



Islamic Relief Afghanistan

Annual Report 2023

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FOREWORD

Providing a lifeline in another rollercoaster year for Afghanistan

After the dramatic upheaval of 2021 and the turbulent transition that followed it, 2023 has been another rollercoaster year for Afghanistan.

In a country that has been in the grip of a severe and protracted humanitarian crisis for many years, the earthquakes that struck the western region in October were yet another devastating blow. Over 275,000 people were affected and 2,000 people, mostly women and children, lost their lives. Approximately 40,000 houses were destroyed.

With each new crisis, Islamic Relief Afghanistan is there on the ground delivering aid to affected communities. I was able to see the life-saving work of our teams first hand on a visit to Herat within a week of the quakes. It was heartbreaking to witness the profound impact on people's physical and psychological wellbeing, and yet heartwarming to see the positive impact of our response.

Another notable emergency response that I was able to see for myself was our operation to support refugees returning to Afghanistan from Pakistan at the Torkham border crossing point. I met with families who had been through a harrowing ordeal just to reach the border, with an unpredictable future still ahead of them, and saw the difference our support was making.

In both these emergencies, I can report that our teams were on the ground within 24 hours, providing urgent primary healthcare in makeshift clinics, water and sanitation facilities, emergency shelter, non-food items, and cash assistance to enable families to meet their immediate needs.

I also visited other project areas – including Bamyán, Balkh and Kandahar – where our teams are delivering a variety of life-changing interventions. These range from women's economic empowerment projects to community infrastructure programmes, from orphan sponsorship and education to seasonal food distributions and work to protect the most vulnerable. In community infrastructure there is a strong emphasis on improving climate resilience and economic stability by building or rehabilitating irrigation systems, feeder roads, markets, water schemes and check dams in hard-to-reach areas.

Islamic Relief Afghanistan extended its reach across the country in 2023, and we now have a presence in 19 out of the 34 provinces. This has enabled us to expand our work to support marginalised people in some of Afghanistan's most far-flung and neglected areas. In doing so we have reached approximately 1 million

people with our humanitarian response and our life-changing development interventions.

At the core of our work are stories of women, children and men who have shown extraordinary resolve in weathering life's storms. I was particularly inspired to witness and hear stories of single and widowed mothers who have transformed their lives through our support.

Those who have benefited from our work include farmers and female entrepreneurs whose incomes have tripled due to our efforts. Many of the 6,000 orphaned children we now support are pursuing their dreams through Islamic Relief-supported schools. Some past beneficiaries of our Orphan Sponsorship Programme have now graduated from higher education and are actively serving their communities.

Despite all that we continue to achieve, the harsh reality is that many Afghans are beyond the reach of humanitarian assistance, sinking deeper into poverty. The international community and institutional donors must bolster their investment in development programmes and commit the long-term funding needed to build resilient communities that are less dependent on aid. Much more support is urgently needed for agriculture, climate change adaptation, market-based infrastructure to strengthen food production and distribution, small businesses led by women, and financial services for smallholder farmers.

None of our work would be possible without the incredible dedication of our staff, the collaboration of our partners, the determination of our rightsholders and the generosity of our donors. I want to thank all donors and partners for their fantastic support, and to urge you to continue to stand by the people of Afghanistan. Your support is crucial for us to sustain and extend essential relief for those who need it most.



Umair Hasan
Country Director

HUMANITARIAN OVERVIEW



People in need:
23.7 million



People displaced:
6.3 million



People affected by earthquakes:
275,000



Afghan returnees since September 2023:
600,000



People affected by floods:
280,000



Children facing acute malnutrition:
3 million



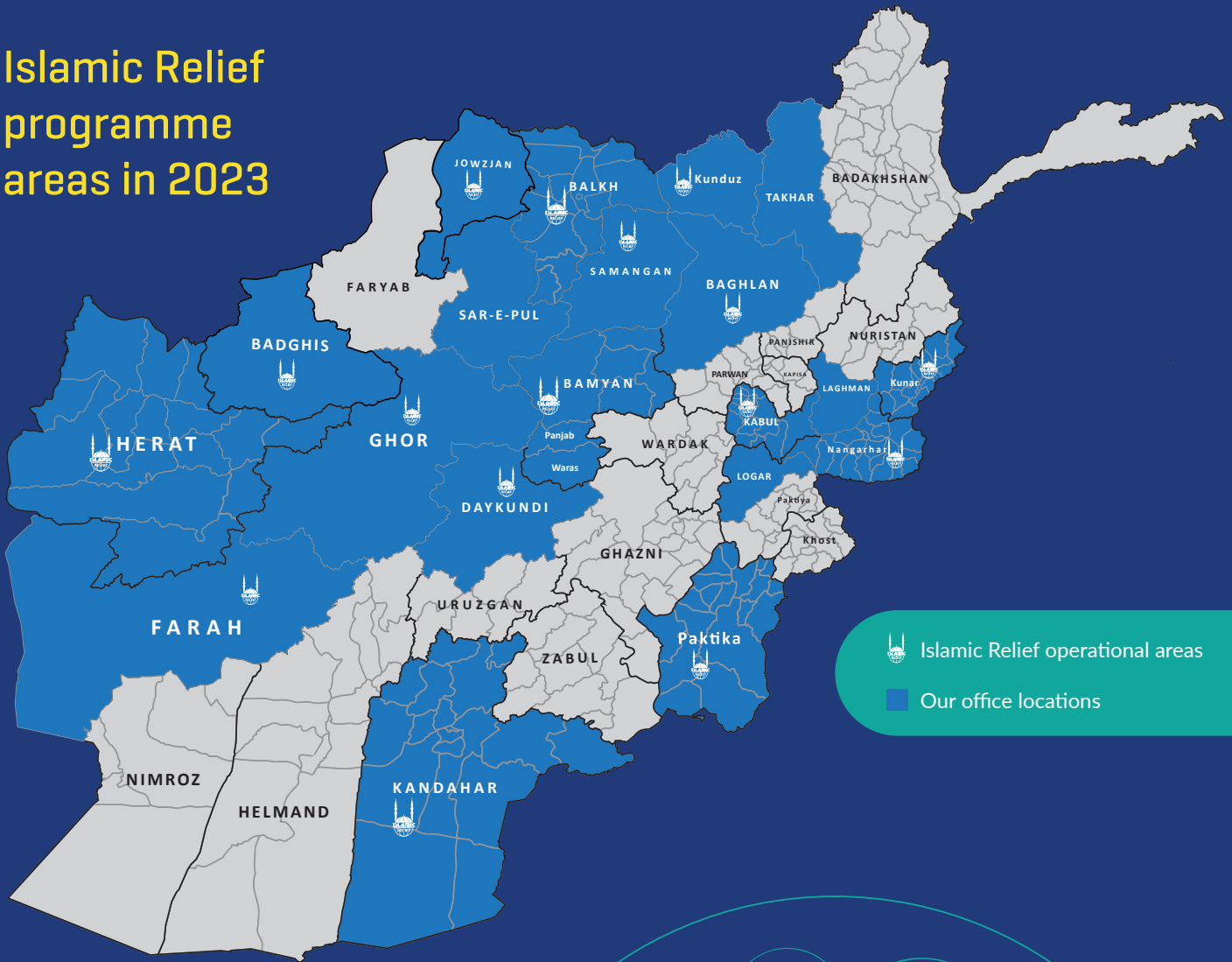
Orphans:
1.2 million



Provinces facing drought-like conditions:
25 out of 34

OUR FOOTPRINT

Islamic Relief programme areas in 2023



- Islamic Relief operational areas
- Our office locations

Islamic Relief in Afghanistan

Islamic Relief began supporting the people of Afghanistan in 1992, working with local partners to run Ramadan and qurbani food distributions. Since then we have expanded our work, with more than 600 staff members now working for us across 19 provinces. The national country office is in the capital, Kabul, while area offices managing regional operations are located in Jalalabad, Herat, Balkh and Kandahar.

OUR VALUES

- إِسْتِخْرَافٌ
EXCELLENCE
- إِسْخِرَافٌ
SINCERITY
- عَدْلٌ
SOCIAL JUSTICE
- رَحْمَةٌ
COMPASSION
- أَمَانَةٌ
CUSTODIANSHIP

OUR IMPACT IN NUMBERS

In 2023, we reached approximately **1 million vulnerable people** across **19 provinces** with a wide range of programmes:



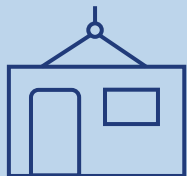
£21 million package of humanitarian and development initiatives implemented



Over **290,400** mothers and children supported with vital healthcare to protect their wellbeing



Nearly **2,000** students empowered through impactful education services



70,300 people enabled to live in safety and dignity through our shelter provision



22,400 people benefited from our vital clean water and sanitation projects, improving health and hygiene standards



187,000 people received transformational support through our life-changing livelihoods projects



310,000 needy people assisted through our Ramadan and qurbani food distributions



40,100 people received winter survival items, cash assistance, and emergency non-food items, such as hygiene kits and kitchen sets, significantly enhancing their wellbeing



6,100 orphaned children supported through our Orphan Sponsorship Programme, offering hope for the future and making a profound difference in the lives of their families



10,600 people reached and supported through our protection and inclusion programmes

CORE PROGRAMMES



An earthquake-affected child drinks from an Islamic Relief water tank in Zindajan district, Herat

Our most important programme focus throughout 2023 and into 2024 has been our work in humanitarian emergency response and early recovery. In the face of the dire and pressing humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, the everyday burden so many families bear has been eased by our emergency and seasonal programmes, from food packs during the holy month of Ramadan, and fresh qurbani meat at Eid Al-Adha, to cash assistance and blankets during the harsh winter.

In 2023, we were at the forefront of emergency response efforts, particularly in Herat province, where multiple earthquakes struck, and during the sudden influx of Afghan returnees from Pakistan. Islamic Relief was among the first to respond in both instances, providing critical aid such as primary health services, cash assistance, water and sanitation, shelter, and blankets.

We continued to support impactful long-term livelihood initiatives to equip local communities with the financial resources, skills and infrastructure needed to earn a reliable income and protect and enhance wellbeing. Our support included providing small cash grants to hundreds of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and delivering vocational skills training to enhance technical and business skills and improve economic resilience. We also repaired and improved vital community infrastructure, such as markets, irrigation canals, feeder roads, and check dams to protect villages from flooding while giving farmers a more reliable water supply and helping them sell their produce.

Our other programme areas include education and orphan sponsorship to support some of Afghanistan's most vulnerable children; projects to improve water and sanitation facilities; and helping communities

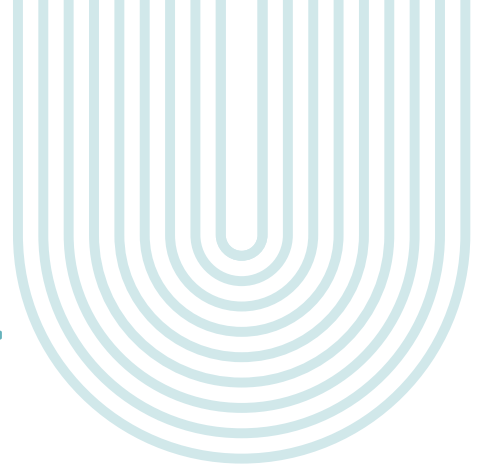
adapt to the ravages of, climate change; and shelter provision. In all these programmes our inclusion and protection focus ensures that the most vulnerable – such as women and girls, older people and people with disabilities – are included in our interventions and protected from harm.

Our work is not done in isolation. We collaborate closely with other humanitarian organisations and United Nations (UN) agencies. In 2023, our efforts meant Islamic Relief was among a handful of non-government organisations (NGOs) selected to advance the UN's Area-based Approach to Development Emergency Initiatives (ABADEI) 2.0 programme, focusing on enhancing community livelihoods and repairing and improving critical infrastructure across the central highlands, western and northern regions.



Islamic Relief staff distributing food packs to rightsholders in Kabul during Ramadan

ABADEI: REBUILDING LIVELIHOODS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES



Building this protection wall has reduced the negative impact of floods on farmland, homes and roads in remote villages in Bamyan province

Our most significant initiative to date, ABADEI, is the flagship project of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Afghanistan. ABADEI supports basic human needs and complements short-term humanitarian life-saving assistance by safeguarding livelihoods and strengthening community resilience.

The ABADEI programme was launched in March 2022 and initially spanned 12 Afghan provinces including Balkh, Bamyan, Herat, Kunduz, Kandahar and Sarepol. The project's first phase concluded in March 2023, significantly enhancing food security for over 170,000 vulnerable people and supporting nearly 1,700 SMEs owned by women.

Through its cash-for-work component, ABADEI also facilitated the completion of over 200 infrastructure projects in the agricultural sector across six provinces. These efforts have contributed to protecting agricultural land from floods and improving the crop yields of local farmers.

Based on the success of phase one, Islamic Relief Afghanistan was among the few NGOs selected to advance the ABADEI 2.0 project. ABADEI 2.0 has been implemented across the central highlands, western regions and northern regions, focusing on two main goals:

Enhancing community resilience and economic development, mainly through supporting women entrepreneurs with cash grants and skills training.

Improving community livelihoods and climate resilience in areas like Bamyan, Daikundi, Ghor, Herat, Badghis and Farah.

The work we are doing in partnership with UNDP includes repairing, improving and constructing key community infrastructure such as irrigation systems, markets, roads and check dams, as well as expanding women's access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET).



Constructing this 10,000 m3 capacity check dam in Ghor province has been crucial in preventing downstream flooding and making more water available for agriculture

ABADEI: NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

Equipped over **1,750 women and girls** with employability skills and knowledge



Provided cash grants to nearly **1,390 women-led informal businesses** to help them expand

Provided temporary wages to over **9,600 people** involved in constructing, repairing and improving community assets



Constructed over **3,460 metres** of protection walls to mitigate flooding

Rehabilitated **42,120 metres** of feeder roads, reducing commuting time and transport costs for farmers



Constructed more than **6,970 metres** of canals to improve farmers' productivity

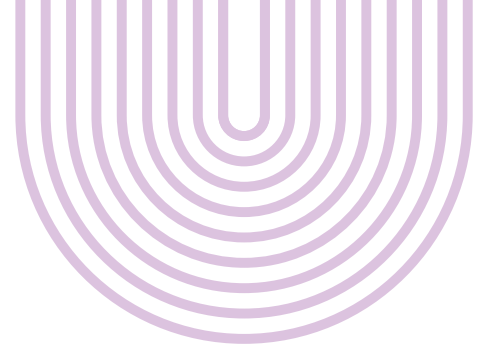
Repaired and improved **six local markets** to provide safe and resilient spaces for traders



Constructed **three check dams** with a total capacity of 32,500 m³ to mitigate the impact of floods and make more water available for farming and drinking

VOICES FROM OUR RIGHTSHOLDERS

Fardina's journey: The benefits of start-up grants and customised training



It was not easy for Fardina, a 29-year-old mother of two, to become an entrepreneur. Raising her children in a low-income household in Mazar-i-Sharif, capital of the northern province of Balkh, Fardina faced severe financial constraints and lacked a network of people to lean on for support.

Fardina's husband could not find a job in Afghanistan, so he went to Iran, where he found work in a factory. His income is low: enough to sustain him, but not the wider family. Despite having to care for two children, her younger sister and her ageing mother on her own, Fardina has never given up trying to build a brighter future for her family. Her journey, marked by resilience and determination, mirrors that of many other Afghan women.

Before the government collapsed in August 2021, Fardina and her younger sister ran a small home-based tailoring business using an old manual machine. The sluggish machine slowed her work, was prone to breaking down regularly, and caused her back pain.

"There's nothing much you can do with a manual machine," she says. "It will jam and break down. I made around 4,000 Afghanis (Afs) per month [around \$55], but this was not enough to meet my family's needs."

Since early 2022, the Taliban authorities have restricted women's right to work and education. For women like Fardina, tailoring remains one of the few remaining sectors where they can still eke out a living, which is why support in these areas is so vital.

Important support

In December 2023, Fardina's fledgling tailoring business was selected by the ABADEI programme, a joint initiative run by Islamic Relief and supported by UNDP.

Through ABADEI, Fardina participated in an eight-day training course for SMEs. After completing the training, she received a grant of 96,500 Afs (around \$1,380) to sustain and expand her business. She used the grant to buy new tailoring equipment, including advanced industrial machines, a zigzag stitching machine, and an electric steam iron.

"I knew my priorities well," Fardina recalls. "I was thirsty for a better machine. When I received the cash grant, I bought an electric tailoring machine. I'm now producing more stuff than ever before, and my income has tripled. I'm able to feed my family."

To attract more customers, Fardina leverages her social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp, where she promotes and sells her colourful products. She has managed to attract customers from as far afield as Pakistan and Iran, and now employs five young women who help her with her business.

"I would like to thank Islamic Relief and UNDP for their support," she says. "I feel humbled that I can take charge of my destiny. I hope to expand my business to other provinces and even beyond."

In Afghanistan, where opportunities for women are limited, Fardina defied expectations and has managed to achieve her dreams. ABADEI supports hundreds of women like Fardina to help them overcome the odds and achieve self-sufficiency.



Gani filling a jerry can with water at a tap stand in her house in Kamal village, Gayan district

“As an older mother, my biggest daily worry was water. Now, my house has a water tap.”

Gani, a 50-year-old widow, lives with her 10 children and grandchildren in Kamal, a hilly and remote village in the Gayan district of Paktika province. She shares a two-room brick home with the rest of her family. There is no bedding except for a few old blankets and pillows.

Most Afghans rely on farming and livestock as a source of income. But Gani is among many who have been forced to give up their farming livelihoods because of unsuccessful harvests and animal deaths brought on by protracted drought.

“Before, we had a piece of land where we grew different types of crops,” she explains. “The harvest was enough to sustain my family throughout the seasons.

“Throughout my life, I have always known the river valleys as our water source. Sometimes the water is clear, and some days muddy and smelly. It didn’t matter. We used it for drinking, washing and cooking. But I don’t know the last time it rained properly.”

An arduous, dangerous task for women and girls

Traditionally, women and girls are responsible for collecting water for their households. If they do not have a well nearby, they have no option but to walk for miles to find water, exposing them to risks such as sexual assault and physical abuse.

“As an older mother, my biggest daily worry was water,” Gani says emotionally. “When I first woke up in the morning, it was never about food; water worried me most.”

Struggling to speak, she adds: “Other women and girls have the strength to walk and fetch water from the river, which is far away. I can no longer walk and carry water on my head. Since then, I have been going door-to-door asking people for water.”

Providing families with safe drinking water

With generous funding from Birmingham-based volunteer group Taskforce GLM, Islamic Relief constructed three solar-powered water networks serving three rural villages in the Gayan district of Paktika province: Kamal, Azar Raja and Miama.

The networks we built each featured a concrete water storage tank and solar-powered pumps to pump water from the wells to additional tanks. In each case a network of gravity-fed pipes connected to the tanks ensures that water is distributed throughout the village. As a consequence, 600 families have access to safe drinking water.

“When the water tap was installed, and water came through the tap, I felt relieved because I would no longer have to ask for water,” says Gani. “I was also happy for our women and daughters. They have seen a lot of problems with water.”

Before these networks were built, about 300 schoolchildren had to walk three kilometres every day to fetch water for their families. The new water facilities mean women and girls are not put at risk by having to walk great distances, and children are no longer exposed to contaminated water that can cause cholera, diarrhoea, and typhoid.

It is humbling to hear that Gani prays for the donors who brought water to her doorstep and promises to keep them in her prayers for the rest of her life.

“May Allah keep the evil away from those who supported us and grant them mercy.”





“If I didn’t get this cash and these supplies, my family situation would be terrible.”

As the morning sun shines through masses of clouds, its occasional brightness cannot take the edge off a strong wind that feels biting cold. It is a wind that does not bode well for the large numbers of Afghans who have to face the brutal winter months in makeshift tents or overcrowded temporary shelters, leaving them exposed to the elements.

In the rural village of Tawoos Khil, in the Kharwar district of Logar province, 65-year-old Mohammad has a radiant smile that belies the tough circumstances his family faces. A father of six, he is partially blind and has to endure various aches and pains that come with ageing. Yet his resilience and grit shine through as he shares his experiences and stories.

Mohammad is the primary breadwinner for his family and faces numerous challenges due to a disability. His visual impairment restricts his ability to see objects clearly, limiting his spatial awareness. Furthermore, his sight worsens at night, rendering him completely blind.

Mohammad never had the chance to go to school, limiting his chances of finding a job. Consequently, he is forced to work as a daily casual labourer. Work is not always readily available, particularly during the lean winter season. On days when he cannot find work, Mohammad wanders the streets, hoping to stumble upon an opportunity to earn some money and provide for his children.

“On certain occasions, I struggle to secure employment, returning home empty-handed and unable to provide food for my family,” he says, his voice full of sadness. “These moments are incredibly challenging, making it difficult for me to face my wife and children due to the shame of not being able to provide for them.

“The situation worsened as I also couldn’t afford heating materials and warm clothing during the cold winter days, forcing my children to endure the cold.”

Islamic Relief outreach teams identified the family after seeing their dire conditions in the face of the brutal winter, providing urgent cash assistance and winter supplies. Mohammad received a winterisation pack

worth 13,500 AFN (equivalent to \$200), including warm clothing and three blankets. The assistance we were able to provide to him was funded by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

“I bought food and heating fuel for my family,” he says, expressing a profound sense of relief. “I was overjoyed to see my children go to bed warm and well fed. I bought food and other things with the cash assistance you gave me.

“If I didn’t get this cash and these supplies, my family situation would be unbearable. I would like to thank Islamic Relief and OCHA for coming to our aid. I could not survive the cold alone.”

Islamic Relief Afghanistan’s annual winterisation assistance was a lifeline for thousands of struggling families in 2023. It provided them with life-saving essentials and prevented them from resorting to dangerous or harmful decisions, such as burning plastic sheeting to find warmth. This underscores the critical importance of humanitarian aid in such harsh winter conditions.



In Laghman, Mohammad receives one of our winter survival packages – warm bedding and clothing and other supplies to help him through the winter months

Helping communities rebuild their lives



Bibi and her daughters appreciate the new home we have provided to replace the one destroyed in an earthquake

It took remarkable resilience for Bibi to survive the severe earthquakes that rocked western Afghanistan in October 2023. It was not until seven months later that the 56-year-old widowed mother-of-five was able to move into a new home provided by Islamic Relief. Despite losing many of her relatives who were trapped under the collapsed houses, Bibi has somehow found the strength to rebuild her life.

Herat province was shaken by three major quakes in close succession, each measuring magnitude 6.3. The initial quakes and the aftershocks that followed left a trail of destruction across the region, also affecting the nearby provinces of Badghis and Farah. The quakes decimated entire villages, mostly mud-brick settlements in Herat province, and claimed the lives of an estimated 2,000 people.

"It was around 11am when the first earthquake struck us," Bibi recalls. "I was outside the house at the time. The earth began to shake violently. Everything that was standing collapsed. I could see the dust from our fallen homes. Then, it was chaotic. People were calling out to their loved ones. I lost my house in the earthquake and was left without a place to live. It was devastating."

Islamic Relief's work in Afghanistan involves providing safe and adequate shelter to people displaced by disasters, conflict, and climate change. We build semi-permanent, solid, and quake-resilient homes for vulnerable families, providing privacy and respite from the country's blazing summers and freezing winters.

With generous funding from the Canadian

Humanitarian Assistance Fund (CHAF), the UK Islamic Mission (UKIM), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), we have built earthquake-resilient houses for 73 of the poorest families affected by the earthquakes. Using local labour to build these new homes ensured an injection of much-needed cash into the local economy to assist impoverished communities. Each two-room dwelling incorporates living space alongside a kitchen, a water tank, and a latrine, increasing families' privacy and dignity.

"The new house has changed my family life," Bibi says. "We couldn't have built these houses for ourselves. We no longer have the resources to put up one. I'm a mother of young daughters, so I was worried about their safety and dignity. It was hazardous and undignified to live in a tent. We struggled to survive."



Bibi and her youngest daughter stand inside of their new house in Gharmoshak village – one of 73 earthquake-resilient homes we have built in Herat

LITTLE VOICES: WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE IN THE FUTURE?



Najiba, eight years old, Balkh

My name is Najiba, and I'm eight years old. I'm a first grade student at the Boria Baf School in Balkh. Islamic Relief provides us with all the learning materials we need in school, and I'm so thankful for their help.

I have four siblings: three brothers and a sister. My mother gets me ready for school in the morning, and my father is a carpenter.

In the future, I want to become a teacher. I was inspired to become a teacher by the daily challenges I go through personally. I have seen we don't have many female teachers. I want to become the first female teacher from my village. I hope that will positively impact many girls who would also emulate me.

Omer, 15 years old, Jalalabad

My name is Omar, and I'm 15 years old. I'm a student in grade 7 at the Sweet Home School in Jalalabad. I have all I need here at school: accommodation, meals, tuition, and learning materials.

I am the only surviving member of my family. I lost them all due to various illnesses – including my parents when I was only four years old. My uncle adopted me, but he is also poor and struggling to meet his family's needs. For the last seven years, I have known Islamic Relief as my parents.

I am determined to become a doctor in the future, not just to help myself but to make a significant difference in the health situation in my country. I have seen people having to travel to other countries for treatment, and I believe that I can help change this situation.

I am deeply grateful to Islamic Relief, Charity Week and the Green Lane Masjid (GLM) for their support and keeping us in school. Your generosity has made a significant difference in my life, and I am genuinely thankful for it.



Omer with classmates at the Sweet Home School in Jalalabad



Maria enrolled in our Orphan Sponsorship Programme a decade ago and is now working as a midwife.

Maria's father died 10 years ago, leaving her mother as the sole breadwinner. Her mother worked as a sheep-shearer. After her father died, Maria wondered whether she would be able to complete high school, much less pursue a university education.

"I knocked on many doors for educational support but none was forthcoming," she says. "Luckily, I was accepted into the Islamic Relief Orphan Sponsorship Programme, and I went on to pursue a degree in midwifery at a private university in Kabul, graduating a few years ago.

"I never imagined that I would be a university graduate. I now work as a volunteer midwife in a hospital – doing what I like most. The joy of assisting a mother in bringing a new life into the world and putting a smile on her face is a gratifying career."

We provided clean water and latrines for Shafiq and her neighbours. Her home was destroyed by an earthquake in Herat in October 2023.

Shafiq, a teenage mother, was fortunate to escape unscathed when the earthquake struck her village in Zindajan district. She was not in her house at the time, so was able to scramble to safety with her four-year-old son as her one-room mud-brick home collapsed before her eyes.

"I was very shocked to witness such devastation," she says. "The ground shook violently. I watched as parts of my house's walls started to crumble. We lost our house to the earthquake, we lost everything.

"We're now living a few steps away from where our house stood. Those who survived are now facing strong winds and a cold winter. My son fell sick, and there was no clinic nearby. Islamic Relief was among the first responders. They brought us water and constructed latrines. We feel safer and more dignified to be using the latrines. Thank you so much."



We provided clean water and latrines for Shafiq and her neighbours. Her home was destroyed by an earthquake in Herat in October 2023

THROUGH THE EYES OF OUR STAFF



A day in Botan Clinic: Dr Wahida's experience on the frontline of primary health care

Dr Wahida is a beacon of hope and a symbol of dedication. She has been a doctor with Islamic Relief Afghanistan since 2022. Wahida leads a six-member health team consisting of a midwife, psychosocial worker, vaccinator, nutritionist, driver, and guard in Botan Clinic, located in a rugged mountainous village in the Gulran district of Herat province.

Dr Wahid and her colleagues drive for two hours to get to the clinic from Herat city each day, setting off at 6am. They aim to reach the clinic by 8am, ready to provide medical assistance, but often experience delays due to the rough terrain of the province's rocky roads often leads to breakdowns.

The clinic primarily offers outpatient services focusing on maternal health, including antenatal and postnatal care, family planning, and emergency treatment. Other services include treating infectious diseases, respiratory infections, skin diseases and diarrhoea, as well as providing vaccinations, nutritional support, health promotion guidance, and counselling.

"Before Islamic Relief set up this clinic, communities used to seek treatment from Herat city, which was not only quite far but also expensive as communities had

to pay for transport," says Dr Wahida. "The families are still reeling from the impact of the earthquakes. They have lost everything they owned. The quakes had a devastating effect on their mental health."

Islamic Relief has established three clinics in the villages of Chehal Dukhtaran, Botan, and Hamamak in Gulran and Robat Sangi districts to address the medical needs of people left devastated by the earthquakes. The quakes had damaged and disrupted the already fragile healthcare system in these remote areas, making the need for these clinics even more urgent.

"Our health services undoubtedly contributed to the communities' resilience and recovery during this difficult time," says Dr Wahida. "I'm proud to be part of a health team committed to providing desperately needed healthcare. Without our support the wellbeing of entire communities would be in jeopardy."



“I feel relieved when our teams deliver aid in remote areas and make their way back safely”

Afghanistan is one of the world’s most challenging countries in which to reach people with emergency aid. Most of those in need live in far-flung, remote areas with poor roads.

However, the long distances and the state of the roads are only half the story for many aid workers. Accessing project locations in most parts of the country is often a dangerous journey.

Before the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, explosions and attacks happened every month. There had been numerous instances of aid workers being kidnapped or taken hostage by armed groups. These types of threats cut off hundreds of thousands of Afghans and their communities from humanitarian aid as organisations shut down their activities.

Islamic Relief currently works to deliver essential services in 19 provinces across the country, including remote areas. It is vital to operate with careful planning and with due consideration of potential security threats, which is where the work of Mirwais Stanikzai, our Security Coordinator, is crucial.

“We cannot ignore the likelihood of our teams potentially falling victim to some form of attack,” Mirwais says. “My role involves assessing the possible risks of delivering humanitarian assistance, so I conduct a comprehensive travel assessment before any field visit. I map any potential security threats based on recent trends and happenings, and based on that, I advise staff accordingly.”

“We work in a fluid security environment where predicting what will happen next becomes more challenging. While security has improved in the last three years, it’s not enough to say we are 100 per cent sure of our staff and rightsholders’ safety. We strive to ensure that all our staff are updated on the security situation of their respective locations and what’s happening around them.”

Islamic Relief has a robust security system and takes every security threat very seriously, as our staff’s security and safety are vital to delivering an effective humanitarian aid operation. For many humanitarian organisations, community acceptance is the bedrock of good security and the ability to provide life-saving assistance to crisis-affected communities in a timely manner.

“As a faith organisation with over two decades of operations in Afghanistan, we have been accepted as part of the fabric of the society,” Mirwais says. “That is why we are present throughout much of Afghanistan. I feel relieved when our teams deliver aid in remote areas and make their way back safely.”



Mirwais Stanikzai plays a vital role as our Security Coordinator in a country with a long history of conflict and insecurity

“For many people living in these remote areas, the distance to the nearest hospital can be the difference between life and death”



Dahir Abdullahi (centre left), our Communication and External Relations Manager, has travelled extensively with our teams delivering aid

My name is Dahir Abdullahi, and I am the Communication and External Relations Manager for Islamic Relief in Afghanistan.

Listening and engaging with communities is a truly rewarding aspect of my work. I find immense joy in gathering testimonials from the people we support, especially from courageous mothers, resilient children, and those with special needs. It's incredibly fulfilling to hear their stories and witness the positive impact we can make together.

This year, I joined a small team of five mobile health workers going to a remote village in Nangarhar province, near the Afghan-Pakistan border. The journey was difficult, with a bumpy ride between agricultural fields and mudbrick settlements. We finally reached Billa village, nestled in rocky mountains overlooking the river.

To get to the village where our clinic is located, we had to cross the river using a small wooden boat operated by a local private owner. This part of the journey can be perilous, especially during the rainy season, and often delays the arrival of our staff at the clinic.

Our clinic offers essential health and nutritional services, including maternity and paediatric services and psychosocial support. It has become a lifeline for impoverished and isolated communities in Billa and nearby villages.

This facility, supported by Islamic Relief Germany, serves around 5,000 people. Most are returnees from Pakistan, along with people from the host communities they are living with. Billa and the nearby villages are almost entirely cut off from the rest of the districts, and only a few can afford the arduous journey to the city in search of treatment. For many people living in these remote areas, the distance to hospitals from their homes can be the difference between life and death.

As we arrived, the patients sat quietly on mats under a tree, waiting to see the doctor. Many of them were women and children, some in severe condition.

The facility serves other catchment villages in the area, some as far as 20 kilometres away. Our teams immediately settled down and bounced into action. They dealt with a variety of cases, such as children and mothers with infectious diseases like malaria and tuberculosis, people with respiratory infections such as pneumonia, skin diseases such as scabies, cases of mental illness including post-traumatic stress disorder, and routine maternal and paediatric care.

At 3pm the last group of patients passed through the clinic. It was time to pack up and return to Jalalabad city to recharge for the following day. Packing up involves carefully storing medical supplies and equipment, ensuring the clinic area is clean and secure, and preparing for the journey back. On average, our teams see around 200 patients in this facility each day, a number which often increases during winter when diseases are more prevalent.



Islamic Relief's mobile health teams doing consultations in Billa village, Nangarhar

“The helplessness and fear of communities devastated by the earthquake will live with me for the rest of my life”



Rubble and ruins characterised the aftermath of the devastating quakes in Herat in October 2023

My name is Nooruddin Haqyar, and I am the area manager for Islamic Relief’s western region offices in Afghanistan.

It was a typical morning in Herat city – until the ground beneath my feet started to shake. I dismissed it as the regular earth tremors we’re used to but the shaking intensified, and the office building began to collapse on us.

While I remembered one of the earthquake safety tips – ‘Stay inside and do not stand in a doorway’ – my instinct propelled me to quickly move out as fast as my legs could carry me. Luckily, no one on my team was injured.

I immediately asked colleagues to assemble in the office courtyard. All we could see within and around the office was dust and destruction. People from the local neighbourhood around our office gathered in the streets, some wailing and calling out to their loved ones. Then news of the full extent of what was happening began to reach us. It turned out to be a series of deadly earthquakes.

I called for an emergency staff meeting to discuss the next course of action. Within seven hours of the first quake, we had deployed a medical team to Herat Regional Hospital, which had started to receive people with injuries. The following day, we conducted a field visit to quickly assess the situation of affected villages so that we could provide targeted assistance to affected families.

I was part of the first team to reach the affected communities in several remote mud-brick villages

in the Zindajan district. I could not believe the devastation the quake had left behind. I saw homes reduced to rubble and social amenities like schools, water points and mosques destroyed.

I saw villagers digging through the rubble with their bare hands and shovels in an attempt to pull out survivors, mostly children and women, from the wreckage. Hundreds of bodies were trapped under collapsed mud-brick homes. Survivors had spent the night out in the open. Some women and children were wrapped in dusty blankets beside their damaged homes.

These communities already struggled with recurrent droughts and lacked basic necessities such as food, clean water, and healthcare. The helplessness and fear of communities devastated by the earthquake will live with me for the rest of my life. Unfortunately, according to the national authorities, we lost around 2,000 people to the series of quakes that happened in a span of two weeks.



Nooruddin Haqyar (left) is our Area Manager for Afghanistan’s western region

A VISUAL JOURNEY THROUGH 2023



Balkh: We are working with farmers to increase their yields and income and build resilience against climate change.



Bamyan: Ensuring orphaned children have a roof over their heads and food on their plates, and can pursue their dreams through high-quality education.



Ghor: Improving irrigation infrastructure to increase farmers' productivity and income and reduce disputes between farmers over water usage.



Herat: Promoting wellbeing among quake-affected children through play and art.



Kabul: Spreading the blessings of the holy month of Ramadan through food packs for vulnerable families.



Kandahar: Providing cash assistance to refugees returning from neighbouring Pakistan to enable them to meet their most pressing needs, such as food, shelter and clothing.



Nangarhar: Providing vital primary healthcare services to Afghan returnees at the Torkham border crossing point from Pakistan.



Paktika: Providing enduring shelter for quake-affected communities with quake-resilient housing to withstand future shocks.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO COMMUNITIES



Islamic Relief's team meets with community representatives for a feedback session to continually improve the quality of our work

Accountability to communities

Islamic Relief Afghanistan's approach to accountability is all about consulting the communities we served and involving them in decision making. We prioritise community engagement processes in our people-centred programming, empowering our rightsholders to participate actively in their own development.

Islamic Relief Afghanistan has established a comprehensive and inclusive accountability framework to ensure that affected populations – particularly women, girls, and people living with disabilities (PLWDs) – are actively involved in decision-making processes and can provide feedback effectively.

"We believe in strong community accountability mechanisms to help us deliver more effective and efficient programming," says Ganesh Thapa, our monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) manager in Afghanistan. "We place a lot of emphasis on community participation and feedback, and response mechanisms are integrated into all our strategies, plans, and programmes, from needs assessment to project implementation to closure."

At the beginning of interventions, our teams tell the local community and other stakeholders how they can contact us and register their feedback. This ensures that all parties are informed about the mechanisms available for providing feedback and raising complaints from the outset of the project.

We select rightsholders through a participatory approach in which we engage community leaders, existing community structures, and established authorities to ensure an inclusive and transparent selection process. We have rolled out several channels for feedback and complaints, including hotlines, SMS text messages, emails, phone calls, community meetings, and feedback boxes during distributions. This ensures accessibility for all individuals, regardless of their circumstances.

As a result of our robust community engagement and feedback mechanisms, we recorded 240 pieces of feedback from members of communities and local authorities in 2023.

All complaints were resolved and integrated into our organisation's learning to inform and improve subsequent interventions.

INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME: CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF HUMANITARIAN LEADERS

Lack of experience is one of the issues we all face in the early stages of our careers. Every employer wants an experienced employee who can start working right away. Our efforts in Afghanistan include bridging this gap and investing in young talent and fresh graduates to meet our needs and develop their careers.

Since 2022 Islamic Relief Afghanistan's Young Professional Development Programme (YPDP) has become an opportunity for graduates and postgraduate students from diverse academic backgrounds to undertake work experience with us.

The internship opportunities we offer combine work assignments and practical experience in a rigorous six-month exercise designed to give graduates a thorough insight into understanding of a variety of functions. These include finance, human resources, supply chain

management, programmes, communication and media, and MEAL, among others.

Since the programme's inception in Afghanistan, we have enabled 26 interns to develop employability skills and knowledge to meet the minimum requirements for an entry-level position in the job market. Some of our interns have joined our own workforce, while others have been employed by other humanitarian organisations or in the private sector.

Through the internships programme, we are producing the next generation of faith-inspired humanitarians who can perform in a rapidly changing and challenging environment.



Khatera Omari, a former intern with Islamic Relief Afghanistan, now works as a programme assistant in our orphans programme.

"The internship programme served as a stepping stone for my professional growth and provided me with a valuable job opportunity upon completion," she says. "My job allows me to work closely with some of Afghanistan's most vulnerable individuals—widows and orphans."








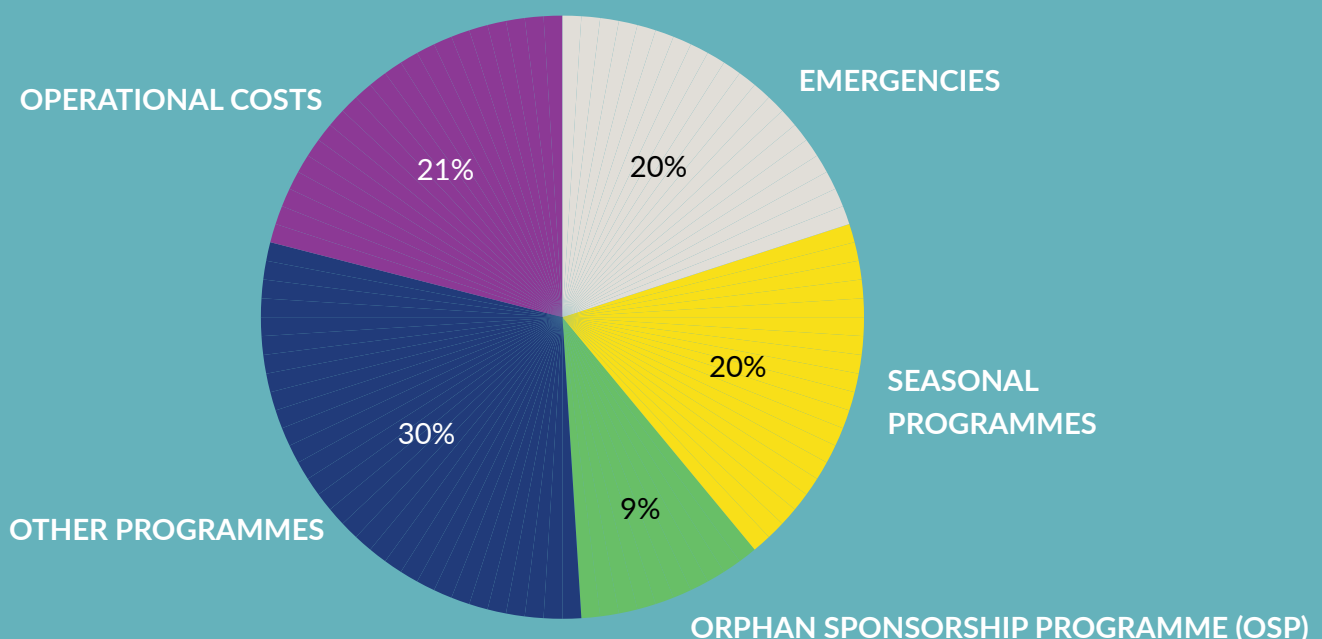
"When you graduate from university, opportunities like Islamic Relief's internship programme are hard to come by," says Ahmad Jalal, a former intern and now an assistant in our monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) team.

"While I was an intern, I worked hard to stand out from other interns and increase my chances of being absorbed into this great organisation's workforce. I had a positive attitude throughout the six months of my journey, and I am thankful for the opportunity."

OUR FINANCES: HOW EVERY POUND IS SPENT

FINANCES AT A GLANCE			
	GBP	Afghanis	
Total operating income	£21,419,549	2,196,788,959	

Programme delivery expenditure	GBP	Afghanis	Overall %
 Emergencies	£4,337,936	444,898,711	20%
 Seasonal programmes (qurbani, Ramadan, Eid gifts and winterisation)	£4,216,007	432,393,625	20%
 Orphan Sponsorship Programme (OSP)	£1,993,305	204,433,329	9%
 Other programmes (education, health, infrastructure, water and sanitation)	£6,372,682	653,582,215	30%
Subtotal for programme delivery	£16,919,930	1,735,307,750	79%
 Operational costs (personnel and management)	£4,499,621	461,481,080	21%
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES	£21,419,549	2,196,788,959	100%





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