



Australian Government



## AFGHANISTAN COVID-19 DEVELOPMENT RESPONSE PLAN

- Australia and Afghanistan's partnership builds on 19 years of cooperation towards a stable, secure and inclusive country, including Australia's substantial development and military contributions to Afghanistan.
- COVID-19 is compounding food insecurity, gender violence, and extreme poverty.
- Australia is working with the Afghan Government and other partners to respond to exacerbated health, stability and economic needs as a result of the pandemic, with an ongoing focus on women and girls.

The Afghan-Australia relationship dates back to 1959, when the Governments of Australia and Afghanistan agreed to establish diplomatic relations. Australia's standing as a small but valued partner of Afghanistan enables us to contribute to the shaping of Afghanistan's future as a stable, prosperous and inclusive state. The development program builds on the gains Afghanistan has made, especially for women and girls. It supports Australia's national interests, in reducing the threat from terrorism, irregular migration and illicit resource flows, and in addressing inequality. Australia's development partnership with the Afghan Government is based on mutual respect, responsibility and accountability, as outlined in the 2017 Afghanistan-Australia Development Partnership Memorandum of Understanding.

### COVID-19 SITUATION ANALYSIS

Afghanistan is facing a humanitarian crisis as it deals with the dual impact of ongoing conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic on top of decades of conflict and high levels of poverty and inequality. An overwhelmed health system alongside cultural stigmatisation has led to underreporting of infections. A government survey in July 2020 estimated around one third of the population (10 million people) had already been infected.

Efforts to contain the spread of the virus through border closures, lockdowns and physical distancing have reduced incomes for almost all Afghans and contributed to food shortages and high food prices. 12.4 million Afghans are experiencing severe or emergency food insecurity.

People movements across Afghanistan's porous borders has also overwhelmed health screening measures intended to help contain the spread of the pandemic.

Alongside the health and humanitarian crises, the protracted conflict continues and civilians continue to experience high levels of violence. In 2020, for the second year running, the Global Peace Index ranked

Afghanistan as the least peaceful country in the world. Displacement remains high as many Afghans move to survive, including to neighbouring nations. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports there are currently more than 4.1 million internally displaced persons, 80 per cent of whom are women and children. People with disabilities are also overrepresented among the internally displaced in Afghanistan and face additional barriers accessing humanitarian and development assistance.

Afghan women and girls are disproportionately affected by conflict, food insecurity, and economic inequality.. COVID-19 is exacerbating these inequalities with 97 per cent of female respondents in a recent Oxfam needs assessment stating that gender-based violence had increased since the outbreak started. Afghan women are particularly vulnerable to economic insecurity caused by the pandemic as they often hold less stable jobs, shoulder the burden of unpaid domestic labour and are generally locked out of decision-making processes. In addition, disruptions to local and global healthcare programs present a significant risk, particularly to neonatal and maternal health.

Afghanistan is one of the last two countries in the world where wild poliovirus still circulates. COVID-19 forced the suspension of the government's polio vaccination program. Reduced routine immunisation services present a significant risk with the potential to result in outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases and further stress on an overwhelmed health system.

The health impact of COVID-19, while significant, may be dwarfed by the economic impacts. The World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook expects a contraction of Afghanistan's economy in 2020 of between 5.5 and 7.1 per cent. Over the longer-term, United Nations development Programme (UNDP) modelling predicts Afghanistan will experience a decline in GDP of up to 17 per cent by 2023 as a result of COVID-19.



The World Bank estimates that poverty rates will increase by 25 per cent in Afghanistan in 2020 to over 70 per cent. Prolonged economic downturn will almost certainly increase unrest, instability and domestic violence. All this will make Afghanistan's already prolonged transition from aid dependency to self-reliance much harder to achieve.

The international financing needs are enormous. Afghanistan is already heavily dependent on development and humanitarian assistance. However, the international community's security and development financing commitments are due to expire in 2020, creating uncertainty. Almost 75 per cent of the government's overall budget and almost 90 per cent of the security sector budget comes from the international community.

The Afghan Government has developed an eight point plan to respond to both the health and human security impact of COVID-19, as well as providing an immediate economic stimulus.

## **AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE**

Australia's targeted investments in Afghanistan will support global and multilateral relief and recovery efforts in response to the pandemic. Our contribution will build on Australia's commitment to Afghanistan, alongside NATO and our allies, over the past 19 years. This approach aligns with the priorities set out in *Partnerships for Recovery*.

Australia's contribution to COVID-19 recovery in Afghanistan will be highly targeted based on Australia's interests and expertise, noting that we are a relatively small development partner in Afghanistan's multi-donor landscape.

In response to priorities set by the Government of Afghanistan and Australia's national interests, our niche support will complement our decreasing Defence presence. We will work across the development, peace and security, and humanitarian spheres for those most in need.

We will continue to prioritise the empowerment of women and girls and marginalised groups in our work, including people with disabilities. Full participation of women will be critical to COVID-19 recovery and Afghanistan's future peace and development. Recognising this, Australia focuses our diplomatic, military and development assistance on supporting the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Australia's objectives under this plan for Afghanistan will be delivered through the following strategic objectives.

## **Health Security**

Australia will support international efforts to reduce the effects of COVID-19 amongst Afghanistan's most vulnerable. We are pivoting our development programs to address immediate health protection, water, sanitation and hygiene needs, where appropriate.

Australia responded quickly to facilitate the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE), enhanced healthcare facilities and training of Afghan officials involved in the pandemic response. This included distributing information on COVID-19, including on preventative measures, and supplying urgent sanitation and hygiene kits to the most vulnerable.

Australia is contributing to a coordinated emergency response effort under the COVID-19 Multi-Sector Country Plan, developed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) with World Health Organization (WHO) assistance. Under the plan, trusted multilateral partners, including WHO, are mobilising activities designed to contain the spread of the pandemic, as well as minimise humanitarian consequences and interruptions to existing humanitarian assistance.

As the focus turns to relief and recovery, DFAT will fund, through Australia's regional humanitarian strategy, lifesaving services to displaced people and their host communities on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border, including vaccinations and sexual and reproductive health services.

We will also continue our support to the Afghan Government through contributions to global health programs, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank's highly concessional lending arms (IDA and ADF), and the World Bank's Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), to help contain and respond to COVID-19 and enhance the Afghan health system.

## **Stability**

Stability is an ongoing challenge in Afghanistan, but is a precursor to achieving the other two strategic objectives. Ending the conflict requires a just, durable and resilient political solution. There are promising signs that despite the devastating effect of COVID-19, Afghanistan is making progress towards peace and stability. The Afghanistan peace negotiations began in Doha on 12 September 2020, following the US-Taliban deal which was signed on 29 February 2020. Although progress on sustained peace will be difficult and lengthy, this is the best opportunity Afghanistan has to end the conflict and build a stable future. However, should the Afghan



Government and the Taliban negotiate a peace agreement that undermines our program, we will adjust accordingly.

Australia will contribute to support peace and stability in Afghanistan, focusing on the participation of women. We will support the nascent peace process, where opportunities allow. We will stay agile, and aim to be catalytic and influential, by providing a mix of high-impact advice and contributions to multi-donor and multilateral efforts.

We will provide assistance that reinforces Afghan leadership and ownership, especially women's leadership, of its own development strategies and programs. Our development program will align with the Afghan Government's National Peace and Development Framework and its National Priority Programs. As part of this commitment, we will provide a proportion of our development assistance 'on budget' to the Afghan Government.

Through our support to the ARTF and the Sustainment to Afghan Security Forces program, we will improve governance and security, support social protection measures to enhance community resilience during COVID-19.

Our longstanding Ending Violence Against Women program partners are working with local organisations to raise awareness of gender-based violence, support services and redress avenues. We are playing a pivotal role in the sustainability of women's protection shelters throughout the pandemic by advocating for a multi-donor trust fund to leverage other donor support. We will invest more on Women, Peace and Security through new funding focused on women's participation in the peace process to protect and advance the gains made in gender equality over the last 19 years.

We will work alongside other donors to support a more inclusive government that represents and protects all Afghans, including women. We will continue to advocate for measures to tackle corruption and enhance transparency in law and justice processes in Afghanistan.

We will continue to use Australia's knowledge and expertise to improve the agricultural system, especially in dryland areas, and build resilient communities through sustainable farming practices. Australia will also use its water expertise (through CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology) to assist Afghanistan's national water management system.

We have adapted our support to The Asia Foundation's Survey of the Afghan People, which collects perception data, to assess progress out of the COVID-19 crisis in

Afghanistan.

### ***Economic Recovery***

Australia will support Afghanistan's economic recovery from COVID-19 through activities aligned with the Afghan Government's strategy for economic self-reliance. We are supporting the Afghan Government to develop a new Afghan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF 2) through our engagement in preparatory processes for the pledging conference scheduled for the end of 2020.

We will channel most of our support through the multi-donor ARTF, in order to reduce the reporting burden on the Afghan Government, benefit from World Bank coordination and fiduciary oversight, and join our voice with likemindeds to advocate for gender and disability-inclusive practices.

We will work with the World Bank on improving the extractives industry and adherence to Extractives Industries Transparency Initiative principles. We will consider ad hoc requests for Australian expertise in the sector, where relevant and appropriate.

Through complementary law enforcement and development cooperation activities, we will work with Afghanistan to combat organised crime and terrorism. This will assist Afghanistan to meet international standards on anti-money laundering and terrorism financing under the Financial Action Task Force's evaluation, scheduled for 2022-23. This will be important to the Afghan Government's ability to secure ongoing international financing.

The inclusion of women and girls in Afghanistan's economic and social life is a priority for Australia. We will continue to support girls' education, which has compounding positive effects on their lives and those of their families and communities.

We will continue our small investment with the Institute for State Effectiveness which provides expert advice to government on critical policy reforms, including on economic responses to COVID-19.

Our ongoing support to the Australia-Afghanistan Community Resilience scheme will advance economic empowerment for poor farmers, including women, in rural and remote areas. We will also help facilitate university-to-university knowledge sharing on developing and enhancing online course curricula.

### **HOW WE WILL WORK**

Risk management is a high priority for Australia's work in



Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a high-threat environment, with challenges likely to increase with COVID-19 and the prospect of a reduced foreign troop presence. The pandemic's impacts, particularly on Afghanistan's transition towards a negotiated peace agreement and the final shape of a negotiated outcome, are unpredictable.

We will continue to advocate for the preservation and advancement of gains made over the past two decades to reinforce the legacy of Australia's engagement in Afghanistan.

We will examine ways to respond flexibly to Afghanistan's emerging needs where we are confident that Australian engagement can have an impact. This includes using all tools available at our disposal to have a catalytic effect. Our development response will adapt to changes in Afghanistan's political and health environment.

To minimise the risks of fraud and corruption, we will work only with trusted partners in Afghanistan who meet international accountability and performance standards.

Using scenario planning, we have developed options for continued delivery of the program in the contingency that the security, health and/or the economic situation in Afghanistan worsens. We have established remote monitoring and evaluation arrangements that enable us to safely track the impact of the program despite the pandemic and security concerns.

The workplace safety of personnel has primacy – the security context is under constant review and program delivery arrangements are calibrated in response. Australia reports on development assistance periodically to the Afghan Government, particularly on mutual accountabilities, including through an annual Development Cooperation Dialogue process.

**TABLE 1: COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK**

Response Plan	Health Security	Stability	Economic Recovery
<b>Expected Outcomes</b>	- Support the international effort to reduce the effects of COVID-19 amongst Afghanistan's most vulnerable	- Contribute to peace and stability in Afghanistan, focussing on participation of women	- Support recovery from COVID-19 through Afghanistan's strategy for economic self-reliance
<b>Key Results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthened health systems including preparedness for health emergencies</li> <li>- Number of children (boys/girls) immunised with Australian support</li> <li>- Number of women accessing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services through Australian support</li> <li>- Number of vulnerable women, men, girls and boys provided with life-saving assistance in conflict and crisis situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthen governance systems and significant policy change achieved</li> <li>- Numbers reached with new or improved social protection programs, including remote communities (M/F)</li> <li>- Number of women and girls survivors of violence receiving services such as counselling</li> <li>- Support for policy and technical advice on building capacity for food security (including examples of assistance provided and results achieved)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support for policy and technical advice on gender-responsive stimulus measures and longer term economic recovery (including examples of assistance provided and results achieved)</li> <li>- Number of female entrepreneurs provided with financial and/or business development services</li> <li>- Number of additional girls and boys enrolled in school</li> <li>- Percentage of Australian development assistance provided 'on budget'</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting Investments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Humanitarian assistance provided through the Regional Humanitarian Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.</li> <li>- Health sector reform from the World Bank Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (budget support)</li> <li>- Global program contributions from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, Global Polio Eradication Initiative, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, UNHCR, IOM, WFP, UNOCHA and ICRC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ARTF contributions to budget support and Citizens Charter</li> <li>- Sustainment Law &amp; Order program</li> <li>- Ending Violence Against Women WPS investment</li> <li>- Australia-Afghanistan Community Resilience Scheme</li> <li>- Water Information Systems</li> <li>- The Asia Foundation's annual Survey of the Afghan People</li> <li>- Contributions from Global Environment Fund, Education Cannot Wait, and support for UNICEF</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Budget support through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund</li> <li>- Institution for State Effectiveness</li> <li>- Empowering Girls Education</li> <li>- Aga Khan's innovative M&amp;E Gender and Data Feasibility study</li> <li>- Australia-Afghanistan Community Resilience Scheme</li> <li>- Global program contributions from Global Partnership for Education and EITI</li> </ul>