

UNICEF Afghanistan

NORTHERN REGION EARTHQUAKE UPDATE #2

First 72-hours

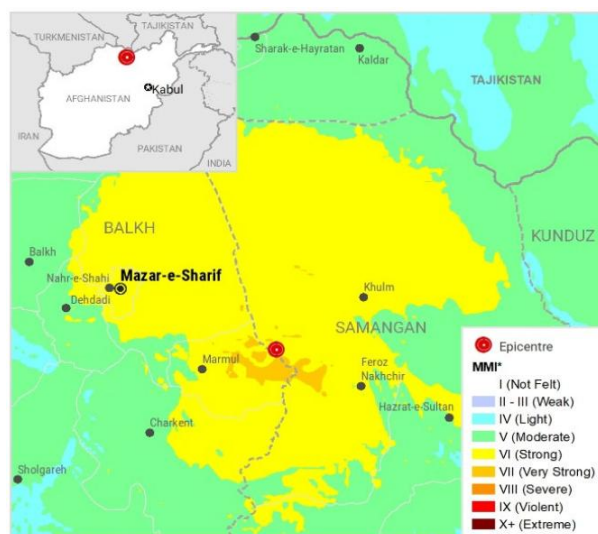
On 5 November 2025, Shamullah sits with his children in front of their home, which was destroyed by the 3 November earthquake in Aybak city, Samangan Province. ©UNICEF/Karimi

SITUATION OVERVIEW

In the early hours of 3 November, a powerful 6.3 magnitude earthquake ripped through northern Afghanistan, shaking communities from Balkh to Samangan as families slept. The epicentre was located between Khulm (Samangan) and Mazar-e-Sharif (Balkh) – close enough to the region's largest northern city to trigger panic across neighbourhoods. The quake was felt as far as Kabul, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, forcing thousands of families to flee their homes into the freezing night.

At least 25 people (12 in Balkh, 12 in Samangan, and 1 in Sar-e-Pul) are confirmed dead and nearly 1,000 injured – with caseloads expected to rise as remote communities become reachable. According to USGS PAGER, up to 110,000 people were exposed to very strong shaking¹.

Early assessments indicate nearly 800 homes destroyed or damaged (305 destroyed, 490 damaged) across Samangan and Balkh. An overflight by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation confirmed no large-scale structural collapse, though minor landslides and rockfalls were observed near Feroz Nakhchir. Roads remain largely passable, and water systems appear functional. The most affected districts are Feroz Nakhchir, Khulm and Hazrat Sultan in Samangan and Sholgara and Marmul in Balkh.² Overall, the most-affected districts



*MMI: Modified Mercalli Scale (2-3: Weak; 4: Light; 5: Moderate; 6: Strong; 7: Very Strong). Data source: USGS
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

¹ OCHA flash update, 5 November 2025

² Ibid

are Feroz Nakhchir, Khulm and Hazrat Sultan in Samangan Province and Sholgara and Marmul in Balkh Province.

UNICEF and partners have completed rapid multi-sector assessments across 26 communities. Initial findings confirm significant disruption to education: 91 education facilities have been affected (48 public schools and 43 community-based education classes), further worsening access to learning in an already underserved region.

Preliminary Multi-Sectoral Rapid Assessment Framework (MSRAF) data from the affected areas in Samangan and Balkh also point to serious WASH challenges. Across the 26 communities assessed, 18 water sources have been damaged; 9 communities reported insufficient water quantity, and another 9 communities reported poor water quality. Open defecation is widespread, practiced in 14 communities, while 11 communities have no access to latrines. Access to basic hygiene is extremely limited: 24 communities lack access to soap, and 15 do not have functional handwashing facilities.

UNICEF RESPONSE (First 72 hours)

Within hours of the earthquake, UNICEF mobilised surge teams, supplies, and flexible funding to reach affected communities across Balkh and Samangan. USD 500,000 in flexible thematic funding was immediately reallocated to kick-start lifesaving interventions, enabling teams to deploy quickly, conduct assessments, and start delivering services while needs were still being confirmed.



On 5 November, Senior Emergency Coordinator Charles Nzuki speaks with community members and surveys destruction in Aybak, Samangan Province, two days after the 3 November earthquake. ©UNICEF

UNICEF health teams – including female health workers – are delivering trauma care, primary healthcare, and mental health and psychosocial support. UNICEF programme officers and female social mobilisers are present in hospitals, affected villages and temporary gathering sites, documenting needs and linking children and caregivers to services.

Emergency coordination mechanisms have been activated at national and sub-national level. UNICEF is co-leading Operational Coordination Team (OCT) meetings in both provinces, aligning sectors, prioritising high-risk communities, and ensuring faster joint decision-making.

The response now prioritises three critical fronts:

- Ensuring continuity of essential services (health, nutrition, hygiene and safe learning).
- Delivering winter supplies and core relief items to families sleeping outdoors or in damaged shelter.
- Strengthening subnational coordination to link immediate response to winterisation and inter-cluster planning for the coming weeks.

Health

UNICEF has ensured uninterrupted health services across Balkh and Samangan from the earliest hours of the emergency. With support from the World Bank-funded HER programme, services remain functional in 163 health facilities, covering primary, secondary and trauma care. Since 3 November, facilities supported by UNICEF have treated 516 injured patients — including 360 trauma cases and 156 surgeries – demonstrating the scale of the caseload absorbed by the system in a short time.

To strengthen referral pathways, 12 ambulances are operating 24/7, transporting patients from remote villages to facilities capable of managing serious injuries. UNICEF has delivered emergency health kits, AWD kits, and pre-positioned supplies including IEHKs, midwifery kits, resuscitation kits, tents and winter clothing for affected children and caregivers.

Nutrition

Children's nutritional status is a growing concern as families face displacement, cold temperatures and reduced access to food. Mobile Health and Nutrition Teams have screened 425 children for acute malnutrition and provided IYCF counselling to 225 mothers – critical to protect infants and young children in a context where family coping capacity is already weak.

UNICEF has dispatched 3,000 cartons of essential nutrition commodities and 1,000 cartons of RUTF to affected areas, with an additional 2,900 cartons pre-positioned. Infant formula is being distributed for infants unable to breastfeed, to ensure continuity of safe feeding practices in this emergency.

Child Protection

UNICEF and partners are prioritising protection of children and caregivers affected by the earthquake. Twenty-six social workers have been deployed across hospitals and affected communities to identify vulnerable children, monitor risks, and link families to psychosocial support. Family tracing and reunification mechanisms are active in the hardest-hit areas – and to date, no unaccompanied or separated children have been reported.

Assessments across 15 villages in four districts identified 194 affected families. Among them: 52

female-headed households and 18 individuals with severe disabilities have already received psychosocial support and winter clothing and have been referred for additional services where needed. Child protection partners, with 30 percent female workforce, have also collected nearly 200 community feedback entries. Forty-seven women have accessed counselling services and injured cases have been referred to health facilities.

To provide safe spaces for children in distress, 15 child-friendly spaces are being established in the affected areas.



On 5 November 2025, Shukria, a dedicated social worker, provided psychosocial support and guidance to families affected by the devastating earthquake that struck Aybak city in Samangan province.
@UNICEF

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

UNICEF is ensuring affected families have access to safe drinking water and essential hygiene support. In Qosh Mala village (Feroz Nakhchir District, Samangan), 400 hygiene kits and 50 boxes of water purification tablets have already been distributed, reaching approximately 2,800 people. Forty thousand jerrycans and 3,000 hygiene kits are being prepared for rapid deployment to other priority locations.

Hygiene promotion is underway, led by UNICEF-supported social mobilisers conducting awareness sessions with women and caregivers to reinforce safe water practices. An additional 500,000 bars of soap are ready for distribution. UNICEF and WASH Cluster partners are further planning distributions of 151 hygiene kits in Feroz Nakhchir (Samangan), 276 in Khulm, and 24 in Marmul (Balkh), targeting another 3,000 people.



On 5 November a social mobilizer is conducting a hygiene awareness session for women in Aybak, Samangan province. ©UNICEF

Education

Preliminary assessments confirm that the earthquake has severely disrupted learning across Balkh and Samangan. At least 91 education facilities have been affected – including 48 public schools and 43 community-based education (CBE) classes. Many of these structures were already fragile before the quake; damage now threatens to push children out of learning entirely.

UNICEF and partners are prioritising continuity of learning through temporary solutions while formal structural assessments continue. High-performance tents are being deployed to replace damaged CBE learning spaces, ensuring children – especially girls – do not lose the limited access to education they have. UNICEF will also advocate for rapid rehabilitation of public schools so that temporary solutions do not become long-term deficits.

Social Protection

UNICEF and partners are combining cash assistance with essential household supplies to support families at highest risk – especially female-headed households, child-headed households, and families living with persons with disabilities. Family kits with cooking sets, tarpaulins, warm winter clothing and blankets are already pre-positioned for immediate distribution.

Cash assistance will be delivered in two phases:

- 1) Multi-purpose cash to help families cover essential needs in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake.
- 2) A second round of cash transfers aligned with the inter-cluster winter response 2025/26, targeting the most affected districts as temperatures drop.

This dual approach is designed to stabilize households quickly, while ensuring children are protected as winter conditions intensify.

Winterization

Winter conditions are rapidly approaching in the northern region, heightening risks for families whose homes are damaged or unsafe. UNICEF has pre-positioned family kits and 5,000 sets of warm winter clothing and blankets, and distributions are underway in priority communities. These supplies are being coordinated with cluster partners to ensure coverage for families now sleeping outdoors, in damaged structures or staying with relatives.

On 6 November, UNICEF, in collaboration with other UN agencies and NGO Partners, carried out a joint distribution of essential non-food items to support families in the most affected districts of Samangan Province. Through this coordinated effort, UNICEF and its partners provided hygiene kits, winter clothing, and blankets to 427 vulnerable households in Khulm and Ferozakchir districts. This intervention aimed to address urgent needs and enhance and mitigate the risks associated with the harsh winter season.



On 5 November, in Kulm district women gather to receive hygiene kits and winter clothing distributed by UNICEF. @UNICEF

UNICEF is integrating winterization into the first phase of the response to reduce exposure to cold weather, prevent respiratory infections, and mitigate the risk of illness among children and pregnant women as temperatures fall. Targeting and allocation are being aligned with the inter-cluster winter planning to protect the most vulnerable before temperatures drop further.

Coordination:

WASH Cluster partners have mobilised life-saving interventions, installing two 5,000L water bladders, delivering 9,000L/day of trucked water, setting up 30 emergency latrines, and conducting hygiene promotion sessions. Preliminary assessments indicate most water systems remain functional, with only localised issues requiring repair.

The Education Cluster has convened partners to review assessment findings, identify priority needs, and coordinate with other sectors. Joint assessments are underway. As immediate support to prevent learning loss, UNICEF is deploying 11 high-performance tents to replace damaged CBE classrooms.

The Nutrition Cluster continues to coordinate partners to ensure uninterrupted services. To date, UNICEF and partners have screened 1,166 children, admitted 10 for severe acute malnutrition treatment, and provided IYCF counselling to 579 caregivers. An additional 1,000 cartons of RUTF have been released to reinforce the response pipeline.

The Child Protection AoR is coordinating with 10 partners to align priorities and messaging. Although no family separation cases have been reported, many children are experiencing psychological distress. Twenty-six social workers and psychosocial counsellors have been redeployed, and initial assistance has already included the distribution of 276 winter kits and 828 blankets. Plans are underway to establish 15 Child-Friendly Spaces and provide hygiene support for affected children and caregivers.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES:

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA): UNICEF has trained all staff, implementing partners, and Community Engagement and Feedback Center (CEFC) personnel on PSEA, including case intake and psychosocial first aid for sensitive cases. IEC materials and guidelines have been distributed. All reports of SEA are being handled in line with UNICEF's PSEA Accountability Framework.

Gender: Female staff continue to play a critical role in reaching women and children safely. Damaged facilities, overcrowded hospitals, and limited privacy are heightening risks – including GBV, poor menstrual hygiene and reduced access to reproductive health care. Immediate priorities include pre-positioning dignity kits, PEP kits and maternal supplies; establishing safe, sex-segregated WASH facilities with lighting; distributing hygiene kits through women-friendly methods; enforcing PSEA measures; strengthening GBV referral pathways; and collecting more sex- and age-disaggregated data to improve targeting.

Social and Behaviour Change (SBC): UNICEF is ensuring communities affected by the earthquake receive timely, life-saving information and can adopt protective behaviours. Leveraging existing trusted networks – including grandmother groups, community health workers, religious leaders (TAAVON) and youth groups (Qahramanan) – UNICEF is delivering key messages through social mobilisers and CEFC facilitators. To date, 941 people have been reached with key information, and 377 community members have participated in hygiene and safety sessions. Feedback from 217 affected individuals has been recorded through AAP systems and is informing programme adjustments. Digital channels are expanding reach through U-Report, while public service announcements on aftershock safety are being broadcast on local radio stations.



On 5 November, a social worker at a Community Engagement and Feedback Center listens to feedback from community members at an earthquake-impacted village in Samangan. ©UNICEF

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