

Enhancing medical professional development for female health workers in Afghanistan

Grantee: EMERGENCY – Life Support for Civilian War Victims, ONG ETS

Location: Afghanistan, Asia

Grant Cycle: 2026

Type of Grant: one year-program support, Protracted Emergency Relief

Website: emergency.it

EMERGENCY is an independent non-governmental organisation that provides free, high-quality medical and surgical care to victims of war, poverty, and landmines. Since its establishment in Italy in 1994, it has treated more than 14 million people in 21 countries, guided by the principle that healthcare is a fundamental human right rather than a privilege. Its activities focus primarily on conflict and post-conflict countries, including Afghanistan, Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Uganda, while also operating in high-income countries such as Italy to support vulnerable populations.

In Afghanistan, EMERGENCY has maintained a continuous presence since 1999, operating hospitals, surgical centres, and First Aid Posts and Primary Healthcare Centres across several provinces. The country remains among the least developed globally, with decades of conflict, natural disasters, and economic instability; nearly half of the population need humanitarian assistance. The healthcare system is under severe strain, particularly due to shortages of medicines, equipment, and specialised health professionals.

Within this context, the situation is especially critical for women. Restrictions on education and employment significantly limit their opportunities to pursue professional training and careers, including in the health sector. As a result, the availability of female healthcare workers, essential for ensuring access to care for women patients who are often unable to be treated by male doctors, continues to decline, further exacerbating inequalities in

healthcare provision.

In response, the Anabah Medical Centre in Panjshir Province, a fully functioning hospital and training institution, provides a rare and secure environment where Afghan women can receive advanced medical education and practice medicine. Alongside its training role, the Centre delivers free, high-quality healthcare to a population of over 250,000 people and includes a Maternity Centre, with a capacity of up to 650 deliveries per month, as well as a Paediatric Department dedicated to the needs of children.

Building on earlier successful initiatives in Sierra Leone (2012) and Kabul (2014), the **Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation** (NaEPF) renewed its partnership with EMERGENCY by supporting activities at the Anabah Medical Centre. The initiative, which runs until December 2026, aims to train a new generation of Afghan women to become doctors, nurses, and midwives capable of delivering high-quality care within their communities.

The programme includes a comprehensive set of training activities. A residency in Obstetrics and Gynaecology enables Afghan women doctors to develop specialised expertise through a combination of theoretical learning and supervised clinical practice, including ante-natal care, labour and delivery, management of high-risk pregnancies, and surgical procedures with increasing autonomy.

In parallel, structured training pathways for nurses

and midwives provide progressive learning from foundational to advanced competencies. These combine classroom instruction with bedside practice, strengthening clinical knowledge, technical skills, and decision-making across maternity, emergency, and intensive care settings. Strong emphasis is also placed on on-the-job training and continuous professional development. Through daily clinical practice under the supervision of experienced international and national staff, participants consolidate their skills while responding to real world medical needs. Additional modules further enhance competencies in areas such as infection prevention, emergency care, and specialised procedures.

Through this integrated approach, the programme contributes to building a qualified and resilient female healthcare workforce of 165 Afghan women, of whom 10 are doctors in residency and 155 are nurses and midwives engaged in structured and continuing education, including 10 nurses involved in advanced training and 15 midwives in professional training.

By enabling Afghan women to deliver high-quality healthcare within their communities, the initiative supported by the Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation, contributes to addressing the long-term effects of conflict and systemic disruption, strengthening local capacity and resilience through knowledge and skills development.