS

- **Enforce Gender Equality in Public Finance:** Ensure women's participation in financial decision-making, integrating gender considerations in debt and resource allocation.
- **Develop Gender-Responsive Policies:** Incorporate gender-transformative frameworks into national crisis management and recovery strategies.
- **Eliminate Legal and Structural Barriers:** Repeal discriminatory laws and align national policies with international human rights standards.
- **Promote International Cooperation:** Ensure equitable humanitarian funding prioritising GBV prevention, healthcare, and economic empowerment for women and girls.





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