

# AFGHANISTAN: Earthquakes in Herat Province

## Health Situation Report No. 14

January 2024



### SITUATION UPDATE

#### Highlights

**Series of earthquakes and aftershocks** hit Herat Province in western Afghanistan between 7 and 15 October 2023.

Around **275,000** people are impacted. Most of the displaced individuals are grappling with various health issues.

By the end of January 2024, Health Cluster partners provided health services to a total of **145,684** individuals in six districts: Zindajan, Injil, Kushk, Herat City, Kohsan, and Gulran.

The Health Cluster is seeking **US\$ 12.7 million** but still faces a US\$ 7.5 million deficit to provide adequate support.



#### Overview:

Due to three earthquakes in Herat province, Afghanistan between 7 and 15 October 2023, each with magnitudes of 6.8, over 275,000 individuals were affected. Many survivors and victims are still staying in tents and temporary shelters. This has predisposed them to different risks including health risks, especially the bricks of water borne and food borne diseases, skin infections and other hazards related to harsh winters. This vulnerability is particularly amplified for vulnerable groups of people like pregnant and lactating women, children, the elderly, persons with specific needs and those with comorbidities. Looking at this situation, the World Health Organization (WHO), along with other health partners, continued response activities in Herat province.

In total, 145,684 individuals have been provided with humanitarian health assistance by January 2024 in leadership of the Health Cluster through 20 health partners. WHO and the partners' interventions encompass a range of health care services, such as primary health care, physical rehabilitation, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), as well as the provision of essential medicine and medical supplies. WHO has also deployed surveillance-support teams (SSTs) to the affected villages to monitor diseases trends and respond to communicable diseases cases. Furthermore, WHO is actively working on establishing new primary health facilities in the affected areas, particularly in Zindajan, Ghoryan, Injil, and Kohsan districts, to ensure continuous service provision in the face of rising demands.

Despite these efforts, a significant funding gap persists. The Health Cluster has appealed for US\$ 12.7 million to sustain these initiatives through March 2024, but only US\$ 5.2 million has been received thus far. This substantial gap threatens to leave vulnerable populations even more exposed to health-related challenges.

# EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Between 7 October and 31 January 2024, Health Cluster partners provided health services to a total of 145,684 individuals in six districts, namely: Zindajan (84,318), Injil (18,093), Kushk (14,666), Herat City (9,850), Kohsan (10,784), and Gulran (7,973). Among the beneficiaries, 120,934 individuals received primary health care services, including reproductive health and MHPSS. Additionally, 14,937 individuals benefited from services focused on the prevention, detection, and response to communicable diseases outbreaks. Trauma care and rehabilitation services were provided to 5,579 individuals, while various kits such as mama and baby kits, dignity kits, and individual cleaning delivery kits were distributed to 4,234 individuals.

## Health Cluster Coordination

Overall, 145,684 individuals have been provided with humanitarian health assistance by January 2024 in leadership of the Health Cluster through 20 health partners.

- By 31 January 2024, a total of 15 static health facilities and five Family Health Houses (FHHs) had been deployed to 15 earthquake-affected communities. These facilities are providing primary health care, including reproductive health and MHPSS services. The deployment of these facilities was made possible with the support of five Health Cluster partners: OCCD/WHO (8), World Vision (4), AADA/UNFPA (2), OHPM/UNICEF (1) and CARE (5 FHHs).
- The Regional Health Cluster coordination team took proactive measures in responding to the earthquake-affected population in Herat. They have conducted regular coordination meetings with the health partners and relevant stakeholders to ensure a well-coordinated health response in the affected areas, preventing duplication and optimizing resource utilization. Additionally, the team actively engaged in various coordination platforms, including the Inter Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG), Operational Coordination Team (OCT), and Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) committee meetings, ensuring a comprehensive multi-cluster response.



Photo: World Vision

## Trauma and Hospital Care

Two mild earthquakes took place in Herat during the month of January 2024. However, no injured cases were received in any one of the health facilities, including Herat Regional Hospital. Herat Regional Hospital is a 650-bed hospital in Herat city. Since October 2024, almost 889 individuals were received and managed for trauma care. At the end of January, no patient is admitted in the hospital for trauma case management.

WHO Health Emergencies Programme (WHE) trauma management unit conducted Basic Emergency Care (BEC) training in Herat from 28 January to 1 February 2024. A total of 51 first-line health care providers, including 25 women, from 17 health facilities across the western region were trained to manage emergency cases

Additionally, WHO is actively monitoring medicine stocks at Herat Regional Hospital to ensure sufficient supply for earthquake-affected victims and maintain readiness for future emergencies.

## Primary Health Care

Eight fixed health facilities continued providing integrated health services in earthquake-affected areas, including primary health care and MHPSS for the earthquake-affected population in Herat province. The mentioned WHO-supported facilities are run by the Organization for Community Coordination and Development (OCCD). Additionally, five Mobile Health and Nutrition Teams (MHNTs) are deployed to the earthquake-affected areas.

The Health Cluster partners plan to deploy additional eight static health facilities in earthquake-affected districts. The site selection and staff recruitment processes have already been completed, and currently awaiting the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs). The new static health facilities will be supported by CARE/WHO (4), IRC (2) and IRW (3).



Photo: Handicap International

Photo: IRW

## Disease Surveillance/Potential Disease Outbreak Prevention and Response

WHO continued strengthening surveillance activities in earthquake-affected areas. The number of SSTs has increased to ten from five. SSTs are deployed in Zindajan district and are conducting active surveillance for epidemic-prone infectious diseases.

In January, a total of 3,426 acute respiratory infections (ARI) cases, 126 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 54 acute watery diarrhea (AWD) cases were reported.



SSTs in earthquake-affected areas of Injil district in Herat.  
Photo: WHO Afghanistan

A total of 946 rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs) and 1,459 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests were conducted for suspected COVID-19 cases, of which four and 122 were positive, respectively. Additionally, four RDTs were carried out for AWD cases, with all test results returning negative. Samples from two suspected measles cases were also tested and the results were negative.

Districts	Diseases	Number of reported cases During 01–27 Jan 2024						
		Male		Female		Total		
		<5 Years	>5 Years	<5 Years	>5 Years	Male	Female	Total
Zinda Jan	ARI	365	1,259	348	1,454	1,624	1,802	3,426
	Measles	0	0	1	1	0	2	2
	AWD	26	6	14	8	32	22	54
	Tetanus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Confirmed COVID-19	0	41	0	85	41	85	126



## WASH and Rehabilitation

WHO's Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) team has conducted WASH assessment in eight primary health care (PHC) health facilities of Zindajan, Ghoryan, Kohsan and Injil districts. The number of beneficiaries received WASH services in earthquake-affected areas are as follows:

- People reached with provision of drinking water: 9,424
- People received emergency latrines: 2,531
- People reached with hygiene promotion messages: 3,071
- People reached with provision of bathing stations: 2,156
- People provided with hand washing stations: 1,470
- People received hygiene kits: 6,160

## Operational Support and Logistics

WHO has donated 11 Items (medical equipment and instruments along with emergency kits) to Herat Regional Hospital and provided three vehicles for 12 SSTs for active surveillance at the earthquake-affected areas.



WHO medical items and medicines supplies to Herat Regional Hospital. Photo: WHO Afghanistan

## GAPS AND NEEDS

Continued and sustained health care delivery: The demand for high-quality health care services is on the rise, particularly the need for medicines and medical supplies.

- High risk of outbreaks and epidemic-prone infectious diseases: Risk of outbreaks and epidemic-prone infectious diseases, particularly AWD, scabies, COVID-19 and measles, is higher in earthquake-affected areas, especially in areas where people are living in tents due to overcrowding, poor hygiene practices and lack of sanitation facilities. It is imperative to strengthen risk communication and community engagement efforts to raise awareness and sensitize the community to effective preventive measures.
- Ambulatory services: Despite partners' efforts in health care service provision, there is a critical need to activate the ambulatory system to ensure 24/7 timely referrals.
- Funding gap: Ongoing health operations strain our resources, leaving a significant shortfall in addressing the health needs of earthquake-affected populations. The Health Cluster is seeking US\$ 12.7 million but still faces a US\$ 7.5 million deficit to provide adequate support.

## Helping women and girls through psychosocial support in Herat, Afghanistan

Several deadly earthquakes and multiple aftershocks in Herat province in western Afghanistan between 7 and 15 October 2023 have left many victims and survivors in a state of strong mental shock.

Psychologist Qadria Tabi is trying to help women and young girls in Kushkak village of Zindajan district to return to normal life. She works in the WHO-supported Kushkak Health Centre, where she is joined by a male psychologist to provide psychosocial support to earthquake-affected people.

More than 100 days after the earthquakes in Herat, around 90 percent of women and girls that Qadria meets for consultation are depressed. “Most of them are scared that a strong earthquake can happen again any time.

They are also stressed for losing most of their family members in the earthquakes,” Qadria Tabi said. “Some are even feeling guilty for not being able to protect other members of the family,” she added.

According to Qadria, the earthquakes increased mental health issues of women and girls in earthquake-affected areas who were already impacted by multiple social and cultural challenges like poverty and underage marriages. “Most of my patients are young girls,” the psychologist from Kushkak Health Centre said.

Qadria and her male colleague have become a good source for the affected people to receive psychologically and to share their problems with them. “They have no one else to share their problems with. They come to me and I listen to their issues and concerns,” Qadria said about the women in Kushkak village.

The first step that Qadria takes when a person with mental health issues comes to her is to build confidence for an open and detailed conversation. “I start the conversation with sympathy. Then I inform the person that the details of the conversation will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone,” she said. “Once they start to feel comfortable, they are able to share their problems with full details. It’s a good way to release some of their stress.”

The psychologist sometimes need to visit her patients’ families to seek the help of other elder women in the family.

Qadria said her work is satisfying because it gives her a sense of empowerment and motivation to support other women. “It is satisfying to be able to listen to women and young girls and provide them with as much support as I can,” she explained. “The health centre that I work in has been a source of strength for the people affected by the earthquakes.”

Qadria praised WHO by acknowledging that “the support she is providing to the earthquake affected people is possible because of the continued support of WHO.”



*Psychologist Qadria Tabi, works in the WHO-supported Kushkak Health Centre, helping women and girls through psychosocial support.*



Psychosocial support session for the earthquake-affected people in Herat province. Photo: IRW

**For more information on the response to #HeratEarthquakes, contact:**

- Dr Jamshed Ali Tanoli**, Health Emergencies Team Lead, Email: tanolij@who.int
- Mr Mohammad Modaser Islami**, Officer-in-Charge, Communications, Email: islamim@who.int
- Mr Mohamed Kakay**, External Relations and Partnerships Team Lead, Email: kakaym@who.int
- Dr Sadia Azam**, Emergency Officer, Email: azams@who.int

**For more information, please visit:**

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