



# Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM): Community Needs Amid Conflict Escalation

March 2026 | Afghanistan

## Key Messages

- While secondary data sources recorded conflict events primarily in Paktya, Khost, and Nangarhar, a substantial proportion of key informants (KIs) **in Kunar (24%) and in several settlements in Kandahar (2%) reported their communities experienced conflict as a shock**, suggesting potential underreporting and overlooked impacts beyond areas with recorded incidents.
- Displacement toward areas beyond conflict-affected provinces remains unclear, with neighbouring provinces potentially experiencing overlooked movements, as a share of **KIs in provinces such as Baghlan (7%) and Laghman (4%) reported large-scale arrivals of displaced populations into their settlements**.
- Between December 2025 and March 2026, the share of settlements receiving assistance in conflict-affected provinces reportedly increased. However, in some, a substantial share of KIs, notably in Nangarhar (12%), reported that **assistance did not reach the most vulnerable, highlighting access challenges and potential response gaps**.

## Context and rationale

Cross-border military tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan have persisted in recent years, with intermittent clashes reported along the Durand Line. These tensions escalated significantly from late February 2026, following airstrikes and subsequent exchanges of fire between the two sides.<sup>1</sup>

Several assessment efforts have been undertaken across impacted districts, including the Community Rapid Needs Assessment (CRNA),<sup>2</sup> to assess communities' evolving needs. However, coverage does not extend to all affected areas. Against this backdrop, REACH Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM), conducted nationwide between 16 February and 14 March 2026, provides complementary data that may help fill existing geographic and information gaps.

This brief presents an overview of community needs across affected provinces based on HSM data, noting that more granular information on conflict-impacted districts is available through sources such as the [CRNA](#). The brief covers exposure to conflict, changes in market dynamics, displacement, and access to public services.

## Methodology

The Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM) is a nationwide, community-level, multi-sectoral needs assessment carried out quarterly across all districts of Afghanistan. It uses structured interviews with key informants in selected settlements to track needs, vulnerabilities, and emerging trends, and to support geographic and sectoral prioritization.

This brief is primarily based on [HSM data](#) and is triangulated with other sources, including the Community Rapid Needs Assessment ([CRNA](#)) and the Joint Market Monitoring Initiative ([JMMI](#)), among others. HSM does not exclude districts assessed by the CRNA, thus, findings may reflect conditions of such districts. Conflict affected provinces are defined using IOM incident reporting data for the two months prior to data collection (see annex 1 in page 5).

All figures presented refer to the proportion (%) of key informants reporting a given condition in their settlement. Further details of the methodology can be found in page 5.

## Conflict

Current conflict incident data recorded conflict events in 7 provinces,<sup>3</sup> with high concentrations in Paktya, Khost and Nangarhar. Alongside these provinces, a substantial proportion of KIs in Kunar (24%) reported their settlements experienced conflict as a shock event.<sup>a</sup> In other neighbouring provinces, such as Kandahar, few settlements reported the same, highlighting a relatively localized impacts of the current conflict. Moreover, it indicates underreporting of incidents in some areas and potentially overlooked impacts of the recent conflict.

In provinces affected by conflict, KIs reported that its main impacts were debt taking (55%), loss of income (52%), and loss of access to education (44%). In Kunar, where the highest number of conflict shocks occurred according to the HSM, 47% of those settlements reportedly experienced injury or death of individuals in the community.

Moreover, Afghanistan has long been heavily affected by contamination from explosive remnants of war, remaining among the countries most impacted globally.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the recent escalation in conflict, including the use of explosives, may increase the presence of such hazards or exacerbate existing contamination. In the assessed provinces, a notable share of settlements reportedly had

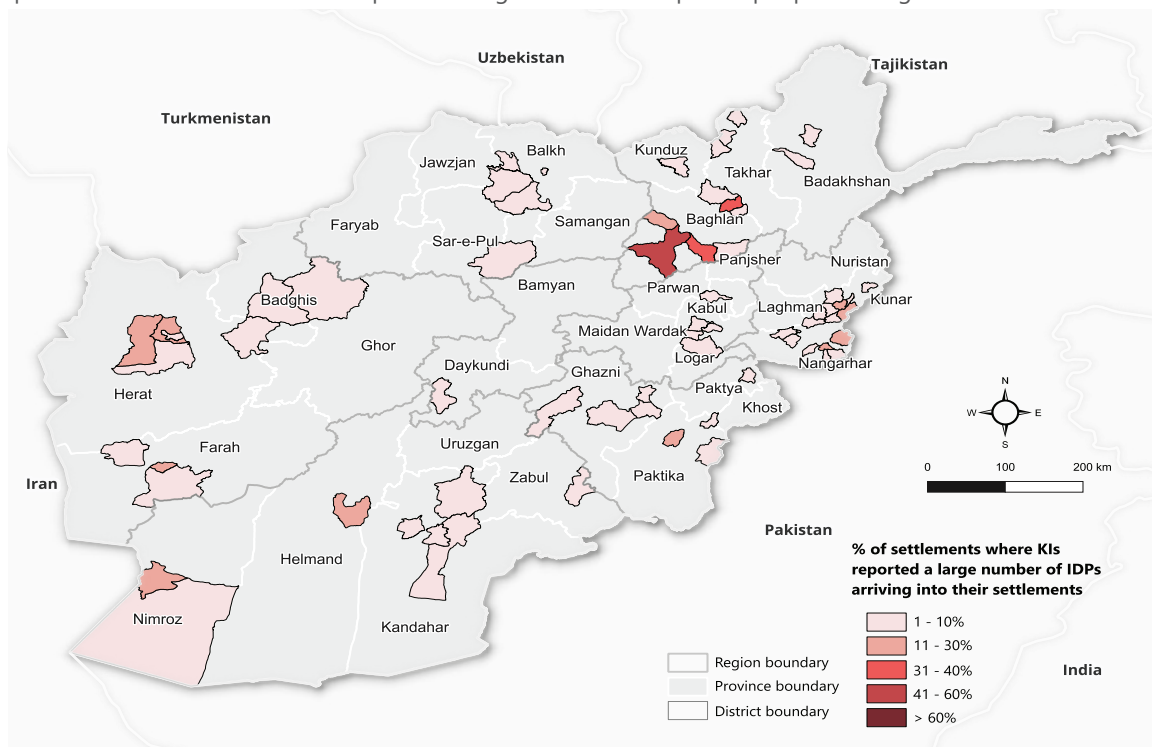
explosive hazards present, with Kabul (17%), Kunar (13%), and Nangarhar (10%) among the most affected. Only in Kunar did some settlements (9%) report that individuals within the community had been injured or killed. In other provinces, the reported impact on mobility and access to basic services appeared limited.

## Displacement

Considering the nearly 50,000 individuals displaced from and into conflict-affected districts, movement toward non-assessed areas remains unclear, as per the CRNA as of 16 March.<sup>5</sup> According to HSM, in several neighbouring districts, particularly four districts in Kandahar, key informants reported large arrivals of displaced populations, although this was observed in fewer than 20% of settlements.

In other provinces, reports of displacement were higher, although it remains unclear whether these movements are linked to the current conflict (see map 1). In provinces with lower reports of large-scale arrivals, such as Laghman and Kabul, displaced households were present in smaller numbers, with key informants noting that only a few households in each community had been displaced, suggesting a slower but steady influx.

Map 1: % of settlements where KIs reported a large number of displaced people arriving in their settlements



<sup>a</sup> A shock is defined in the HSM questionnaire as a major event that directly affected many people in the settlement in the past 3 months.

Cross-border return from Pakistan remained at similar levels compared to December 2025,<sup>b</sup> with 24% of settlements reportedly hosting cross-border returnees. In the provinces neighbouring Pakistan, the trend was similar, except in Kunar, where the share of settlements with returnees increased from 38% to 62%. In most of these settlements, the majority of returnees were reportedly staying in their own properties, rented houses, or with relatives and friends; in 13%, the majority were living in tents or makeshift shelters.

## Market dynamics

According to REACH Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI), as of March 2026, several provinces along the Pakistan Afghanistan border experienced partial and limited market disruptions, increased demand for food items, and relatively minor price increases. However, overall, markets appeared resilient, with most provincial markets able to diversify suppliers. Only Zabul was a notable exception, where price increases and supply chain disruptions appeared more pronounced.<sup>6</sup>

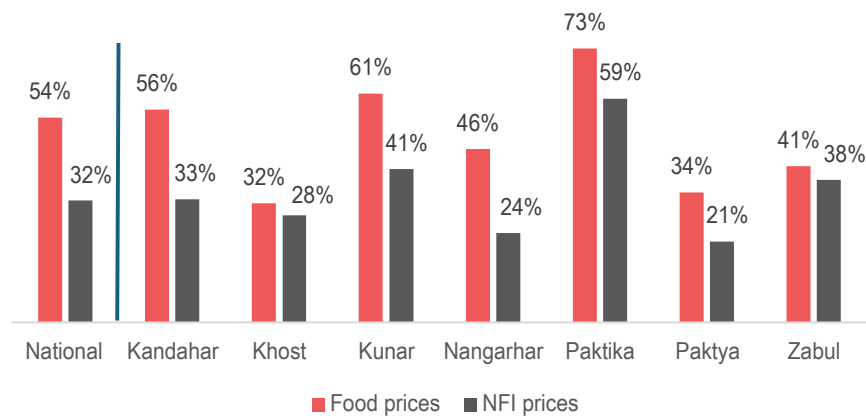
KIs in some affected provinces also reported barriers to accessing markets. Notably, unsafe road conditions were reported in a substantial share of settlements, particularly in Kunar (51%), Nuristan (44%), and Zabul (43%). In Kunar and Nuristan, this was also reflected in reduced purchasing capacity, with over 20% of KIs reporting that most people in their settlements were unable to afford essential items.

Overall, while markets appeared relatively resilient at the provincial level, community-level findings suggest continued variation, with some settlements, particularly in provinces such as Kunar, Paktika, Kandahar, and Zabul, reporting price increases, access constraints, and reduced purchasing capacity.

## Deterioration of public services

Although conflict events have been localized in specific settlements along the border, critical infrastructure may still be impacted or experience reduced capacity.

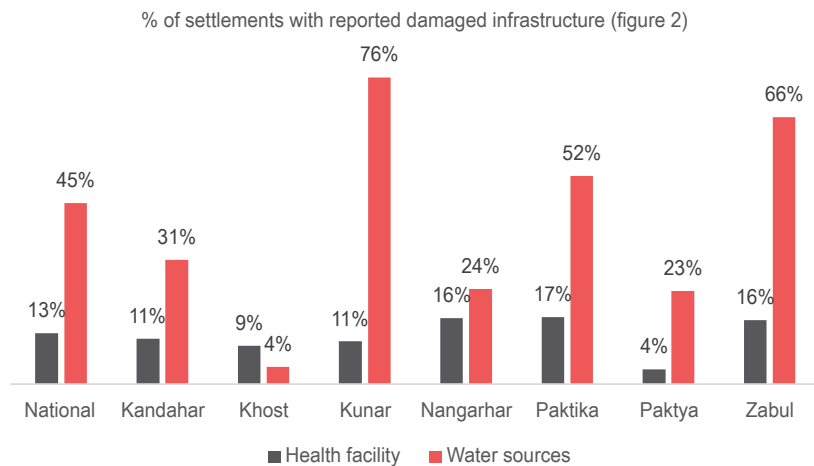
% of settlements where KIs reported big increase in prices, by category (figure 1)



However, findings from HSM suggest that more localized market dynamics may be more affected. Price increases, potentially linked to border closures or restricted access, were reported in 54% of settlements across the country. In conflict-affected provinces, this proportion was higher, with increases of more than 20 percentage points observed in Paktika, Kunar, and Kandahar compared to December 2025. A similar pattern was observed for non-food items, with most of these provinces, except for Kandahar, reportedly experiencing price increases (Figure 2).

According to KIs, health facilities did not appear to have sustained additional damage since December 2025, whereas public water sources reportedly experienced further damage. The most notable cases are Zabul (from 4% to 66%) and Paktika (from 7% to 52%), where the proportion of settlements reportedly experiencing structural damage increased by more than 40 percentage points over the three months prior to data collection.

<sup>b</sup> Border crossings with Pakistan have experienced repeated closures since late 2025 due to security tensions. These closures have not been continuous, with intermittent and partial reopening reported. Reuters (2025, 2026).



## Scale-up of humanitarian assistance

Across the country, the proportion of settlements reportedly receiving assistance in response to new arrivals increased from 42% to 51% between November 2025 and February to March 2026, mainly in the form of in-kind assistance (18% to 34%). Expectedly, this increase was driven by affected provinces, including Paktya and Paktika. However, in some areas with reported conflict events, there was notable decrease (i.e., in Kandahar: 67% to 40%). Despite the reported increase in assistance, some areas still risk exclusion.

As in-kind assistance remains the most commonly provided modality, a substantial share of KIs reported that the assistance they received did not meet the quality needed to address community needs: in Kandahar (22%), Nangarhar (19%), and Kunar (16%). Notably, in Nangarhar, 12% of KIs reported that assistance did not reach the most vulnerable.

Despite increased in-kind support and relatively good market functionality, financial services remained unavailable in several affected areas. In Khost, Paktya, and Kandahar, more than 40% of settlements reportedly lacked access to financial services, whereas in Nangarhar and Kunar, fewer than 20% of settlements reportedly faced such limitations. Overall, assistance in affected provinces remains constrained by access and internal dynamics.

## ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).

## Methodology Overview

The Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM) is a key informant-level assessment covering approximately 12,000 settlements across Afghanistan, accounting for 54% of the population within the assessed settlements. Key informants (KIs) – including religious leaders, teachers, healthcare practitioners, and government officials – are surveyed to collect information on community needs.

Key informants are selected using a two-stage methodology. First, settlements are randomly chosen using a population-weighted approach, giving larger settlements within each BSU a higher probability of selection while still

including smaller ones. Second, trained enumerators visit selected settlements and identify relevant key informants through a snowball approach.

The sampling strategy aims to cover all districts and Basic Service Units (BSUs) in the country. A BSU is defined as a geographic unit where a number of households share public spaces and essential services, including health facilities or schools. The collected data is then aggregated at the district level to inform different actors. Results are indicative, not representative.

For a comprehensive understanding, please refer to the [HSM terms of reference \(ToR\)](#).

## Annex 1: List of districts with recorded conflict incidents<sup>7</sup>

Province	District	OCHA Code
Nangarhar	Jalalabad	AF0601
	Chaparhar	AF0604
	Deh Bala	AF0610
	Pachir Wa Agam	AF0611
	Goshta	AF0614
	Achin	AF0615
	Muhmand Dara	AF0617
	Lalpoor	AF0618
	Dur Baba	AF0622
Paktika	Omna	AF1206
	Barmal	AF1214
	Turwo	AF1219
	Jaji	AF1307
	Chamkani	AF1310
	Dand Wa Patan	AF1311
Khost	Gurbuz	AF1403
	Terezayi	AF1408
	Jaji Maydan	AF1413
Kunar	Marawara	AF1502
	Sar Kani	AF1505
	Khas Kunar	AF1510
	Nari	AF1515
Zabul	Shamul Zai	AF2610
Kandahar	Spin Boldak	AF2711
	Shorabak	AF2714

## Endnotes

1 OCHA (2026). [Afghanistan Situation Update #1: Humanitarian Impact of Afghanistan-Pakistan Military Escalation \(05 Match 2026\)](#).

2 OCHA (2026). [Community Rapid Needs Assessment \(CRNA\): Afghanistan-Pakistan military escalation dashboard](#).

3 Based on IOM, Incident report tracking (March – February 2026). (internal document)

4 HALO Trust. [“Afghanistan remains one of the most landmine-contaminated countries in the world”](#). Accessed March 2026.

5 Based on CRNA, as of 16 March 2026.

6 REACH Afghanistan. [Joint Market Monitoring Initiative \(JMIMI\) dashboard](#). Accessed 30 March 2026.

7 Based on IOM, Incident report tracking (March – February 2026). (internal document).