



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Afghanistan: Fear of anti-government elements (AGEs)

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ARCHIVED

Preface

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and policy guidance to Home Office decision makers on handling particular types of protection and human rights claims. This includes whether claims are likely to justify the granting of asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave and whether – in the event of a claim being refused – it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under s94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers must consider claims on an individual basis, taking into account the case specific facts and all relevant evidence, including: the policy guidance contained within this note; the available COI; any applicable caselaw; and the Home Office casework guidance in relation to relevant policies.

Country information

The COI within this note has been compiled from a wide range of external information sources (usually) published in English. Consideration has been given to the relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity, currency, transparency and traceability of the information and wherever possible attempts have been made to corroborate the information used across independent sources, to ensure accuracy. All sources cited have been referenced in footnotes. It has been researched and presented with reference to the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the [European Asylum Support Office’s research guidelines, Country of Origin Information report methodology](#), dated July 2012.

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

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Information about the IAGCI’s work and a list of the COI documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector’s website at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>

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Policy guidance

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1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by anti-government elements (AGEs) because of the person's actual or perceived association with, or support for, the government and/or international military forces.

1.2 Other points to note

- 1.2.1 Within this note, AGEs include those who identify as "Taliban"; the Haqqani Network; Hezb-e-Islami; Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan; Islamic Jihad Union; Lashkari Tayyiba; Jaysh Muhammed; and groups identified as 'Daesh' (Islamic State), and other militia and armed groups pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives including armed criminal groups directly engaged in hostile acts on behalf of a party to the conflict.
- 1.2.2 This guidance concerns targeted risk from AGEs as opposed to a generalised risk of indiscriminate violence under Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive or Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. For consideration of such claims see the country policy and information note on [Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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2. Consideration of Issues

2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 Anti-Government elements (AGEs), including the Taliban, have been responsible for serious human rights abuses (see [Anti-Government Elements \(AGEs\)](#) and [Targeted groups](#)).
- 2.2.2 If it is accepted that the person has been involved with AGEs then decision makers must consider whether one of the Exclusion clauses is applicable. Members of the Afghan security forces and pro-Government militias may also have been involved in human rights abuses and consideration must be given on whether one of the Exclusion clauses applies (see the country

policy and information note on [Afghanistan: security and humanitarian situation](#)).

- 2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses, discretionary leave and restricted leave, see the [Asylum Instruction on Exclusion: Article 1F of the Refugee Convention](#), the [Asylum Instruction on Discretionary Leave](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 Assessment of risk

- 2.3.1 Civilians associated with, or perceived to be supporting the Government, civil society and the international community in Afghanistan, including the international military forces and international humanitarian and development actors, have been subject to intimidation, threats, abductions and targeted attacks by AGEs, such as the Taliban. Other targets, though not exhaustive, include civilians accused of spying; government officials and civil servants; judges, prosecutors and judicial staff; journalists and other media professionals; perceived 'Westerners'; Teachers and those involved in the education sector including students; tribal elders and religious leaders; healthcare workers; humanitarian workers and human rights activists; women in the public sphere; and families or individuals supporting or perceived to be associated with the above (see [Targeted groups](#)).
- 2.3.2 Whilst noting a significant decline in targeted and deliberate killings of civilians in the first half of 2016 compared to the same period in 2015, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented a total of 5,166 civilian casualties, attributing 60% to AGEs – 3,082 civilian casualties (966 deaths and 2,116 injured). Targeted and deliberate killings accounted for 11% (583) of all civilian casualties (see [Targeted groups](#)).
- 2.3.3 In the case of [H. and B. v. The United Kingdom - 70073/10 44539/11 - Chamber Judgment \[2013\] ECHR 298 \(09 April 2013\)](#), the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), considered the position of two persons, one who had worked as an interpreter for the US armed forces, and the other as a driver for the UN, who would both be returned to Kabul. The ECtHR:
- '...observes that the parties to the case did not dispute the conclusion of the December 2010 UNHCR Guidelines that, inter alia, individuals associated with, or perceived as supportive of the Afghan Government and the international community fall within a potential risk category and require a particularly careful examination of the risks to them upon return to Afghanistan... All the evidence before the Court supports this assessment. Indeed, the evidence paints a disturbing picture of the attacks carried out by the Taliban and other armed anti-government forces in Afghanistan on civilians with links to the international community' (paragraph 96). (See also [Targeted groups](#).)
- 2.3.4 However, the ECtHR held that 'not every person with links to the international community and forces would automatically be at risk in Afghanistan...' (paragraph 99), and that the risk faced by those who are perceived as supportive of the international community will depend on 'the individual circumstances of their case, the nature of their connections to the

international community and their profile.’ (paragraph 100). The court further found that it was ‘... not persuaded that the applicants have established that everyone with connections to the UN or the US forces, even in Kabul, can be considered to be at real risk of treatment contrary to Article 3 regardless of their profile or whether or not they continue to work for the international community’ (paragraph 100). (See also [Taliban’s ability to pursue individuals](#)).

- 2.3.5 Guidance published by the Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, dated 19 November 2015, provides information on [Supporting UK locally employed staff in Afghanistan](#), aimed at current and former local staff in Afghanistan who face intimidation as a result of their employment with the United Kingdom. The publication explains the eligibility criteria for protection and support, and how to seek it.
- 2.3.6 Harassment, intimidation and targeted attacks are, in general, more likely to take place in areas which are under the control of, or contested by, AGEs (see [Areas of government/AGE control](#)).
- 2.3.7 However, AGEs have carried out attacks in all parts of the country, including in Kabul (see [Targeted groups](#), and the country policy and information note on [Afghanistan: security and humanitarian situation](#)).
- 2.3.8 In [H and B](#) the ECtHR found that ‘... there is insufficient evidence before [the court...] at the present time to suggest that the Taliban have the motivation or the ability to pursue low-level collaborators in Kabul or other areas outside their control’ (paragraph 97).
- 2.3.9 Whilst some evidence suggests that the Taliban may have the ability to pursue a person, decision makers must consider whether they would have the motivation to track and pursue a person considered low-profile (see [Taliban’s ability to pursue individuals](#)).
- 2.3.10 The country information indicates that the Taliban have the capability to track down a person who relocates to a different area, and that they have been successful in doing so, particularly when targeting their “well known or well positioned opponents” (see [Taliban’s ability to pursue individuals](#)).
- 2.3.11 However as the ECtHR found in [H and B](#), ‘There is also little evidence that the Taliban are targeting those who have, as requested by them, already stopped working for the international community and who have moved to other areas...’ (paragraph 98). Other AGEs should also be taken into account when considering this factor, although, as with the Taliban, there is little evidence to suggest they would target persons who had stopped working for the international community and moved to another area.
- 2.3.12 However each case must be considered on its facts. The onus is on the person to demonstrate that on return to Afghanistan, they are likely to be at real risk from AGEs because of their profile and/or activities. In assessing whether a person is at risk, decision makers should take into account the following factors:
 - the particular profile of the person including, where relevant, previous personal security arrangements, their professional role, whether the

organisation they work for is domestic or international, and its perceived relationship with the government;

- the extent to which they and their activities are known by the AGEs, and whether they are perceived to support the government and/or international forces;
- the nature of the threat from, and the capability of, the AGEs to pursue the person;
- whether the person has been previously threatened or harassed by AGEs;
- whether the person has ceased to engage/will cease to engage in the activities that have brought them to the attention of the AGEs;
- where the person was located and/or threatened, and how far that threat would extend in Afghanistan;
- their personal circumstances, such as gender, age, family and tribal links, religion, ethnicity, and previous interaction with the AGEs.

2.3.13 Persons considered high-profile, who may include high-ranking government officials, Members of Parliament, and police and military personnel, may be at a greater risk of targeted and deliberate attacks from AGEs. Persons considered low-profile, such as off-duty truck drivers, low-level government officials, and teachers, are unlikely to be of continuing interest to AGEs if they leave their job and/or relocate to an area outside AGE control, unless there are specific individual circumstances that increase the risk or which could lead to continued targeting (see [Targeted groups](#) and [Taliban's ability to pursue individuals](#)).

2.3.14 For people working for the ANDSF or the international military forces, it might not be sufficient to simply quit their job or stop their activity in order to escape intimidation and targeting by AGEs. Some persons considered low-profile may be targeted for a perceived association with the government and/or international forces, such as those accused of spying (see [Civilians, including interpreters, associated with the international military forces \(IMF\), Government officials and civil servants, and civilians associated with or perceived as supporting the Government, or accused of spying](#) and [Taliban's ability to pursue individuals](#)).

2.3.15 As regards the forced recruitment by AGEs of unaccompanied children, in the Country Guidance case of [AA \(unattended children\) Afghanistan CG \[2012\] UKUT 16 \(IAC\) \(01 February 2012\)](#) the Upper Tribunal found that:

‘... the background evidence demonstrates that unattached children returned to Afghanistan, depending upon their individual circumstances and the location to which they are returned, may be exposed to risk of serious harm, inter alia from indiscriminate violence, forced recruitment, sexual violence, trafficking and a lack of adequate arrangements for child protection. Such risks will have to be taken into account when addressing the question of whether a return is in the child's best interests, a primary consideration when determining a claim to humanitarian protection (paragraph 93ii).’

- 2.3.16 Young men may also face coerced or forced recruitment by AGEs. Each case must be decided on its individual circumstances that might increase this risk (see [Risk of forced recruitment](#)).
- 2.3.17 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Protection

- 2.4.1 Where the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm from non-state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.
- 2.4.2 In areas controlled by AGEs, the state will be unable to provide effective protection (see [Areas of government/AGE control](#)).
- 2.4.3 In Kabul, and other districts, cities and towns controlled by the government, the authorities may be willing but will usually be unable to offer effective protection given the structural weaknesses in the security forces and the justice system (see [Capability of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces](#)).
- 2.4.4 A decision maker's assessment of whether a person would be able to access assistance and protection must be carefully considered on the facts of the case. The onus is on the person to demonstrate why they would not be able to seek and obtain effective state protection.
- 2.4.5 For further guidance on assessing the availability or not of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Internal relocation

- 2.5.1 Internal relocation may be both relevant and reasonable but this will depend on the person's profile and personal circumstances.
- 2.5.2 In general, persons considered low-profile, or who have ceased the activities that created the risk, may be able to relocate to a part of Afghanistan not controlled by the AGE that they fear. However, persons considered high-profile, who have been able to demonstrate that they are of continuing interest to an AGE, may be at risk in other parts of Afghanistan if the AGE are able and willing to pursue them.
- 2.5.3 Depending on their strength in the location, the Taliban and other AGEs may have the ability to find a person who relocates to a different area, particularly if that person has a high-profile. It may be more difficult for the Taliban or other AGEs to track people who have moved to urban areas (see [Taliban's ability to pursue individuals](#) and [Areas of government/AGE control](#)).
- 2.5.4 For women, the Upper Tribunal found, in the Country Guidance [AK \(Article 15\(c\)\) Afghanistan CG \[2012\] UKUT 163 \(IAC\)](#) (18 May 2012), that whilst women with a male support network may be able to relocate internally, it would be unreasonable to expect lone women and female heads of household to do so (paragraph 249, B (v)). See also the country policy and

information note on [Afghanistan: Women fearing gender based harm/violence](#)).

- 2.5.5 For further guidance on internal relocation, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.6 Certification

- 2.6.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.6.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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3. Policy summary

- 3.1.1 A person who is associated with, or is perceived to support the government and/or international forces, may face a real risk of serious harm from AGEs, depending on their individual circumstances.
- 3.1.2 Relevant factors in assessing any such risk are the particular profile of the person; the nature of the threat; whether the person has been previously threatened or harassed; how far the risk would extend; the nature of any personal security arrangements; and whether the person has ceased/will cease to engage in the activities that have brought them to the attention of the AGEs.
- 3.1.3 Persons considered high-profile, such as senior government officials, political leaders, and members of the Afghan security forces, may face a greater risk of serious harm throughout Afghanistan.
- 3.1.4 Persons considered low-profile are unlikely to face a risk of serious harm if they leave their job and/or relocate to a part of the country not controlled by the AGE they fear, unless there are specific individual circumstances that increase the risk or which could lead to continued targeting.
- 3.1.5 If a person is able to demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm because of their (imputed) political opinion, and is unable to acquire effective protection or relocate internally, a grant of asylum will normally be appropriate.
- 3.1.6 In general, the state is willing to provide effective protection but is not always capable of doing so. Each case will need to be considered on its specific facts.
- 3.1.7 Internal relocation may be both relevant and reasonable but this will depend on the person's profile and personal circumstances. Internal relocation will not be reasonable for lone women and female heads of households.
- 3.1.8 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

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4. Anti-Government Elements (AGEs)

4.1 Composition of AGEs

- 4.1.1 The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) identified Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) as encompassing:
- ‘... all individuals and armed groups involved in armed conflict with or armed opposition against the Government of Afghanistan and/or international military forces. They include those who identify as “Taliban” as well as individuals and non-State organised armed groups taking a direct part in hostilities and assuming a variety of labels including the Haqqani Network, Hezb-e-Islami, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkari Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed, groups identified as ‘Daesh’ and other militia and armed groups pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives including armed criminal groups directly engaged in hostile acts on behalf of a party to the conflict.’¹
- 4.1.2 For more detailed information on AGEs, see the [European Asylum Support Office \(EASO\) Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan Security Situation](#).
- 4.1.3 For information on the general security situation, see the country policy and information note on [Afghanistan: security and humanitarian situation](#).

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4.2 Taliban's ability to pursue individuals

- 4.2.1 In February 2016, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) provided information, citing a range of sources, on the Taliban's ability to track and pursue individuals in Afghanistan, and noted:
- ‘In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor, who is the Director of the Program for Culture and Conflict at the Naval Postgraduate School in California, and who, for three decades, has been conducting and publishing research on Afghanistan and South Asia, explained that the Taliban may be able to find a person who relocates to a different area, and that they have been successful in doing so, particularly when targeting their “well known or well positioned opponents”... In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an assistant professor at the Institute of National Security and Counterterrorism at Syracuse University, who has published work on post-conflict reconstruction and terrorism in Afghanistan, gave the view that the Taliban generally has the capability to track individuals, through

¹ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), ‘Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict’, (page 44, footnote 118), July 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

the use of “formal and informal communication” networks to obtain information about a person's whereabouts...

‘The Professor explained that the Taliban has shadow governors and military commanders in almost all provinces; communication and information-sharing between the command structure is likely, including in efforts to obtain information about a person's background... Additionally, there may be communication between mullahs and the shadow governors, particularly in the southern regions, who serve as a source for information... The AAN [Afghanistan Analysts Network] analyst explained that there is some coordination between higher levels within the Taliban, but that information being fed back up from local levels is “not done in a systematic way” and that local level Taliban have a lot of “discretionary power” when carrying out their activities... The Professor similarly explained that command and control can vary with regional commanders in some areas; for example, in Arghandab, local commanders have a “free hand” with only a small number of fighters and little relationship with the Quetta Shura Taliban leadership, while in other areas, such as Helmand, there is tight command and control over the area... He further stated that whether the Taliban will seek information about someone can depend on the relationship between the commanders of the individual's province of origin and the destination province... Similarly, the AAN analyst indicated that the strength of the local Taliban in the location where a person relocates to can be a factor in whether their background is detected; Taliban checkpoints and high levels of Taliban activity in an area increases the likelihood of searches of personal belongings and questioning of travellers...’²

4.2.2 The IRB response continued:

‘According to the Professor, particularly in rural areas of Afghanistan, people are “extremely perceptive of their environments” and “know when a new person comes into the village or travels through it”... Similarly, the AAN analyst stated that unless an outsider has a very good cover story, their background is likely to become known due to the close-knit nature of Afghan communities... The same source explained that factors impacting a person's ability to conceal their background include: tribal/local connections to elders and family, regional accent differences, last names which may refer to origin, religious affiliation and prayer rituals, and higher education profiles which may identify the individual as belonging to a higher social class...

‘Sources report that the Taliban allegedly obtained information about people who were believed to be NGO employees during their September 2015 assault on Kunduz city, and used this information to look for those identified... According to Amnesty International (AI), the Taliban's list allegedly included the names and photos of activists, journalists and

² Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016, AFG105412.E, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56d7f2670.html>, date accessed 2 September 2016.

government workers in Kunduz... AI further notes that during the assault, the Taliban gained access to addresses, phone numbers, and photos of NGO staff, government employees, and security force personnel by raiding government and NGO offices... An October 2015 briefing note by the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) similarly states that the Taliban has been able to gather personal information about NGO staff, government employees, and security personnel, which “may increase the likelihood of these groups being targeted in future”...³

(See also [Humanitarian aid and development workers, non-governmental organisations \(NGOs\), and health workers](#)).

4.2.3 In reference to locating individuals in urban areas, the IRB reported that:

‘According to the Professor, “it is more difficult to track people [who] have moved into urban environments, but even there the Taliban have spies and members who can gather considerable information”... The same source explained that tribal networks still operate in urban areas, and gave the example of the Taliban infiltrating and obtaining information from large refugee camps near Kabul... The [AAN] analyst stated that the Taliban conducts local-level intelligence gathering in Kabul, and therefore have been able to carry out targeted attacks in some urban centres... A 2015 article by the Christian Science Monitor reports on one instance in which a Western journalist attended a large Pashtun wedding in Kabul as a guest of one of the Afghan attendees; several days later the attendee and his family received threats and was accused of working as a spy for coalition forces. According to [a 2012] article by Agence France-Presse, the Taliban has “spies” within the police and military ...’⁴

4.2.4 As regards tribal or family connections, the IRB reported:

‘The AAN analyst explained that when people move from one location to another area where they have tribal or family connections, this could potentially shield the person's background from being uncovered; however, these same connections could also be their greatest liability in the sense that a person's connections could also be used as a way to locate the person... The Professor stated that “Afghans are a tribal people and this allows them to, in part, know the circumstances of people in their tribe or ethno-linguistic group. This is obviously easy to do at the local, district and Provincial level of their home locality but because of extended families and other dynamics, it

³ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016, AFG105412.E, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56d7f2670.html>, date accessed 2 September 2016.

⁴ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016, AFG105412.E, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56d7f2670.html>, date accessed 2 September 2016.

[one's identity] is often hard to hide even when an Afghan leaves their home locality.”

‘Without providing details, the Professor stated that it is “[m]uch easier for Pashtuns to track people because of their cultural norms than other ethno-linguistic groups”... According to the Professor, the Taliban “keep tabs” on people by exploiting tribal leaders’ and families’ knowledge of the whereabouts of their family members or tribe members... Sources also report that the Taliban exerts pressure on family members of wanted individuals ... and that a targeted person's family may be punished in their absence... The Professor explained that in addition to exploiting tribal connections when pursuing a person of interest, the Taliban “can apply pressure and draconian measures on the person's family members to gain information. This is probably their most important means in tracking down a person: “tell me where he/she is or we will kill your family.” Such intimidation is usually a fairly successful tactic”.

‘The professor stated that if the Taliban uncovers the background of an ordinary person, which the Taliban perceives to be questionable, this would create problems for that person ... The AAN analyst explained that if the person in question is someone who has worked as an interpreter, for example, and relocates, if the Taliban becomes suspicious of that person's background, they might contact another district's commander to find out more about the individual ... The AAN analyst gave the view that the concern for someone in a situation like that is about the possibility that their background would be found out in their new location; however, for someone who has a higher profile, for example a district governor who has spent time overseas and then returns, the Taliban can more easily track down such an individual from one location to another location ... The Professor stated that the Taliban's tribal networks are very well established and tribal law can cover long distances; people know what is occurring in their district and that traditional ways of locating people through tribal networks still apply’⁵

(see [Civilians, including interpreters, associated with the international military forces \(IMF\)](#)).

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4.3 Night letters

- 4.3.1 For information on night letters (a method of communication, often threatening) issued by the Taliban, see the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada’s response on [Afghanistan: Night letters \[Shab Nameha, Shabnamah, Shabnameh\], including appearance](#), dated 10 February 2015.

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⁵ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016, AFG105412.E, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56d7f2670.html>, date accessed 2 September 2016.

4.4 Parallel justice punishments

- 4.4.1 UNAMA noted that, during the first half of 2016, killings, torture and other abuses continued to be carried out by AGEs, including the Taliban, to 'punish' civilians for perceived crimes or offenses. UNAMA noted 'Compounding the illegality of such proceedings is the absence of government redress mechanisms for victims of human rights abuses carried out by parallel judicial structures run by Anti-Government Elements...

'Between 1 January and 30 June 2016, UNAMA documented 26 incidents of Anti-Government Elements, including Taliban, punishing civilians for alleged infractions of Sharia law, perceived offences, and allegations of spying or connections with government and Afghan security forces. UNAMA documented summary executions, lashings, beatings, illegal detention, and orders to pay financial restitution. The majority of recorded parallel justice structure punishments occurred in the western region, particularly Farah and Badghis provinces [areas controlled or contested by the Taliban]... UNAMA also documented several cases in which Anti-Government Elements executed civilians for allegedly spying for the Afghan security forces, being family members of Afghan security forces, or working for the Government...

'The Government's inability to hold perpetrators accountable for such crimes may amount to a violation of human rights, under the principle of due diligence. The failure of legitimate judicial institutions and government to address the use of these illegal structures may stem from continued insecurity and large gaps in the rule of law. Moreover, the apathy towards what amounts to egregious human rights abuses may indicate a reluctant acceptance of what should be an intolerable practice at the heavy cost of fundamental human rights protection for Afghans.'⁶ (see [Capability of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces](#)).

- 4.4.2 UNAMA also reported that:

'Consistent with trends in 2015, between 1 January and 30 June 2016, UNAMA documented six parallel justice punishments of women accused of so-called "moral crimes", resulting in the execution of two women, and the severe physical punishment (lashings) of four women by Anti-Government Elements. Additionally, the mission documented one case in Takhar province where local elders prevented Anti-Government Elements from carrying out a punishment of death by stoning of a woman and a man accused of adultery.'⁷

See also [Targeted groups](#)

⁶ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', (pages 67-69), July 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

⁷ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', (pages 14-15), July 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

5. Risk of forced recruitment

5.1 Taliban

5.1.1 UNHCR noted in its Eligibility Guidelines for Afghanistan of April 2016 that:

‘In areas where AGEs exercise effective control over territory and the population, they are reported to use a variety of mechanisms to recruit fighters, including recruitment mechanisms based on coercive strategies. Persons who resist recruitment, and their family members, are reportedly at risk of being killed or punished.

‘AGEs are reported to continue to recruit children, both boys and girls, to carry out suicide attacks and as human shields, as well as to participate in active combat, to plant IEDs, to smuggle weapons and uniforms, and to act as spies, guards or scouts for reconnaissance.’⁸

5.1.2 The EASO COI Report ‘Afghanistan: Recruitment by armed groups’, published in September 2016, cited some instances of possible coercion by the Taliban, whilst also noting that the use of force was only done in exceptional cases, and that the term “forced recruitment” was ‘...a concept that does not stem from the Afghan social context.’ The report named a number of incentives that drove young men to join the Taliban, including: unemployment; insecurity caused by other armed actors; religious motivation; grievances against the government; and adventure, honour and pride. EASO also noted methods of recruitment by other AGEs.⁹

5.1.3 In December 2015, Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) reported that the forced closure of schools in Helmand province, due to the security situation, had made thousands of students vulnerable to recruitment by the Taliban. IRIN noted that ‘Lack of education and job opportunities have left young men with few options, and the Taliban has been capitalising on the situation.’ One tribal elder told IRIN “Taliban is distributing pamphlets and audio cassettes, inciting the young to join them... They are also offering money and weapons...” A security official added that both the Taliban and Daesh were recruiting young men in Helmand.¹⁰

5.1.4 The Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, covering the period January to December 2015, noted that 35 cases of the recruitment and use of children by the Taliban and other AGEs had been verified. The report noted ‘The Taliban continued to recruit children for combat and suicide attacks. There is continuing concern about allegations of

⁸ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan’, (page 39), 19 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>, date accessed 9 August 2016.

⁹ European Asylum Support Office, ‘EASO Country of Origin Information Report – Afghanistan Recruitment by armed groups’, (Sections 1.4-1.5 and 2-3), September 2016, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_recruitment.pdf, date accessed 5 October 2016.

¹⁰ Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), ‘School closures fuel Taliban recruitment’, 16 December 2015, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/569412eb6d2b.html>, date accessed 13 September 2016.

cross-border recruitment of children and of use of religious schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan for child recruitment and military training by the Taliban and other armed groups.’¹¹

- 5.1.5 Al Jazeera reported that, during its siege of Kunduz in September 2015, Taliban fighters went door-to-door forcibly recruiting young boys.¹² In February 2016, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that ‘... recruitment increased in 2015 due to expanded Taliban operations against Afghan government forces.’ HRW continued:

‘The Taliban recruit and train children in age-specific stages. Boys begin indoctrination as young as six years old, and continue to study religious subjects under Taliban teachers for up to seven years. According to relatives of boys recruited by the Taliban, by the time they are 13, Taliban-educated children have learned military skills including use of firearms, and the production and deployment of IEDs. Taliban teachers then introduce those trained child soldiers to specific Taliban groups in that district...

‘In general, children are not recruited by force. However parents who have tried to retrieve their children are usually unable to do so because the Taliban claim that the boys are of age, or are committed to jihad regardless of their age. The Taliban madrasas attract many poor families because the Taliban cover their expenses and provide food and clothing for the children. In some cases they offer cash to families for sending their boys to the madrasas.’¹³

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5.2 Islamic State in Khorasan (ISK)

- 5.2.1 Regarding recruitment by the Islamic State in Khorasan (ISK), the EASO COI Report ‘Afghanistan: Recruitment by armed groups’, published in September 2016, stated:

‘ISK had a certain degree of freedom of movement and control over the population in the districts where it had a firm presence, such as in Achin, Deh Bala, Spin Ghar and Nazyan in Nangarhar. In other districts, ISK is forced to work covertly and activities are limited to recruitment efforts and propaganda activities. A source in Kabul stated that ISK propaganda pamphlets were found in Badakhshan calling on Taliban fighters to join the ISK. In April 2016, a USIP study claimed that ISK had appointed recruiters in nine provinces, including four in the north: Kunduz, Samangan, Sar-e Pul and Faryab.

¹¹ UN Report of the Secretary General, ‘Children and armed conflict’, (paragraph 21), 20 April 2016, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=s/2016/360&preferer=/english/&Lang=E, date accessed 29 August 2016.

¹² Al Jazeera, ‘Afghan Taliban “recruiting boys” from Kunduz families’, 30 September 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/09/afghan-taliban-recruiting-boys-kunduz-families-150930155157751.html>, date accessed 13 September 2016.

¹³ Human Rights Watch, ‘Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges’, 17 February 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/17/afghanistan-taliban-child-soldier-recruitment-surges>, date accessed 13 September 2016.

'A source in Kabul states that about 70 % of ISK fighters are TTP-members from the Orakzai-tribe and 30 % are local recruits.

'Salafism is still appealing to a certain and growing segment of young people at universities ... ISK has used Salafi religious networks in Nangarhar to gain support, either by winning or by coercing their backing. Yet the group has demonstrated the will and ability to establish fronts outside this relatively small Salafist community

'Part of the ISK propaganda and recruitment effort focuses on the failures of the Taliban to expel international military forces after more than a decade of fighting ... Part of the attraction to certain youth is that they represent a "cool new brand" ... Certain ISK propaganda focuses on the alleged relationship between Taliban and the Pakistani intelligence agency ISI. Portraying the Taliban as puppets of Pakistan, it urges all Taliban fighters to side with the Islamic State. Under the leadership of Rahim Muslim Dost, leader of ISK in Nangarhar in its initial stages, ISK presented itself as a religious alternative to the "impurity" of the Taliban...

'According to Foreign Policy, "The group allegedly pays an ordinary fighter a salary of [US]\$500 to \$1,000 per month — a small fortune in a country where a security guard usually earns no more than \$200 per month. These figures, however, could not be independently verified". Borhan Osman said the salaries he heard mention were \$200 to \$500. He too stated such claims need to be independently verified.' ¹⁴

5.2.2 On the question of whether ISK practices forced recruitment, the EASO report noted:

'[A] western security official stated that despite ISK's initial friendly approach towards the villagers under its control, it started to behave much more aggressively once the war with the Taliban started; as such its popularity and village acceptance started dwindling. A nonviolent outreach was replaced by the execution of elders, the destruction of shrines and the prohibition on growing opium poppy. These violent measures diminished the attractiveness of ISK as an alternative to the Taliban. In particular, the ban on cultivation and trade in drugs (both poppy and marijuana) quickly eroded any local acceptance of the forces deemed foreign. Borhan Osman said that eventually, in the limited areas under its control, ISK applied very brutal methods to force the population into submission and obedience. Osman was unsure if ISK had forcibly recruited fighters. Antonio Giustozzi states that ISK would force inhabitants of the areas it controlled into providing support, but not into a fighting role. ISK recruits support elements among the local population for logistical tasks such as carrying goods and cooking. While ISK will pay a full salary to these people, it will also try to indoctrinate them and turn them into ideological sympathisers and eventually fighters. However, in Kabul and Jalalabad, Aziz Hakimi says one can find many people who fled

¹⁴ European Asylum Support Office (EASO), EASO Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan: Recruitment by armed groups, (pages 28-30), September 2016, available at <https://www.easo.europa.eu/information-analysis/country-origin-information/country-reports>, date accessed 18 November 2016.

ISK controlled areas for fear of forced recruitment, among other reasons. IDPs reported to UNHCR that a fear of forced recruitment by ISK was a reason for their displacement. On social media videos circulated of the summary execution of, among others, so-called defectors. In areas where ISK tries to gain influence through covert operations and propaganda, it has no operational capacity to force people to join its ranks and will refrain from inviting all Taliban fighters to join. But it may do so in a very threatening tone, says a source in Kabul. On pamphlets found in Badakhshan all Taliban fighters were welcomed to join the side of the Islamic State and those who would not were all threatened with decapitation.’¹⁵

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6. Capability of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces

- 6.1.1 The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported that, according to USFOR-A, as of April/May 2016, the total strength of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) was 319,595, comprising of 171,428 Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan Air Force (AAF) personnel, and 148,167 Afghan National Police (ANP) personnel.¹⁶ The UN-Secretary General reported ‘Even though recruitment was on target, re-enlistment rates remained particularly low and needed to be increased to compensate for other losses. In April 2016, army troop levels and Afghan National Police numbers reached 87 per cent and 74 per cent respectively, of the levels projected for August 2016.’¹⁷ The Costs of War project estimated that, as of mid-2016, 30,470 Afghan military and police had been killed due to wartime violence since 2001. A further 17,000 were reported injured, though this figure was incomplete.¹⁸
- 6.1.2 According to the US Department of State, in its Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2015 (USSD HR Report 2015):
- ‘There were reports of impunity and lack of accountability by security forces throughout the year. According to observers, ALP and ANP personnel were largely unaware of their responsibilities and defendants’ rights under the law. Accountability of NDS [National Directorate of Security] and ANP officials for torture and abuse was weak, not transparent, and rarely enforced.

¹⁵ European Asylum Support Office (EASO), EASO Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan: Recruitment by armed groups, (page 30), September 2016, available at <https://www.easo.europa.eu/information-analysis/country-origin-information/country-reports>, date accessed 18 November 2016.

¹⁶ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), ‘Quarterly Report to the United States Congress’, (page 93), 30 July 2016, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2016-07-30qr.pdf>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

¹⁷ UN Report of the Secretary-General, ‘The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security’, (paragraph 15), 10 June 2016, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/532, date accessed 24 August 2016.

¹⁸ Crawford, N. C., Boston University, ‘Costs of War: Update on the Human Costs of War for Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001 to mid-2016’, (page 9), August 2016, http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2016/War%20in%20Afghanistan%20and%20Pakistan%20UPDATE_FINAL_corrected%20date.pdf, date accessed 22 August 2016.

Independent judicial or external oversight of the NDS and ANP in the investigation and prosecution of crimes or misconduct, including torture and abuse, was limited... Police corruption remained a serious problem.¹⁹

- 6.1.3 The US Department of State's Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) noted in its Afghanistan 2016 Crime & Safety Report that 'The local law enforcement authorities are generally ineffective...'²⁰

- 6.1.4 Reporting in September 2015, Australia's Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) noted:

'The ongoing insurgency across the country means that the government struggles to exercise effective control over many parts of the country, particularly areas outside major urban centres. As a result, the government lacks the ability to adequately address human rights issues, protect vulnerable groups and prosecute human rights violators in those areas. Despite these challenges, DFAT assesses that the government maintains effective, but not absolute, control in major urban centres, particularly Kabul. While violent attacks still occur and there are major concerns over the capacity of law enforcement and judicial systems, security in these urban centres is typically better than in rural areas.'²¹

- 6.1.5 The UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, published 19 April 2016, cited a number of sources regarding the ability of the State to protect civilians. The Guidelines stated that:

'Afghan governance and the adherence to the rule of law are perceived as particularly weak, while public satisfaction with government performance and confidence in public institutions reportedly decreased sharply in 2015.

'The capability of the Government to protect human rights is undermined in many districts by insecurity and the high number of attacks by AGEs. Rural and unstable areas reportedly suffer from a generally weak formal justice system that is unable to effectively and reliably adjudicate civil and criminal disputes. Government-appointed judges and prosecutors are reportedly frequently unable to remain in such communities, due to insecurity. High levels of corruption, challenges to effective governance and a climate of impunity are all reported by observers as factors that weaken the rule of law and undermine the ability of the State to provide protection from human rights violations... a number of State actors tasked with protecting human rights, including the ANP and ALP, are themselves reported to commit human rights abuses with impunity in certain parts of the country.

¹⁹ US Department of State, 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2015', Afghanistan, section 1d, 13 April 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252957>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

²⁰ US Department of State, Overseas Security Advisory Council, 'Afghanistan 2016 Crime & Safety Report', 15 March 2016, <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=19292>, date accessed 7 September 2016.

²¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'DFAT Country Information Report – Afghanistan', (page 21), 18 September 2015, date accessed 9 September 2016. Available on request.

'Victims of the human rights abuses carried out by [...] parallel justice structures reportedly do not have access to government redress mechanisms.'²² (See [Parallel justice punishments](#)).

6.1.6 The report of the UN Secretary-General, dated 10 June 2016, stated:

'The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces remained under pressure, in particular in Baghlan, Faryab, Helmand, Kunar, Kunduz, Nangahar and Uruzgan provinces, and were reinforced by Afghan special forces and international military assets. Notwithstanding intensified efforts to strengthen army units, in particular in Helmand Province, significant shortcomings remained in the areas of command and control, leadership, logistics and overall coordination. In the first four months of 2016, reports indicated rising casualties among the security forces. The sustainability of the forces remains a challenge in the light of high attrition rates. ... Some progress was made in increasing air capacity, and the air force carried out a limited number of air missions.'²³

6.1.7 The SIGAR report of July 2016 noted that:

'The ANDSF have struggled to respond to the Taliban's growing national presence. There has been particularly stiff resistance in provinces along the border with Pakistan, such as Helmand, Kandahar, and Nangarhar, with reports that 68.5% of security incidents occur in southern, southeastern, and eastern Afghanistan. Many of the issues preventing the ANDSF from properly engaging the Taliban relate to deficiencies in key areas such as command and control, leadership, logistics, and overall coordination. High attrition rates, including high casualty rates, continue to make the sustainability of the ANDSF a major concern and priority for leadership... The ANDSF has also had to address activity from other insurgent groups, most notably the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and ISIL-K [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan], which have remained active despite pressure from both Afghan forces, supported by Coalition air strikes, and the Taliban. ISIL-K's safe haven in Nangarhar has been greatly reduced and some members of the group are now working to establish safe havens in Kunar and Nuristan Provinces to the north.'²⁴

6.1.8 Despite a split in the IMU movement in 2015, after its leader, Usman Ghazi, pledged allegiance to Islamic State and later suffered defeat against the Taliban in Zabul Province, The Long War Journal reported in June 2016 that a new faction of the IMU had emerged and indicated that it remained loyal to the Taliban, al Qaeda, and other traditional jihadist groups operating in

²² UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 'UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan', (pages 25-26), 19 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>, date accessed 9 August 2016.

²³ UN Report of the Secretary-General, 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security', (paragraph 15), 10 June 2016, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/532, date accessed 24 August 2016.

²⁴ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress', (page 85), 30 July 2016, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2016-07-30qr.pdf>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. In a public statement dated 10 June 2016, the IMU claimed that the group had continued to fight in spite of the break up.²⁵

6.1.9 Citing media sources, the SIGAR report observed in July 2016:

‘A sign of the growing insecurity in Kabul are the increasing number of concrete blast walls that surround government buildings, foreign embassies, companies, and the homes of wealthy residents. However, Afghan media reported in July that the number of insurgent attacks in the country decreased in June by 17%. An increased number of Afghan and Coalition air strikes during the month is reported to have had a major impact on eliminating insurgent fighters. On June 29, a spokesman for the Nangarhar governor reported at least 88 ISIL-K fighters were killed in the Kot district, where the retreating fighters torched 90 homes in retribution for locals assisting the Afghan security forces.’²⁶

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7. Areas of government/AGE control

7.1 Afghan government

7.1.1 The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported in July 2016 that, according to the United States Forces – Afghanistan (USFOR-A):

‘... approximately 65.6% of the country’s districts are under Afghan government control or influence as of May 28, 2016, a decrease from the 70.5% reported as of January 29, 2016. Of the 407 districts within the 34 provinces, 268 districts were under government control or influence, 36 districts (8.8%) within 15 provinces were under insurgent control or influence, and 104 districts (25.6 %) were “at risk.” Of the 36 districts under insurgent control or influence, nine districts with a population of 524,072 are under insurgent control and 27 districts with a population of 1.98 million are under insurgent influence.’²⁷

7.1.2 Tolo News reported on 28 June 2016 that, according to the Ministry of Interior, over 50 districts faced “serious security threats”, nine of which – Nawzad, Disho, Baghran and Musa Qala districts in Helmand, Wardooj and Yumgan districts in Badakhshan, Kohistanat district in Sar-e-Pul, Nawa district in Ghazni, and Khak Afghan district in Zabul province – were outside government control.²⁸ According to a Tolo News survey of July 2016,

²⁵ The Long War Journal, ‘Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan faction emerges after group’s collapse’, 14 June 2016, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/06/islamic-movement-of-uzbekistan-faction-emerges-after-groups-collapse.php>, date accessed 5 October 2016.

²⁶ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), ‘Quarterly Report to the United States Congress’, (page 87), 30 July 2016, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2016-07-30qr.pdf>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

²⁷ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), ‘Quarterly Report to the United States Congress’, (page 86), 30 July 2016, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2016-07-30qr.pdf>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

²⁸ Tolo News, ‘Over 50 districts face severe security threats, Mol admits’, 28 June 2016,

Nangarhar was the least insecure province, followed by Faryab, Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar and Paktika, whilst Daikundi and Panjshir provinces were considered the most secure.²⁹

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7.2 Taliban

7.2.1 Reporting on 4 September 2016, Bill Roggio, editor of The Long War Journal, noted that 'The Taliban currently control or contest more than 80 of Afghanistan's 400 plus districts... that number may be higher as reports from some districts known to be Taliban strongholds are unavailable.'³⁰ According to The Long War Journal, "contested" districts are those where the Afghan government may control the district centre but the Taliban control all, or large areas, outside of the district centre. "Control" means the Taliban are openly administering a district, including providing services and security, and also running the local courts.³¹ [See [Map of Taliban controlled and contested districts in Afghanistan](#), although this should be used with caution as the assessment of whether an area is contested or controlled may be based on a single media source dated 2014 or 2015].

7.2.2 The Long War Journal report added that:

'... it is reasonable to assume that the insurgents have a significant footprint in many more districts, particularly in northern and eastern Afghanistan. For instance, it is likely that additional districts in Kunar, Nuristan, Paktia, Paktika, Khost, Logar, Wardak, Zabul, Ghazni, Nimruz and Kandahar are Taliban administered or contested. But without a claim of control or news reporting to substantiate the Taliban's presence, these districts are not included on the [map](#). Using this methodology, 29 of Afghanistan's 398 districts are under Taliban control, and another 36 districts are contested. 335 districts are either under government control, or their status cannot be determined.

'The Afghan government and the US military have not been transparent concerning the status of the country's districts. In June 2015, the government claimed that only 4 of the 398 districts in Afghanistan's 34 provinces were administered by the Taliban. The US military does not comment on the status of Afghanistan's districts, even when conducting military operations there, and refers all inquiries to the Afghan government.'³²

<http://www.tolnews.com/en/afghanistan/26011-over-50-districts-face-severe-security-threats-moi-admits>, date accessed 24 August 2016.

²⁹ Tolo News, 'Security incidents drop by 14 percent in June: Tolo News survey', 8 July 2016, <http://www.tolnews.com/en/afghanistan/26157-security-incidents-drop-by-14-percent-in-june-tolnews-survey>, date accessed 24 August 2016.

³⁰ The Long War Journal, 'Another district in eastern Afghanistan falls to the Taliban', 4 September 2016, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/09/another-district-in-eastern-afghanistan-falls-to-the-taliban.php>, date accessed 6 September 2016.

³¹ The Long War Journal, 'Taliban controls or contests scores of districts in Afghanistan', 5 October 2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/10/taliban-controls-or-contests-scores-of-districts-in-afghanistan.php>, date accessed 9 September 2016.

³² The Long War Journal, 'Taliban controls or contests scores of districts in Afghanistan', 5 October

7.3 Islamic State in Khorasan (ISK)

7.3.1 The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) noted in a report of September 2016:

'In 2014, groups started to emerge in Afghanistan that claimed to belong to the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. In January 2015, certain figures claimed allegiance to the Islamic State via a video message, recognising the leadership of Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. They created a so-called province of the Islamic State: the Wilayat Khorasan, or hereafter the Islamic State in Khorasan (ISK). This group was eventually endorsed by the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Several groups have appeared in provinces such as Nangarhar, Helmand, Farah, Logar and Zabul that mainly consist of disillusioned or disenfranchised Taliban commanders and/or fighters. Regularly, ISK promoted pictures of training camps inside Afghanistan through social media. Three of these camps were...likely located in Nangarhar, with one in Logar. Attempts to infiltrate provinces other than Nangarhar were short-lived as these Taliban splinter groups met fierce resistance from their former Taliban comrades. The main group, and the only one with established links to the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, settled in the southern districts of Nangarhar.

'ISK's main base is in Achin district, where its fighters entered from the Tira valley in Pakistan's Khyber Agency...

'Government sources claim the ISK was dealt serious blows in Nangarhar and was expelled from Achin district. UNHCR received information in February 2016 from a government source that many families who fled harassment, intimidation, targeting and armed conflict started returning to Achin district. ISK retained limited presence in the Achin, Deh Bala and Chaparhar districts of Nangarhar province, and recent operations by the ANSF, supported by international military air strikes, as well as attacks from the Taliban, led to the removal of ISK to remote locations near the border with Pakistan. Later local sources were quoted as stating that ISK returned to Achin and controlled it almost entirely, except for the district center.

'Currently, the presence of ISK outside Nangarhar is limited. In southern Afghanistan, a group of several hundred fighters operating in Helmand and Farah was decimated by Taliban attacks and US drone strikes. In April 2016, it had no more than a dozen men, based in and around Kajaki district in Helmand. The ISK group in Farah was basically a Taliban splinter group, eventually crushed by the main Taliban group under the leadership of mullah Mansour.'³³

2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/10/taliban-controls-or-contests-scores-of-districts-in-afghanistan.php>, date accessed 9 September 2016.

³³ European Asylum Support Office (EASO), 'EASO Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan: Recruitment by armed groups', (pages 27-28), September 2016, available at <https://www.easo.europa.eu/information-analysis/country-origin-information/country-reports>, date accessed 18 November 2016.

- 7.3.2 According to UNAMA, the highest number of civilian casualties continued to be recorded in the Southern, Central and Eastern regions.³⁴

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8. Targeted groups

8.1 Overview

- 8.1.1 The UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Afghanistan, published 19 April 2016, noted that Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) ‘... are reported to systematically target civilians who are associated with, or who are perceived to be supporting the Afghan Government, Afghan civil society and the international community in Afghanistan, including the international military forces and international humanitarian and development actors.’ Though not an exhaustive list, other targets included: government officials and civil servants; judges, prosecutors and judicial staff; tribal elders and religious leaders; healthcare workers; humanitarian workers and human rights activists; women in the public sphere; individuals perceived as ‘Westernised’; journalists and other media professionals; and families or individuals supporting or perceived to be associated with the above.³⁵
- 8.1.2 The British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG) reported in June 2016 that ‘Taliban fighters continued to target public courts and judges, the Afghan police, and international security contractors in almost all regions of the country, including the capital.’³⁶ In its report on civilian casualties in the year 1394 (March 2015 to March 2016), the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) noted that press releases issued by the Taliban considered almost all persons who supported the government, whether military personnel or civilians, as enemies and therefore legitimate targets.³⁷ The US Department of State’s Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) noted in its Afghanistan 2016 Crime & Safety Report that ‘... Afghans associated with foreigners are potential targets, including non-governmental organization (NGO) employees, clergy, local medical staff, aid and rehabilitation workers, and others. Visitors and residents of Afghanistan must be on guard against assault, kidnapping, and all forms of theft.’³⁸

³⁴ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), ‘Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict’, (page 11), July 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

³⁵ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan’, (pages 34-42), 19 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>, date accessed 9 August 2016.

³⁶ British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group, ‘Afghanistan in June 2016’, undated, <http://www.baag.org.uk/sites/www.baag.org.uk/files/resources/attachments/Afghanistan%20this%20month%20-%20June%20final.pdf>, date accessed 22 August 2016.

³⁷ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, ‘Report on Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan in 1394’, (page 32), 1 August 2016, http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/Research%20Reports/english/Report%20on%20Civilian%20Casualties_1394_English.pdf, date accessed 6 September 2016.

³⁸ US Department of State, Overseas Security Advisory Council, ‘Afghanistan 2016 Crime & Safety Report’, 15 March 2016, <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=19292>, date

- 8.1.3 Though not defined under international law, the UN Special Rapporteur described a targeted killing as ‘... the intentional, premeditated and deliberate use of lethal force, by States or their agents acting under colour of law, or by an organized armed group in armed conflict, against a specific individual who is not in the physical custody of the perpetrator... The means and methods of killing vary, and include sniper fire, shooting at close range, missiles from helicopters, gunships, drones, the use of car bombs, and poison. The common element in all these contexts is that lethal force is intentionally and deliberately used, with a degree of pre-meditation, against an individual or individuals specifically identified in advance by the perpetrator. In a targeted killing, the specific goal of the operation is to use lethal force.’³⁹
- 8.1.4 An Afghanistan Analysts Network (ANN) analyst explained to the IRB Research Directorate that ‘... when an individual wanted by the Taliban relocates or returns to their province of origin and if their background is revealed, depending on the individual's profile, as well as the political climate of the day, that person could be killed, which has occurred ...’ According to a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School in California, ‘targeted assassinations carried out by the Taliban are aimed towards people perceived as “facilitators” of the government in Kabul...’⁴⁰

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8.2 Casualty numbers

- 8.2.1 In its mid-year report, covering events between 1 January and 30 June 2016, UNAMA documented a total of 5,166 civilian casualties, attributing 60 per cent to AGEs – 3,082 civilian casualties (966 deaths and 2,116 injured). Targeted and deliberate killings accounted for 11 per cent (583) of all civilian casualties. UNAMA also noted a significant decline (a 25 per cent reduction) in targeted and deliberate killings of civilians in the first half of 2016 compared to the same period in 2015.⁴¹ The AIHRC attributed 1,470 civilian deaths to targeted assassinations during its reporting period (March 2015 to March 2016).⁴²

accessed 7 October 2016.

³⁹ UN Human Rights Council, ‘Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston — Addendum: Study on targeted killings’, (paragraphs 1, 8 and 9), 28 May 2010 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/14session/A.HRC.14.24.Add6.pdf>, date accessed 6 September 2016.

⁴⁰ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, ‘Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016)’, 15 February 2016, AFG105412.E, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56d7f2670.html>, date accessed 2 September 2016.

⁴¹ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), ‘Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict’, (pages 2, 44 and 57), July 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

⁴² Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, ‘Report on Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan in 1394’, (page 20), 1 August 2016, <http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/Research%20Reports/english/Report%20on%20Civilian%20Casua>

8.2.2 UNAMA attributed AGE responsibility for civilian casualties in the first half of 2016 as follows:

Civilian casualties from incidents publicly claimed by Taliban	1,058
Civilian casualties from incidents attributed to Taliban commanders and affiliated groups but not publicly claimed	1,338
Civilian casualties from incidents publicly claimed by groups pledging allegiance to ISIL/Daesh	22
Civilian casualties from incidents sources attributed to groups pledging allegiance to ISIL/Daesh but not publicly claimed	100
Civilian casualties attributed to anti-government armed groups for which there was no claim of responsibility and attribution to a specific armed group was not possible	564
Total civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements	3,082

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Civilian casualties by AGEs 1

8.2.3 UNAMA also reported that ‘In the first six months of 2016, Taliban claimed responsibility for 51 attacks directed at civilians, including judicial bodies and staff, civilian government works, religious personnel and media professionals.’ UNAMA added that AGEs used threats, intimidation and harassment against civilians, including against healthcare personnel, media workers, students and teachers, which included physical violence, abductions, unlawful movement restrictions or prohibition of freedom of expression, and illegal deprivation of property.⁴⁴

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8.3 Abductions

8.3.1 NYA International, a global risk and crisis management consultancy, noted in its Global Kidnap for Ransom report dated April 2015 that in Afghanistan ‘The risk of kidnapping ... remains severe, especially for those associated with the government or security forces, NGOs or western aid groups.’⁴⁵

8.3.2 In 2015, UNAMA and UNICEF documented 66 abductions of health workers – more than twice that of 2014, and over six times more than 2013.⁴⁶ The

[ties_1394_English.pdf](#), date accessed 6 September 2016.

⁴³ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), ‘Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict’, (page 44), July 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

⁴⁴ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), ‘Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict’, (page 59), July 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

⁴⁵ NYA International, ‘Global Kidnap for Ransom update – April 2015’, Afghanistan, <http://www.nyainternational.com/sites/default/files/no-index/NYA-Global-Kidnap-for-Ransom-Update-April-2015-362.pdf>, date accessed 2 September 2016.

⁴⁶ UNAMA, UNICEF, ‘Education and Healthcare at Risk – Key trends and incidents affecting children’s access to healthcare and education in Afghanistan’, (page 10), April 2016, http://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/education_and_healthcare_at_risk.pdf, date accessed

UN Secretary-General reported that 92 children were abducted in 23 incidents in 2015, adding 'The abductions of 69 children were attributed to the Taliban (two killed), 3 to ISIL-affiliated groups (all killed) and 12 to undetermined armed groups. An incident involving eight children remains unattributed.'⁴⁷

8.3.3 The AIHRC Report on civilian casualties in Afghanistan in 1394 (March 2015 to March 2016) noted that, during the reporting period, hostage taking increased to unprecedented levels, adding: 'The majority of highways and roads became unsafe in the provincial and district centers. The anti-government armed elements have control on the parts of the highway.' The report noted that, of the nearly 90 people who were abducted, 22 were killed, the whereabouts of five others was unknown, and the rest were released.⁴⁸

8.3.4 In correspondence with the IRB's Research Directorate, an Afghanistan Analyst Network (ANN) analyst stated:

'... when an individual wanted by the Taliban relocates or returns to their province of origin and if their background is revealed, they can be intimidated, taken by the local Taliban for extortion or blackmail purposes to raise funds for the local district commander, or used as leverage in exchange for prisoners held by the government... People in this situation have been subjected to intimidation, threats, night letters, and higher taxation by the local Taliban...'⁴⁹

8.3.5 In its mid-year report for 2016 UNAMA observed that

'... civilians were frequently kidnapped based on suspicions that they had connections to, or worked for, the Government, in addition to the intentional and targeted abduction and kidnapping of civilian Government employees, including off-duty ANP. However, civilians were also kidnapped by Anti-Government Elements for financial gain, with release predicated on payment of a substantial ransom payment. In addition, UNAMA recorded seven incidents of abduction or attempted abduction of humanitarian de-miners and fifteen cases concerning civilian contractors and labourers. Many civilians were released unharmed following payment of ransoms or negotiation with local elders.'⁵⁰

29 August 2016.

⁴⁷ UN Report of the Secretary General, 'Children and armed conflict', (paragraph 29), 20 April 2016, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=s/2016/360&referer=/english/&Lang=E, date accessed 29 August 2016.

⁴⁸ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 'Report on Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan In 1394', (page 29), 1 August 2016, <http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/Research Reports/english/Report on Civilian Casualties 1394 English.pdf>, date accessed 22 August 2016.

⁴⁹ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 'Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016)', 15 February 2016, AFG105412.E, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56d7f2670.html>, date accessed 2 September 2016.

⁵⁰ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', (page 65), July 2016,

See also [Taliban's ability to pursue individuals](#).

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8.4 Civilians, including interpreters, associated with the international military forces (IMF)

8.4.1 According to information provided under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 by the UK's Ministry of Defence, dated 24 March 2015, 'A total of 2904 Afghan citizens were employed as interpreters for British forces in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014' and 'A total of 3857 Afghan citizens worked as Locally Employed Civilians (LECs) between 2001 and 2014'.⁵¹ According to NATO, as of 8 July 2016, 13,079 Coalition forces, were serving in Afghanistan, as part of its Resolute Support Mission.⁵² No specific information on the number of LECs working with the Resolute Support Mission could be found at the time of writing this report.

8.4.2 The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published a report in 2012 on intimidation and targeted violence against Afghans by insurgents. Summarising the findings from a range of sources, the report noted:

'Those working for the IMF face a real risk of being intimidated or targeted by insurgents in all parts of Afghanistan, but the risk is lower in the city of Kabul. However, individual and specific circumstances might lead to an increased risk. For people working for the IMF, it might not be sufficient to simply quit their job or stop their activity in order to escape intimidation and targeting by the insurgents. If someone working for the IMF quits his activity and can flee the area and resettle in a safer area, he can normally escape intimidation or targeting by insurgents, unless there are specific individual circumstances which would preclude this possibility.' The EASO report also noted that construction workers and truck drivers may face a risk of being targeted whilst working but generally, when they are off duty, they do not risk being targeted because of their job, although that risk may increase if they work for the IMF or an IMF contractor.⁵³ (See also [Taliban's ability to pursue individuals](#)).

8.4.3 Citing media reports, the UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines of April 2016 noted that 'AGEs have reportedly threatened and attacked Afghan civilians who work for the international military forces as drivers, interpreters or in other

https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

⁵¹ Ministry of Defence, 'J8 FOI Secretariat letter', 24 March 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/456580/20150810-T3-FOI2015_02271_Employment_of_Afghan_LECs.pdf, date accessed 23 August 2016.

⁵² Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress', (page 90), 30 July 2016, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2016-07-30qr.pdf>; NATO, 'Afghanistan Resolute Support', undated, <http://www.rs.nato.int/>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

⁵³ European Asylum Support Office, 'COI Report Afghanistan: Insurgent strategies — Intimidation and targeted violence against Afghans', (pages 19-21), December 2012, <https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/AFG%20Insurgent%20strategies%20Intimidation%20and%20targeted%20violence.pdf>, date accessed 9 September 2016.

civilian capacities. There are also reports of AGEs targeting former employees of the international forces and the government.⁵⁴

- 8.4.4 In April 2016 a former interpreter for the US military, from 2010 to 2014, described his experiences to Al Jazeera. The Afghan interpreter cited the two letters he had received from the Taliban, threatening him and his family with death if he continued to work for the US forces. The interpreter explained that he still feared for his life and was currently in the process of applying for a US visa.⁵⁵
- 8.4.5 In May 2016 The Telegraph reported that an Afghan interpreter, who worked for the British forces in 2006, claimed that interpreters were denounced as spies by the Taliban, adding that they “remain under threat and unable to work or live with their families in Afghanistan. Translators, their families and their homes are being attacked”.⁵⁶

(See also [Government officials and civil servants, and civilians associated with or perceived as supporting the Government, or accused of spying and Taliban's ability to pursue individuals](#)).

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8.5 Government officials and civil servants, and civilians associated with or perceived as supporting the Government, or accused of spying

- 8.5.1 According to Afghanistan's Central Statistics Organization, as of 2015-2016 there were a reported 400,812 civil service employees.⁵⁷
- 8.5.2 The EASO 2012 report, summarising the findings on intimidation and targeted violence against Afghans by insurgents from a range of sources,, noted:

‘High-ranking officials and government employees face a real risk of being intimidated or targeted by insurgents in all parts of Afghanistan. Low-ranking officials and government employees also face a real risk of being intimidated or targeted in peripheral unsafe areas and a low risk of being targeted in safer areas in Afghanistan which are not under the insurgents’ control... For low-ranking government employees or officials, it is possible to escape insurgents’ threats by stepping down from their position, unless there are specific individual circumstances that could lead to continued targeting. If a

⁵⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan’, (page 37), 19 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>, date accessed 9 August 2016.

⁵⁵ Al Jazeera, ‘Afghan interpreter: “Taliban don't wait to kill you”’, 6 April 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/04/afghan-interpreter-taliban-don-wait-kill-160403131005408.html>, date accessed 30 August 2016.

⁵⁶ The Telegraph, ‘Afghan interpreter asks “how many more must die” as he loses High Court fight’, 9 May 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/09/afghan-interpreter-asks-how-many-more-must-die-as-he-loses-high/>, date accessed 29 August 2016.

⁵⁷ Central Statistics Organization, Afghanistan, ‘Statistical Yearbook 2015-2016’, undated, <http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%20%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87%20%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A6%DB%8C%D9%88%DB%8C%20%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%201394/Civil%20Service%20Employees.pdf>, date accessed 11 August 2016.

low-ranking official or government employee quits his activity and can flee the area and resettle in a safer area, he can normally escape targeting by insurgents, unless there are specific individual circumstances which would preclude this possibility.⁵⁸ (See also [Taliban's ability to pursue individuals](#)).

- 8.5.3 For those persons seen as supporters, collaborators or contractors of the Afghan government, the EASO report noted:

'High profiles face a real risk of being intimidated or targeted by insurgents in all parts of Afghanistan. In general, low profiles also face a real risk of being intimidated or targeted in areas which are under insurgents' sustained control or strong influence, but not much risk in the safer areas of Afghanistan which are not under the insurgents' control... However, individual and specific circumstances might lead to an increased risk. For those with low profiles, it is possible to escape insurgents' threats by stopping an activity or quitting a job, unless there are specific individual circumstances that could lead to continued targeting. An example of these circumstances could be involvement in military opposition against the insurgents (e.g. PGM [Pro-Government Militia] members or contractors to the ANSF). If a low-profile person quits his activity, can flee the area and resettle in a safer area, he can normally escape intimidation or targeting by insurgents, unless there are specific individual circumstances which would preclude this possibility.'⁵⁹ (See also [Taliban's ability to pursue individuals](#)).

- 8.5.4 In its September 2015 report on Afghanistan, DFAT noted 'Insurgent and terrorist groups, including the Taliban, openly target government officials and people associated with the international community. These individuals are often subject to intimidation, threats, abduction and killing. These attacks occur throughout Afghanistan, including Kabul.' DFAT offered its assessment of the position for people associated with the government or the international community, stating:

'... individuals working for, supporting or associated with the government and/or the international community are at high risk of violence perpetrated by anti-government elements. While ethnicity and religion are unlikely to be primary motivations for attacks on government workers, in some cases these issues may be contributing factors... In many cases, individuals working with the government or the international community will take measures to mitigate the risks they face. This includes concealing their employment from their families, not travelling with documentation that would identify them as employees of international organisations and deleting contact information from phones. Some international organisations instruct their staff not to carry

⁵⁸ European Asylum Support Office, 'COI Report Afghanistan: Insurgent strategies — Intimidation and targeted violence against Afghans', (page 19), December 2012, <https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/AFG%20Insurgent%20strategies%20Intimidation%20and%20targeted%20violence.pdf>, date accessed 9 September 2016.

⁵⁹ European Asylum Support Office, 'COI Report Afghanistan: Insurgent strategies — Intimidation and targeted violence against Afghans', (page 19), December 2012, <https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/AFG%20Insurgent%20strategies%20Intimidation%20and%20targeted%20violence.pdf>, date accessed 9 September 2016.

identification.’⁶⁰ (See also [Humanitarian aid and development workers, non-governmental organisations \(NGOs\), and health workers](#) and [Taliban’s ability to pursue individuals](#)).).

8.5.5 As regards people accused of spying, the EASO 2012 report noted:

‘Civilians accused by the Taliban of being a spy face a high risk of being targeted in areas under the sustained control of the Taliban, which will very often result in the death of the victim... However, individual and specific circumstances might lead to an increased risk. If a low-profile civilian accused of being a spy can flee the area and resettle in a safer area, he can normally escape targeting by insurgents, unless there are specific individual circumstances which would preclude this possibility.’⁶¹ (See also [Taliban’s ability to pursue individuals](#)).

8.5.6 UNCHR cited in its Eligibility Guidelines for Afghanistan, dated April 2016, that:

‘AGEs are reported to kill civilians deliberately to punish them for supporting the government, with the killings intended to serve as a warning to others. AGEs are also reported to use different mechanisms to warn civilians against supporting the Government, including text messages, local radio broadcasts, social media and “night letters” (shab nameha). In locations where AGEs have been unable to win public support, they are reported to harass and intimidate local communities, and to mete out punishments against the local population for supporting the Government. Civilians accused of “spying for” the Government are reportedly subjected to summary trials in parallel and illegal judicial procedures operated by AGEs; the punishment for such alleged “crimes” is usually execution.

‘AGEs have been reported to target family members of individuals with the above profiles, both as acts of retaliation and on a “guilty by association” basis. In particular, relatives, including women and children, of government officials and members of the ANSF have been subjected to harassment, kidnappings, violence, and killings.’⁶² (See also [Night letters](#) and [Parallel justice punishments](#)).

8.5.7 UNAMA documented increasing attacks against civilian government officials, including judicial staff and institutions, by AGEs in 2015.⁶³ (see also [People](#)

⁶⁰ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘DFAT Country Information Report – Afghanistan’, (pages 14-15), 18 September 2015, date accessed 9 September 2016. Available on request.

⁶¹ European Asylum Support Office, ‘COI Report Afghanistan: Insurgent strategies — Intimidation and targeted violence against Afghans’, (page 20), December 2012, <https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/AFG%20Insurgent%20strategies%20Intimidation%20and%20targeted%20violence.pdf>, date accessed 9 September 2016.

⁶² UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan’, (pages 38-39 and 41), 19 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>, date accessed 9 August 2016.

⁶³ UNAMA, ‘Afghanistan Annual Report 2015: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict’, page 44, February 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf, date accessed 19 August 2016.

[working in the justice system](#)). On 4 May 2015, Reuters reported that a suicide car bomber targeted a bus carrying Afghan civil servants as they travelled into Kabul, killing one person and injuring 15 others. The Taliban claimed responsibility.⁶⁴ A statement issued by the Taliban on 22 April 2015 read “officials of the puppet regime and other harmful people will be targeted during the war in 2015”.⁶⁵

8.5.8 In the first half of 2016 UNAMA recorded 77 attacks against civilian government officials (excluding judicial staff and prosecutors) by AGEs, which caused 128 civilian casualties (19 deaths and 109 injured). UNAMA attributed 14 of these attacks directly to the Taliban. The report noted that the overall figures had reduced by 72 per cent compared to the same period in 2015. UNAMA also noted the complex attack that took place in Kabul on 19 April 2016 on the VIP Protection Directorate, which is tasked with providing close protection and security for high ranking civilian Government officials city. The attack caused 56 deaths and injured 337 others. A number of staff members were killed in the blast and in the armed attack that followed.⁶⁶

8.5.9 An Afghan member of parliament was killed on 5 June 2016 when a bomb planted near his residence exploded. The bomb also injured 11 others.⁶⁷ On 20 June 2016 an Afghan provincial minister and five others were wounded when a bomb planted on the minister’s car detonated in Kabul.⁶⁸ On 5 September 2016, more than 30 people, including senior police and army officials, were killed in twin explosions outside the Ministry of Defence in Kabul. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.⁶⁹

Between January and June 2016, UNAMA recorded 26 incidents of AGEs, including the Taliban, ‘punishing civilians for alleged infractions of Sharia law, perceived offences, and allegations of spying or connections with government and Afghan security forces.’⁷⁰ (See also [Parallel justice](#)

⁶⁴ Reuters, ‘Suicide bomber targets Afghan civil servants’ bus in Kabul’, 4 May 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-attack-idUSKBN0NP0Q420150504>, date accessed 29 August 2016.

⁶⁵ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, ‘Report on Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan in 1394’, (page 20), 1 August 2016, http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/Research%20Reports/english/Report%20on%20Civilian%20Casualties_1394_English.pdf, date accessed 6 September 2016.

⁶⁶ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), ‘Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict’, (pages 55 and 62), July 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

⁶⁷ Reuters, ‘Afghan lawmaker killed in blast at his home in Kabul’, 5 June 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-lawmaker-idUSKCN0YR0P3>, date accessed 22 August 2016.

⁶⁸ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), ‘Quarterly Report to the United States Congress’, (page 87), 30 July 2016, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2016-07-30qr.pdf>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

⁶⁹ Tolo News, ‘Over 30 Killed In Twin Bombing Outside MoD’, 5 September 2016, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/27106-at-least-20-killed-in-twin-bombing-outside-mod>, date accessed 6 September 2016.

⁷⁰ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), ‘Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of

[punishments, Members or associates of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces \(ANDSF\) and Taliban's ability to pursue individuals](#)).

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8.6 Humanitarian aid and development workers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and health workers

8.6.1 The Council on Foundations, an active philanthropic non-profit organisation, cited Afghanistan's Ministry of Economy as reporting 2,137 registered NGOs (both foreign and domestic) in Afghanistan as of April 2016.⁷¹ According to Freedom House, in 2015 there were approximately 274 active international NGOs in 2015, as well as nearly 1,800 local NGOs.⁷² The independent social research organisation, the Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO), stated in a 2014 report that the number of NGOs in Afghanistan was unclear, but reported there were approximately 72,000 aid workers as of 2013.⁷³ In 2013 the New York Times cited the number of aid workers in Afghanistan as 90,000, the large majority of whom were locally employed Afghans.⁷⁴

8.6.2 EASO noted in its 2012 report that NGO workers may be targeted under certain circumstances, for example, 'working in US-funded or for US organisations; activities which are perceived by insurgents to be partisan; cooperation with the IMF.' The report continued:

'Afghan UN staff members or Afghan employees of other international organisations are at risk of being targeted by insurgents. This is also the case for employees of foreign companies, especially if the companies are American, British or Indian... The individual circumstances of the case determines whether the Taliban would further target or threaten a person after he quits his job or stopped activities. If an Afghan civilian working for an NGO, international organisation or foreign companies quits his activity and can flee the area and resettle in a safer area, he can normally escape intimidation or targeting by insurgents, unless there are specific individual circumstances which would preclude this possibility.'⁷⁵ (See also [Taliban's ability to pursue individuals](#)).

Civilians in Armed Conflict', (page 67), July 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

⁷¹ Council on Foundations, 'Afghanistan', Chapter III.A, April 2016, <http://www.cof.org/content/afghanistan#end2>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

⁷² Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2016 – Afghanistan', 7 June 2016, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/575aa7d215.html>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

⁷³ Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization, 'Transition and Non-Governmental Organizations in Afghanistan: An assessment and prospects', (page 10), 1 January 2014, <http://appro.org.af/2014-01-01-transition-and-ngos-in-afghanistan/>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

⁷⁴ The New York Times, 'Attacks on Aid Workers Rise in Afghanistan, U.N. Says', 2 December 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/03/world/asia/attacks-rise-on-aid-workers-in-afghanistan.html?_r=0, date accessed 19 August 2016.

⁷⁵ European Asylum Support Office, 'COI Report Afghanistan: Insurgent strategies — Intimidation and targeted violence against Afghans', (page 19), December 2012, <https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/AFG%20Insurgent%20strategies%20Intimidation>

- 8.6.3 The International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) noted in 2016 that ‘Whilst incidents of NGOs being the direct targets of hostility remain rare, there have been several prominent cases in which NGOs were targeted as a result of their activities being perceived as either non-neutral or in violation of Afghanistan’s cultural or religious customs.’⁷⁶ Freedom House noted that ‘... threats and violence by the Taliban and other actors have curbed the activities of many NGOs and hampered recruitment of foreign aid workers.’⁷⁷
- 8.6.4 UNHCR provided the following information in its Eligibility Guidelines for Afghanistan, regarding humanitarian workers:
- ‘AGEs are reported to target civilians who are employees of international or Afghan humanitarian organizations, including Afghan nationals working for UN organizations; employees of international development agencies; employees of national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and truck drivers, construction workers and individuals involved in mining projects and other development projects. Individuals with these profiles are reported to have been killed, abducted, and intimidated.’⁷⁸ (See also [Taliban’s ability to pursue individuals](#)).
- 8.6.5 The Aid Worker Security Database recorded 27 incidents (defined as killings, kidnappings, and attacks that result in serious injury) against aid workers in Afghanistan during 2015, compared to 54 in 2014, and 81 in 2013.⁷⁹ The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB Canada) noted that, in correspondence with the Research Directorate in January 2016, a representative of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) indicated that ‘Ghazni, Zabul, Kunduz, Laghman, and Nangarhar have seen relatively higher levels of incidents involving NGO workers than other parts of the country.’⁸⁰ UNAMA reported that ‘Geographically, Anti-Government Elements targeted humanitarian de-miners primarily in the central and eastern regions, particularly in Nangarhar, Logar and Maidan Wardak provinces although attacks resulting in civilian casualties occurred in Nangarhar, Helmand, Kandahar and Zabul provinces.’⁸¹

[%20and%20targeted%20violence.pdf](#), date accessed 9 September 2016.

⁷⁶ International NGO Safety Organisation, Afghanistan, ‘Key risks and mitigation measures’, 2016, <http://www.ngosafety.org/country/afghanistan>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

⁷⁷ Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World 2016 – Afghanistan’, 7 June 2016, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/575aa7d215.html>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

⁷⁸ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan’, (page 35), 19 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>, date accessed 9 August 2016.

⁷⁹ Aid Worker Security Database, ‘Total Incidents by Country (1997-2015)’, 31 December 2015, <https://aidworkersecurity.org/incidents/report/country>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

⁸⁰ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, ‘Afghanistan: Situation of Afghan citizens who work for NGOs or international aid organizations, and whether they are targeted by the Taliban; attacks against schools and incidents of violence against students, teachers, and the educational sector; state response (2012-January 2016)’, 22 February 2016, AFG105413.E, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56d7f1994.html>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

⁸¹ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), ‘Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict’, (page 29), July 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_re

The IRB Canada recorded that an analyst with the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), an independent non-profit policy and research organization based in Afghanistan, explained to the Research Directorate in January 2016 that ‘the Taliban targeting of NGOs and schools that has occurred in recent years is “very dependent on local political conditions” in which the organizations or schools are operating.’ The AAN added that ‘the Taliban continues to target local aid workers and local staff of international organizations, though the organization's reputation with the community and local political climate impacts whether workers will encounter problems.’ NGO employees were also subject to intimidation by the Taliban. According to sources cited by the IRB Canada, aid and foreign workers risked being labelled by insurgents as “invaders”, “hirelings”, “spies” or “foreign agents”.⁸² (see also [Members or associates of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces \(ANDSF\)](#), [Government officials and civil servants, and civilians associated with or perceived as supporting the Government, or accused of spying](#) and [Taliban's ability to pursue individuals](#)).

8.6.6 According to the US Department of State, in its Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2015 (USSD HR Report 2015):

‘Suspected Taliban members attacked NGO offices, vehicles, guesthouses, restaurants, and hotels frequented by NGO employees. Violence and instability hampered development, relief, and reconstruction efforts. NGOs reported insurgents, powerful local individuals, and militia leaders demanded bribes to allow groups to bring relief supplies into the country and distribute them. In June unidentified attackers abducted and later released several members of a mine removal team from HALO Trust, a mine clearance agency, in Logar Province. In September the UN World Food Program temporarily suspended operations in Badakhshan Province after unidentified attackers stopped five UN vehicles and burned them.’⁸³ (see also [Abductions](#)).

8.6.7 The Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, covering the period January to December 2015, noted that:

‘Verified attacks on hospitals and health personnel (125) significantly increased compared with 2014. In the attacks, at least 63 health-care personnel, including vaccinators, were killed or injured, 66 abducted and 64 intimidated and assaulted. A total of 75 incidents were attributed to the Taliban; 14 to ISIL-affiliated groups; 1 to TTP [Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan]; 19 to undetermined armed groups; 14 to the Afghan National Defence and

[port_2016_final.pdf](#), date accessed 9 August 2016.

⁸² Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, ‘Afghanistan: Situation of Afghan citizens who work for NGOs or international aid organizations, and whether they are targeted by the Taliban; attacks against schools and incidents of violence against students, teachers, and the educational sector; state response (2012-January 2016)’, 22 February 2016, AFG105413.E, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56d7f1994.html>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

⁸³ US Department of State, ‘Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2015’, Afghanistan, (section 1g), 13 April 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252957>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

Security Forces and pro-Government militias; and 1 to international forces. For example, 49 medical staff were killed or injured in an air strike by international forces on the Médecins sans frontières hospital in Kunduz on 3 October... The United Nations also verified 10 incidents of military use of hospitals.⁸⁴

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8.7 Journalists and the media

8.7.1 According to the DFAT report dated 18 September 2015:

‘Despite greater regulatory freedom, journalists continue to face security challenges beyond those faced by ordinary members of the community. Journalists have been threatened and subjected to violent attacks to limit reporting that is critical of government officials, anti-government elements, religious figures and/or powerful local figures. According to Reporters Without Borders, areas under greater Taliban influence have much less media activity than the rest of the country. Human Rights Watch has reported that violent attacks on journalists are often not investigated, nor are the offenders punished. In addition to attacks by security forces, insurgents and other groups specifically targeting journalists, the overall security environment also presents a risk to journalists, particularly when travelling by road outside of the major urban centres.’⁸⁵

8.7.2 The UN Secretary-General’s report of 7 March 2016 stated:

‘In January 2016, anti-government elements carried out two deliberate attacks on journalists and other employees of media organizations. On 20 January, a Taliban suicide bomber detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device against a minibus transporting staff of the Tolo media organization, killing 8 civilians, including seven Tolo staff members, and injuring 24 others. The attack followed a specific threat issued by the Taliban in October against Tolo and other named Afghan news organizations, identifying them as military objectives. On 29 January, a journalist working for a national radio and television organization in Jalalabad city was killed by anti-government elements.’⁸⁶

8.7.3 The Secretary-General’s subsequent report, dated 10 June 2016, noted:

‘The Taliban continued to threaten media organizations and journalists, accusing them of engaging in propaganda. On 28 February [2016], the Government established a committee consisting of representatives of the

⁸⁴ UN Report of the Secretary General, ‘Children and armed conflict’, (paragraphs 27 and 28), 20 April 2016, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=s/2016/360&preferer=/english/&Lang=E, date accessed 29 August 2016.

⁸⁵ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘DFAT Country Information Report – Afghanistan’, (page 18), 18 September 2015, date accessed 9 September 2016. Available on request.

⁸⁶ UN Report of the Secretary-General, ‘The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security’, (paragraph 26), 7 March 2016, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2016_218.pdf, date accessed 29 August 2016.

Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Information and Culture, the office of the Attorney General, the National Directorate of Security and journalist unions to investigate cases involving the killing of journalists. On 3 May, the President appointed a human rights activist as Ambassador for Freedom of Expression in Afghanistan.⁸⁷

8.7.4 An Afghan journalist and his American colleague were killed in June 2016 when their vehicle came under attack from the Taliban as they travelled in an Afghan National Army convoy in Helmand province.⁸⁸

8.7.5 According to the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC) six-monthly report, dated July 2016:

‘2016 was the bloodiest year for journalists in the history of Afghanistan. Only in the first six months, ten journalists were murdered, exacerbating fear and concern over safety of journalists. In this reporting period, AJSC recorded a total of 54 incidents, which include murder, physical assault, detention, and intimidation. This figure shows a 38 percent increase from the first six months of 2015, in which 39 cases were reported. Individuals linked to the government still account for the majority of cases of violence and intimidation. Based on the findings of this report, the number of cases where Taliban have been the perpetrators has dramatically increased compared to the previous years. In this reporting period, the government is responsible for 21 cases (39%) and Taliban 16 cases (30%).’⁸⁹

8.7.6 The Costs of War project noted that:

‘... according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), that profession appears to be in a less precarious position. The CPJ found that in 2014, three journalists were killed, where the motive could be confirmed, while they found that no journalists were killed for confirmed motives in 2015. Costs of War uses the CPJ count, but there are other sources that record different numbers. An Afghan monitoring organization found that Afghan journalists faced continued “violence, threats, and intimidation” from mid March 2015 to mid March 2016, and records 10 deaths in that year. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, which includes both domestic and international journalists and their interpreters, counts 32 journalists killed in Afghanistan from 2005 to mid 2016 – ten of these killings occurred in 2016 alone.’⁹⁰

⁸⁷ UN Report of the Secretary-General, ‘The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security’, (paragraph 25), 10 June 2016, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/532, date accessed 24 August 2016.

⁸⁸ Al Jazeera, ‘NPR journalist killed in Afghanistan mourned’, 7 June 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/npr-journalist-killed-afghanistan-mourned-160606195448620.html>, date accessed 29 August 2016.

⁸⁹ Afghan Journalists Safety Committee, ‘Six Months Report (Jan – Jun 2016) 15 Years of Reporting in Afghanistan’, (page 5), 11 July 2016, <http://ajsc.af/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/JAN-JUN2016SixMonthsReportENGLISH.pdf>, date accessed 29 August 2016.

⁹⁰ Crawford, N. C., Boston University, ‘Costs of War: Update on the Human Costs of War for Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001 to mid-2016’, (page 8), August 2016, http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2016/War%20in%20Afghanistan%20and%20Pakistan%20UPDATE_FINAL_corrected%20date.pdf, date accessed 22 August 2016.

8.8 Members or associates of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF)

8.8.1 The EASO 2012 report on intimidation and targeted violence against Afghans by insurgents summarised its findings as regards security forces officials, noting:

‘High-ranking ANSF officials face a real risk of being intimidated or targeted by insurgents in all parts of Afghanistan. Low-ranking members face a low risk of being intimidated or targeted in safer areas in Afghanistan which are not under the insurgents’ control, unless there are specific individual circumstances that increase the risk. They also might be targeted by complex attacks in several other cities, including Kabul. ANSF members might face continued targeting by insurgents even after stepping down from their position. If a low-ranking ANSF member quits his activity and can flee the area and resettle in a safer area, he can normally escape targeting by insurgents, unless there are specific individual circumstances which would preclude this possibility.’⁹¹ (See also [Taliban’s ability to pursue individuals](#)).

8.8.2 According to the USSD HR 2015 report, ‘The majority of Taliban attacks targeted security forces, in particular ANP and ALP [Afghan Local Police] forces, notably in volatile areas.’⁹² Citing various sources, the UNHCR reported in its Eligibility Guidelines for Afghanistan, dated April 2016, that:

‘Afghan security forces, particularly the ANP, continue to be the object of targeted campaigns. Since the withdrawal of most foreign combat forces in 2014, police bases and checkpoints have been increasingly targeted in attacks by AGEs. ANP police officers have been targeted both on duty and off duty. ALP members are also widely targeted. As ALP members are often stationed in more volatile areas, estimates suggest that their casualty rate is three times higher than that of other AN[D]SF members. AGEs are also reported to target officers of other police forces in Afghanistan, as well as former members of the AN[D]SF.’⁹³

8.8.3 The US Department of Defense (US DoD) reported in June 2016 that:

‘The majority of ANDSF casualties continue to be the result of direct fire attacks and IED [improvised explosive device]. Although casualties from IED attacks have declined for the ANA, the ANP continue to incur the same level

⁹¹ European Asylum Support Office, ‘COI Report Afghanistan: Insurgent strategies — Intimidation and targeted violence against Afghans’, (page 19), December 2012, <https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/AFG%20Insurgent%20strategies%20Intimidation%20and%20targeted%20violence.pdf>, date accessed 9 September 2016.

⁹² US Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2015’, Afghanistan, (Section 1g), 13 April 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252957>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

⁹³ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan’, (pages 36-37), 19 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>, date accessed 9 August 2016.

of casualties from IED attacks, which could be attributed in part to less protective measures. ANDSF and ALP casualties this reporting period were higher than during the same time period one year ago... Afghan security forces also remain at risk for insider attacks from within their own forces (otherwise known as “green-on-green” attacks).⁹⁴

- 8.8.4 The US DoD reported that, on 19 April 2016, an attack on the National Directorate of Security (NDS) building in Kabul resulted in the deaths of more than 60 people, with 300 others injured. Afghan government and ANDSF personnel, and civilians, were among the casualties.⁹⁵ Media reports on the day of the attack cited at least 28 deaths and up to 330 wounded. The Taliban claimed responsibility.⁹⁶
- 8.8.5 On 5 June 2016, Tolo News reported that Taliban insurgents used a government hand-held biometric system to test the identity of bus passengers in Kunduz. Those affiliated with the security forces were reportedly executed.⁹⁷ On 30 June 2016 Al Jazeera reported that the Taliban targeted a police academy near Kabul, killing at least 27 recruits and injuring 40 others in a suicide blast.⁹⁸ The BBC cited 30 dead and 50 wounded, adding that all but two of the dead were police cadets.⁹⁹
- 8.8.6 According to USFOR-A, as reported in the SIGAR report of July 2016, ‘There were 77 insider attacks against the Afghan security forces [between 1 January 2015 and 1 July 2016], resulting in the deaths of 205 and the wounding of 103 Afghan security forces. Of these attacks, 20 occurred in 2016, resulting in the deaths of 68 and the wounding of 48 Afghan security forces.’¹⁰⁰
- 8.8.7 The UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines of April 2016 indicated that ‘AGEs are widely reported to target civilians who are suspected of collaborating with, or

⁹⁴ US Department of Defense, ‘Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan’, (pages 30-31), June 2016,

http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Enhancing_Security_and_Stability_in_Afghanistan-June_2016.pdf, date accessed 22 August 2016.

⁹⁵ US Department of Defense, ‘Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan’, (page 30), June 2016,

http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Enhancing_Security_and_Stability_in_Afghanistan-June_2016.pdf, date accessed 22 August 2016.

⁹⁶ Reuters, ‘Afghan Taliban kill at least 28 in major attack in central Kabul’, 19 April 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-blast-idUSKCN0XG0BO>; BBC News, ‘Afghanistan violence: Deadly bomb and gun attack hits Kabul’, 19 April 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-36079445>, date accessed 22 August 2016.

⁹⁷ Tolo News, ‘Taliban Used Biometric System During Kunduz Kidnapping’, 5 June 2016, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/25653-taliban-used-biometric-system-during-kunduz-kidnapping>, date accessed 24 August 2016.

⁹⁸ Al Jazeera, ‘Dozens of Afghan police recruits dead in Taliban attack’, 30 June 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/dozens-afghan-police-feared-dead-taliban-attack-160630082922396.html>, date accessed 22 August 2016.

⁹⁹ BBC News, ‘Taliban attack on Afghanistan police cadets near Kabul kills dozens’, 30 June 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-36671676>, date accessed 22 August 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), ‘Quarterly Report to the United States Congress’, (page 90), 30 July 2016, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2016-07-30qr.pdf>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

“spying for” pro-government forces, including the ANSF.’¹⁰¹ (see [Government officials and civil servants, and civilians associated with or perceived as supporting the Government, or accused of spying](#)).

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8.9 Persons perceived as “Westernised”

8.9.1 The UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines of April 2016 indicated that:

‘AGEs reportedly target individuals who are perceived to have adopted values and/or appearances associated with Western countries, due to their imputed support for the Government and the international community. There are reports of individuals who returned from Western countries having been tortured or killed by AGEs on the grounds that they had become “foreigners” or that they were spies for a Western country. Individuals who fall under other profiles, such as ... (humanitarian workers and development workers) and ... (women in the public sphere) may similarly be accused by AGEs for having adopted values and/or appearances associated with Western countries, and may be targeted for that reason.’¹⁰²

8.9.2 In its assessment of the treatment of returnees, DFAT noted in its February 2016 report that:

‘Returnees from western countries are almost exclusively returned to Kabul. While some families are returned, most returnees tend to be single men travelling alone. While men of working age are more likely to be able to return and reintegrate successfully than unaccompanied women and children, the lack of family networks for single men can also impact on their ability to reintegrate into Afghan community. The relatively better economic opportunities available mean returnees often choose to remain in Kabul. There are no tracking mechanisms for these returnees, so it is difficult to assess the conditions they face. There are plausible, but anecdotal, reports of returnees from western countries turning up in drug communities. DFAT assesses that, because of Kabul’s size and diversity, returnees would be unlikely to be discriminated against or subject to violence on the basis of ethnicity or religion.’¹⁰³

8.9.3 DFAT also noted in its 2015 report that it was:

‘... aware of occasional reports of returnees from western countries alleging they have been kidnapped or otherwise targeted on the basis of having spent time in a western country. While this Country Information Report does not make a judgement on the veracity of individual cases, in general DFAT assesses that returnees from western countries are not specifically targeted

¹⁰¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan’, (page 37), 19 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>, date accessed 9 August 2016.

¹⁰² UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan’, (page 41), 19 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>, date accessed 9 August 2016.

¹⁰³ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘DFAT Thematic Report – Hazaras in Afghanistan’, (page 15), 8 February 2016. Available on request.

on the basis of their being failed asylum-seekers. ... people who are identifiable as being associated with foreign (particularly western) countries may be targeted by insurgent groups such as the Taliban. Returnees from western countries, however, face a similar level of risk to other people in Afghanistan who are associated with support for the government or the international community. People in this situation often take measures to conceal their association, such as not travelling with documents or symbols that may link them to the Afghan government, the international community based in Afghanistan or western countries. DFAT assesses that returnees from western countries who maintain a low profile such as by taking steps to conceal their association with the country from which they have returned do not face a significantly higher risk of violence or discrimination than do other people in Afghanistan with a similar ethnic and religious profile.¹⁰⁴

(see also [Humanitarian aid and development workers, non-governmental organisations \(NGOs\), and health workers](#), [Women in the public sphere](#) and See also [Taliban's ability to pursue individuals](#)).

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8.10 People working in the justice system

- 8.10.1 UNAMA documented that deliberate targeting of judges, prosecutors and judicial institutions by AGEs doubled in 2015 compared to 2014. The majority of such attacks were attributed to the Taliban.¹⁰⁵ UNAMA noted in its 2016 mid-year report that, following the execution of six Taliban prisoners by the authorities in May, the Taliban issued public statements referring to judicial officials as “legitimate military targets”. The report added that ‘In the first half of 2016, UNAMA documented 23 incidents targeting judges, prosecutors, and judicial staff that resulted in 104 civilian casualties (36 deaths and 68 injured), a decrease of 42 per cent compared to the same period in 2015. Taliban claimed responsibility for 12 incidents that caused 93 civilian casualties (31 deaths and 62 injured).’¹⁰⁶
- 8.10.2 On 1 June 2016, an attack on a court building in Ghazni killed 10 people, including a police officer.¹⁰⁷ On 5 June 2016 the Taliban attacked a courthouse in eastern Logar province, killing at least seven people including a newly appointed chief prosecutor.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘DFAT Country Information Report – Afghanistan’, (page 23), 18 September 2015, date accessed 6 October 2016. Available on request.

¹⁰⁵ UNAMA, ‘Afghanistan Annual Report 2015: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict’, (page 45), February 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf, date accessed 19 August 2016.

¹⁰⁶ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), ‘Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict’, (page 60), July 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, ‘Ten Killed As Taliban Militants Storm Afghan Court’, 1 June 2016, available at ecoi.net http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/324906/451053_en.html, date accessed 22 August 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Deutsche Welle, ‘Afghan lawmaker killed in Kabul bombing’, 5 June 2016,

8.11 Religious and tribal leaders

8.11.1 The US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report for 2015 (USSD IRF 2015) noted that:

'As of the end of the year [2015], MOHRA [Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs] estimated between 4,800 and 5,000 mullahs were registered with and worked directly for MOHRA, receiving an average monthly salary of 4,700 afghanis (\$69). While MOHRA said the ministry did not have the financial resources to create a comprehensive registry of mullahs and mosques in the country, MOHRA estimated that there were approximately 150,000 to 160,000 mosques. Approximately 50,000 mosques had been registered in a database over several years with the financial and technical assistance of an NGO. MOHRA also estimated there were approximately 300,000 mullahs in Afghanistan.'¹⁰⁹

8.11.2 The USSD HR Report 2015 noted that AGEs '...continued to attack religious leaders whom they concluded spoke against the insurgency or the Taliban.'¹¹⁰ In its annual report for 2015, UNAMA expressed its concern at the '... continued pattern of targeted killings of mullahs who had expressed pro-Government views or condemned civilian casualties caused by Anti-Government Elements.' The report also noted the deliberate targeting of places of worship, adding that the number of attacks against religious personnel had decreased compared to 2014.¹¹¹ UNAMA also noted a decrease in attacks against mullahs and places of worship in the first six months of 2016 compared to the same period in 2015. The report highlighted, however, that in comparison to the first half of 2015, the number of civilian casualties in such attacks between January and June 2016 had almost tripled.¹¹²

8.11.3 The USSD IRF 2015 noted that 'According to media reports, the Taliban, the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), and other insurgent groups attacked and killed leaders of religious minority communities because of their beliefs or their links to the government. The Taliban reportedly killed two

<http://www.dw.com/en/afghan-lawmaker-killed-in-kabul-bombing/a-19308164>, date accessed 22 August 2016.

¹⁰⁹ US Department of State, 'International Religious Freedom for 2015', Afghanistan, (Section II), 10 August 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256299>, date accessed 22 August 2016.

¹¹⁰ US Department of State, 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2015', Afghanistan, (Section 1g), 13 April 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252957>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

¹¹¹ UNAMA, 'Afghanistan Annual Report 2015: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', (page 46), February 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf, date accessed 19 August 2016.

¹¹² UNAMA, 'Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', (page 62), July 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

clerics during one week in July. ISKP killed several religious scholars in separate incidents in October and November.¹¹³

8.11.4 UNHCR noted in its Eligibility Guidelines for Afghanistan that:

‘AGEs are reported to target local traditional leaders such as tribal elders who are perceived to be supporters of the Government or the international community, or as non-supportive of AGEs.

‘AGEs are also reported to target religious leaders who are perceived as pro-government, or on the basis of their particular interpretations of Islam. Imams have reportedly been targeted for performing funeral ceremonies for members of the ANSF and for individuals who have been killed by the Taliban.’¹¹⁴

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8.12 Teachers, students and schools

8.12.1 Afghanistan’s Ministry of Education reported in June 2014 that over 8 million children (39 per cent girls) were enrolled in education; around 187,000 teachers (32 per cent female) were employed in 2013; and, as of 2013, 14,600 schools were functioning.¹¹⁵

8.12.2 The Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, covering the period January to December 2015, noted that:

‘Attacks on schools and protected personnel continued to be verified, including the killing, injury and abduction of education personnel. Of 132 verified incidents, 82 were attributed to the Taliban, 13 to ISIL-affiliated groups, 11 to undetermined armed groups, 1 to Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and 23 to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and pro-Government militias; 2 incidents could not be attributed to any party. The emergence of ISIL-affiliated groups in the east had an impact on access to education and led to the closure of 68 schools, affecting more than 48,751 children in Nangarhar Province...

‘In a positive development, in May, the Government signed the Safe Schools Declaration, aimed at protecting education facilities from military use during conflict. The use of schools by parties to the conflict continued, however, with 24 cases attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and 11 to armed groups (Taliban (4), ISIL-affiliated group (7)).’¹¹⁶

¹¹³ US Department of State, ‘International Religious Freedom for 2015’, Afghanistan, (Executive summary), 10 August 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256299>, date accessed 22 August 2016.

¹¹⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan’, (page 39), 19 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>, date accessed 9 August 2016.

¹¹⁵ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Education, ‘Afghanistan National Education for All (EFA) Review Report, 2015’, (pages 3 and 24), June 2014, [http://moe.gov.af/Content/files/FINAL-EFA%202015%20Review%20Afghanistan-June%202015%20\(1\).pdf](http://moe.gov.af/Content/files/FINAL-EFA%202015%20Review%20Afghanistan-June%202015%20(1).pdf), date accessed 21 September 2016.

¹¹⁶ UN Report of the Secretary General, ‘Children and armed conflict’, (paragraphs 26 and 28), 20

8.12.3 A joint report by UNAMA and UNICEF, covering the period 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2015, noted that, due to insecurity in Afghanistan 'More than 369 schools closed partially or completely, affecting at least 139,048 students (65,057 boys and 73,991 girls) and 600 teachers.' Access to girls' education was particularly limited as, throughout 2015, AGEs 'deliberately restricted access of women and girls to education, including closure of girls' schools, prohibition of education beyond 4th or 6th grade and complete bans on education for women and girls.'¹¹⁷ The report added:

'In Afghanistan, education personnel, including students, continued to face direct attacks and threats from Anti-Government Elements due to their association with education provided by the Government. For example, UNAMA documented multiple instances of teachers employed by the Government of Afghanistan being killed, beaten, abducted or threatened by Anti-Government Elements after being accused of pro-Government alignment.'¹¹⁸

8.12.4 During the first half of 2016 UNAMA documented:

'... 46 conflict-related incidents targeting education and education-related personnel – a decrease of 35 per cent compared to the first half of 2015 – that resulted in 15 civilian casualties (five deaths and 10 injured). All of the civilian casualties from incidents targeting the education sector occurred as a result of incidents perpetrated by Anti-Government Elements – 14 casualties from targeted killings and one from the severe beating of an education official for failure to pay an illegal tax on his salary. UNAMA also documented four abduction incidents targeting the sector that resulted in the abduction of 10 civilians, although without casualties. The mission furthermore documented five incidents of intentional damage to educational facilities, two IED incidents targeting the education sector, and one incident of looting of school property.

'Incidents of intimidation and threats against education-related personnel accounted for the majority of incidents targeting education in the first half of 2016. While UNAMA documented a 39 per cent decrease in incidents compared to the same period in 2015, the mission continued to document threats and intimidation intended to prevent girls' access to education after grade six or impose conditions on their attendance.'¹¹⁹

April 2016,

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=s/2016/360&referer=/english/&amLang=E, date accessed 29 August 2016.

¹¹⁷ UNAMA, UNICEF, 'Education and Healthcare at Risk – Key trends and incidents affecting children's access to healthcare and education in Afghanistan', (page 6), April 2016, http://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/education_and_healthcare_at_risk.pdf, date accessed 29 August 2016.

¹¹⁸ UNAMA, UNICEF, 'Education and Healthcare at Risk – Key trends and incidents affecting children's access to healthcare and education in Afghanistan', (page 10), April 2016, http://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/education_and_healthcare_at_risk.pdf, date accessed 29 August 2016.

¹¹⁹ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', (page 20), July 2016,

- 8.12.5 Reporting for the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), Ajit Kumar Singh, a Research Fellow at the Institute for Conflict Management, noted that, on 24 August 2016, an attack on the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul, lasting 10 hours, killed at least 13 persons, including seven students, one professor, two security guards and three Security Force (SF) personnel. Another 45 persons, including 36 students and staff members and 9 SF personnel were injured. Nearly 3 weeks earlier, on 7 August, 2 professors of the same university – an American and an Australian – were abducted at a gun point from near the University campus. Their whereabouts are still unknown. The report noted that no one had yet claimed responsibility for either incident.¹²⁰ (See also [Abductions](#)).

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8.13 Women in the public sphere

- 8.13.1 For the general position of women in Afghanistan, see the country policy and information note on [Afghanistan: women fearing gender-based harm/violence](#).

- 8.13.2 In its 2016 Eligibility Guidelines for Afghanistan, UNHCR cited:

‘Although women have attained some leadership roles in Afghan Government and civil society since 2001, including as judges and members of parliament, women in the public sphere and those holding public office continue to be subjected to threats, intimidation and violent attacks. There are widespread reports of the targeting of women in the public sphere, including female parliamentarians, provincial council members, civil servants, journalists, lawyers, police officers, teachers, human rights activists and women working for international organizations. They have been targeted by AGEs, local traditional and religious power-holders, community members, and government authorities. Women who seek to engage in public life are often perceived as transgressing social norms, condemned as “immoral” and targeted for intimidation, harassment, or violence. AGEs reportedly use threats and intimidation against women in the public sphere. There are also numerous reports of women in the public sphere having been killed.’¹²¹

- 8.13.3 UNAMA noted in its 2016 mid-year (January to June) report that:

‘In the first six months of 2016, Anti-Government Elements continued to target prominent women working in public life, including women police. UNAMA documented three separate attacks on women police in Kandahar and Herat provinces. In all three incidents members of Anti-Government Elements groups on motorcycles shot female police officers: killing a female

https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

¹²⁰ South Asia Terrorism Portal, South Asia Intelligence Review, ‘Weekly Assessments & Briefings Volume 15, No. 9, ‘Violent Surge’, 29 August 2016, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair15/15_9.htm#assessment1, date accessed 29 August 2016.

¹²¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan’, (page 40), 19 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>, date accessed 9 August 2016.

Afghan National Police officer on her way to work in Kandahar city on 14 March; injuring another female officer returning home from her workplace on 4 May in Kandahar city; and injuring two female officers on their way to work on 24 January in Herat city.

'UNAMA also received multiple reports that such attacks, coupled with rising insecurity, restricted women's participation in civil society organizations, in some cases reducing their participation in public functions to symbolic roles for fear of becoming targets for Anti-Government Elements.'¹²²

- 8.13.4 The USSD HR Report for 2015 noted that '...women active in public life continued to face threats and violence and were the targets of attacks by the Taliban and other insurgent groups. In February a bomb killed Angiza Shinwari, a female provincial council member in Nangarhar Province. Most female parliamentarians reportedly experienced some kind of threat or intimidation, and many believed the state could not or would not protect them.'¹²³

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¹²² UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', (page 14), July 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2016_final.pdf, date accessed 9 August 2016.

¹²³ US Department of State, 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2015', Afghanistan, (Section 3), 13 April 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252957>, date accessed 19 August 2016.

Version control and contacts

Contacts

If you have any questions about this note and your line manager, senior caseworker or technical specialist cannot help you, or you think that this note has factual errors then [email the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

If you notice any formatting errors in this note (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability, you can [email the Guidance, Rules and Forms Team](#).

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **2.0**
- valid from **1 December 2016**

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information.

Revision of guidance in line with updated COI.

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