European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Afghanistan

Introduction

Ongoing conflict, insecurity, and a drought in spring 2021 continue to cause large-scale suffering and displacement in Afghanistan and the region.

Despite the challenges posed by the withdrawal of international troops and the Taliban takeover, the EU continues to provide life-saving assistance in Afghanistan. EU humanitarian aid focuses on health care, nutritional support, cash and protection assistance, including areas not reached by government structures.

What are the needs?

According to the UN, Afghanistan saw a high number of civilian casualties in the first 6 months of 2021, an increase of 47% compared to the same period last year. Since the beginning of 2021, some 550,000 people fled their homes, bringing the number of displaced people to at least 4.2 million. Attacks against medical and educational facilities remain high.

The COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 spring drought, persisting political insecurities, and increased violence have further deteriorated the humanitarian situation. Coronavirus import restrictions and widespread unemployment have worsened food insecurity, with close to 14.1 million people (35% of the population) critically food insecure.

Due to the severe drought and withdrawal of international troops, 18.5 million people could require humanitarian assistance. Severe weather conditions – drought, heavy snowfall, flash floods and avalanches – regularly affect thousands of people and their homes.

Close to 760,000 people returned from Iran and Pakistan in 2021. The influx of the returnees has strained the capacity of existing services and caused concerns about their reintegration and living conditions. Meanwhile, close to 6.5 million Afghans still live as refugees in neighbouring Iran and Pakistan, many without registration or legal status.
How are we helping?

Given the intensity of the conflict and the level of humanitarian needs, the EU’s priority is to provide life-saving assistance. In 2021, the EU allocated close to €57 million in humanitarian support. In the light of the recent Taliban takeover, additional humanitarian funding will be made available.

The 2021 funding will ensure critical relief assistance to the most vulnerable including the victims of war, forced displacement and natural hazards. Interventions focus on providing emergency health care, shelter, food assistance, access to clean water and sanitation facilities, as well as various protection services targeting women and children.

This year’s funding is also addressing the food insecurity and health emergencies related to the spring drought, the conflict and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The support for COVID-19 patients and preventing the further spread of the virus is part of the continued funding.

To facilitate the delivery of life-saving aid, the EU deployed 2 Humanitarian Air Bridge flights in 2021 so far carrying over 50 tonnes of cargo. This includes surgical equipment and medical supplies that are critical to continue the provision of primary and life-saving medical assistance in Afghanistan. The assistance is distributed by EU partners and humanitarian organisations operating in the country.

The EU has funded humanitarian operations in Afghanistan since 1994, providing over €1 billion. Funds are allocated strictly based on the humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality to ensure access to those in need.

The EU also funds the Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM), which ensures timely and flexible emergency assistance to people who have been recently displaced. In 2020, the ERM reached more than 220,000 people in all provinces through the delivery of cash grants, clean water, and access to sanitation services.

The ERM’s initial provision of life-saving assistance has allowed other humanitarian agencies to coordinate and plan further assistance in the mid- and long-term, and helped EU partners to deliver solid advocacy efforts for the early mobilisation of development and stabilisation funds.

Furthermore, the EU supports life-saving health services, whilst ensuring access to health care for people in areas where regular government services are disrupted. Health facilities continue to report record-high admission levels of conflict-related trauma cases. The EU also supports a particular nutrition response, in view of the more than 3 million children under 5 suffering from malnutrition in Afghanistan.

The EU also funds education projects for children who were forced out of school due to conflict or displacement. EU funding supports humanitarian flights, the provision of security information to non-governmental organisations and the coordination of humanitarian interventions.