

**Alert note**

Afghanistan, Harsh Winter, December-February 2025

**Completed by:** Community World Service Asia**Date completed:** January 29, 2025**Forum:****Type of emergency:** Harsh Winter**Date of emergency (if rapid onset):** Winter Season- 2025**1. The nature of the emergency**

As winter sets in, Afghanistan is facing an increasingly severe humanitarian crisis. Harsh weather conditions, including freezing temperatures and heavy snowfall, are putting the lives of vulnerable households at risk, particularly those in regions highly exposed to extreme cold and lacking adequate shelter. With temperatures plummeting to as low as -25°C in mountainous areas such as the central highlands, many families are bracing for yet another brutal winter without sufficient winterisation support.

The winter season in Afghanistan typically spans from mid-December to mid-March, with the cold spell peaking in January-February. However, its economic and health impacts extend well beyond, reaching into March. Limited income-generating opportunities, accumulated debts, and winter-related illnesses continue to strain vulnerable households. Additionally, market disruptions and delayed assistance further exacerbate the crisis, leaving many families in urgent need of support.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), extreme weather in early January 2025, including storms, heavy snowfall, and torrential rain, has led to multiple fatalities in Afghanistan's northern and eastern regions. On January 2, severe weather conditions resulted in five deaths and 17 injuries in the provinces of Kunar, Laghman, and Nuristan due to road accidents and structural damage. By 5 January, the extreme cold had claimed two lives in Faryab and three in Baghlan<sup>1</sup>.

According to the national Shelter Cluster, over 900,000 individuals in high-priority areas are at risk of not receiving essential heating assistance and winter non-food items (NFIs). Vulnerable groups, including women, girls, young children under five, and the elderly, are at heightened risk of pneumonia, starvation, and other health complications.

Among the most at-risk communities are over 18,000 families whose shelters were damaged or destroyed by flash floods and heavy rains in 2024, leaving them without proper insulation or protection against the cold. Additionally, more than 679,500 returnees from Pakistan since September 2023 are living in inadequate and undignified shelter conditions, with only 15% receiving critical support for rent, repairs, or transitional housing due to severe funding constraints.<sup>2</sup>

Approximately 14.8 million people—over 30% of Afghanistan's population—are expected to face acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or worse) between November 2024 and March 2025. Of these, more than 3.1 million are projected to experience emergency-level food insecurity (IPC Phase 4), according to an IPC analysis released in early January. This crisis is largely driven by the impact of the winter lean season, a period from November to March when food becomes increasingly scarce due to drought, economic instability, high food prices, limited livelihood opportunities, and reduced remittances.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup><https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/asia-and-pacific-weekly-regional-humanitarian-snapshot-7-13-january-2025>

<sup>2</sup><https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-winter-needs-and-urgent-critical-gaps-2024-2025-15-dec-2024>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1159434/?iso3=AFG>

A recent study by Information Management and Mine Action Programs (iMMAP Inc.) on Winter Needs and Resilience highlights significant vulnerabilities—such as income instability, rising expenses, and worsening health conditions—that have exacerbated existing economic and social hardships, making the winter season particularly challenging for Afghans. Seasonal factors, including limited job opportunities and rising heating costs, have disproportionately affected households reliant on daily wage labour, small businesses, and agriculture. The study underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions, such as cash assistance, heating supplies, and healthcare, to alleviate the severe hardships posed by Afghanistan’s harsh winter.<sup>4</sup>

**2. The impact and scale of the emergency (please include your source of information with links if possible)**

Based on the forum's initial assessment, this emergency can be classified as a medium-scale emergency due to the widespread and severe impacts of the winter conditions, particularly in the high-priority districts identified by the Inter-Cluster Coordination Team (ICCT). The combination of extreme cold, snow, and limited access to essential services makes the scale of the emergency more extensive and urgent.

The emergency primarily affects high-altitude and mountainous areas, with two districts—Dawlat Shah and Alishing—in Laghman Province being significantly impacted. Dawlat Shah is located approximately 74 km from Mehterlam, while Alishing is 21 km away. Both districts have limited infrastructure and face challenges in accessing markets, which exacerbates the difficulty of obtaining necessary winterisation supplies and services. These areas are geographically isolated, adding to the vulnerability of the population.

As of the latest data from the 2019 survey, Dawlat Shah has a population of 36,950, and Alishing has 79,257 residents. The majority of people in these areas belong to the Pashai ethnic group, a minority community in Afghanistan<sup>5</sup>. These communities are among the most vulnerable, with limited access to basic services and income-generating opportunities. Women, girls, young children (especially those under five), and the elderly are at particular risk during the winter months.

In Dawlat Shah<sup>6</sup>, a total of 5,170 households requires winterisation support, but only 3,122 have received assistance so far, leaving 2,048 still in need. In Alishing, 2,357 households require winterisation support, but only 336 have been assisted. These deficits highlight the significant gap in meeting urgent needs.

The most vulnerable groups such as women, children under five, and the elderly are particularly affected by respiratory infections, hypothermia, and potential fatalities due to the extreme cold. Livelihoods have been severely impacted, with limited access to income-generating opportunities and markets, and many households are unable to meet basic needs. This increases the financial strain on already vulnerable families.

The disruption in access to essential services, including heating items, healthcare, food, and shelter, coupled with delayed humanitarian assistance, amplifies the catastrophe.

In the short term, the winter conditions are likely to lead to a rise in preventable deaths, primarily due to cold-related illnesses such as pneumonia and hypothermia, which are exacerbated by the lack of sufficient heating items and clothing.

In the long term, the impacts will affect livelihoods and protection. With agriculture and livestock potentially devastated by the cold and snow, many families will lose their primary income sources.

<sup>4</sup><https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-winter-needs-and-resilience-study-january-2025>

<sup>5</sup>[https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieWU1NTUwMzMtNTg4Yi00NzEwLTg1NTMtMjU3NmY1YmRiZTA1IiwidCI6ImU1YzM3OTgxLTy2NjQtNDZlYTBiLTU1NDNkMmFmODBiZSIsImMiOiJh9&\\_kx=VKVdJgPAfrm6VRDqmgKgNz0QlZQQ2tKyKiONw5dk\\_qd\\_UhSgje32Y0JxiHyGsgMHwbx7zZTTdyt2gO-V00ZORA.Y6hzWJ](https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieWU1NTUwMzMtNTg4Yi00NzEwLTg1NTMtMjU3NmY1YmRiZTA1IiwidCI6ImU1YzM3OTgxLTy2NjQtNDZlYTBiLTU1NDNkMmFmODBiZSIsImMiOiJh9&_kx=VKVdJgPAfrm6VRDqmgKgNz0QlZQQ2tKyKiONw5dk_qd_UhSgje32Y0JxiHyGsgMHwbx7zZTTdyt2gO-V00ZORA.Y6hzWJ)

<sup>6</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dawlat\\_Shah\\_District](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dawlat_Shah_District)

To mitigate these impacts, it is crucial to increase humanitarian assistance, including winterisation support (e.g., heating materials, blankets and warm clothing) and food aid, as well as health services to prevent the spread of cold-related diseases.

**3. Local and national capacity**

Vulnerable families in Dawlat Shah and Alishing rely on traditional coping mechanisms, including sharing resources, collecting firewood, and using makeshift insulation. However, these strategies remain inadequate, leaving many exposed to extreme cold, respiratory illnesses, and food insecurity. Women, children, and the elderly are at the highest risk.

The Afghan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), local humanitarian partners, and community networks are attempting to provide support. The Emergency Shelter and Non-Food Items (ES/NFI) Cluster is coordinating assistance, but resources are severely limited, and access to remote areas remains a challenge.

There is no specific winterisation response plan from the De Facto Authorities. The national emergency response framework lacks dedicated funding and operational capacity, making it difficult to address the crisis. There is no evidence of a comprehensive contingency plan being implemented.

The UN, NGOs, and the ES/NFI Cluster are working to provide blankets, heating materials, and emergency shelter, but funding gaps and logistical constraints limit their effectiveness. While the UN cluster system, including the ES/NFI Cluster and other humanitarian groups, is active, the response remains insufficient, requiring urgent donor support and enhanced coordination to scale up assistance.

**4. Key needs and gaps**

Based on the needs assessment conducted by CWSA in Dawlat Shah and Alishing districts, the following gaps and needs have been identified:

**Inadequate Shelter:** Many families are living in makeshift shelters that lack proper insulation, leaving them highly exposed to cold temperatures.

**Lack of Heating Materials:** A significant portion of the population does not have access to fuel, firewood, or heating stoves, making them vulnerable to severe weather conditions.

**Insufficient Warm Clothing and Blankets:** Households, particularly those with children, elderly individuals, and pregnant women, reported a dire need for warm clothing and blankets.

**Health Risks Due to Harsh Weather:** Many families are at risk of cold-related illnesses, including respiratory infections, due to prolonged exposure to low temperatures and the absence of adequate medical support.

**Food Insecurity:** Many families in Dawlat Shah and Alishang are facing acute food insecurity, and there is need for food assistance to ensure they do not go hungry during the winter months.

Efforts from ANDMA, UN agencies, and NGOs are not enough, with major gaps in funding and pre-positioning of winter supplies.

There is a lack of updated data on the number of affected households and their specific winterisation needs. Coordination with UN OCHA, the ES/NFI cluster (led by UNHCR and IOM), government assessments, and humanitarian partners is essential to address these gaps.

Immediate donor support, better logistical coordination, and scaling up aid delivery are essential to protect vulnerable communities during the harsh winter months.

Please indicate whether you are considering:

	Indicate your intention with an <b>X</b> below
Rapid Response Fund ( <i>intended for small and medium scale emergencies</i> )	X
Appeal ( <i>intended for large scale emergencies</i> )	

*If you indicate an intention to launch an appeal, the secretariat will activate an Emergency Steering Committee meeting within two working days on receipt of this alert.*

#### 5. Forum Capacity and members intention to respond

ACT Member	Geographical focus	Sectors of expertise and experience
Community World Service Asia	Dawlat Shah and Alishang districts of Laghman province, Afghanistan	Emergency shelter, Food Security and Livelihood, Cash Intervention (MPCA, Cash for food) Education, Health, Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change

#### 6. Potential responses

CWSA plans to provide winterisation support to a total of 340 households, including 200 households in Dawlat Shah and 140 households in Alishang districts of Laghman province. The proposed intervention focuses on:

Cash for Winterisation Support: A standard<sup>7</sup> winterisation package of USD \$200 per household, which includes \$170 for fuel/gas and \$30 for a gas cylinder, in line with ES/NFI cluster guidelines.

<sup>7</sup> [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/194HqcdYMtWojNiTTM-29v3mgs6inML\\_b/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=115245266952978477287&rtpof=true&sd=true](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/194HqcdYMtWojNiTTM-29v3mgs6inML_b/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=115245266952978477287&rtpof=true&sd=true)