



**Afghanistan – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 30 July 2014**

**Is there any information as to whether men and boys of fighting age in Baro village in Roidad District, Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, may be in need of protection from forced recruitment by anti-government elements (AGEs)**

Information specifically referring to the risk of forced recruitment for men and boys in the village of Baro in Roidad District, Nangarhar Province was not found among sources available to the Research and Information Unit.

A report from the International Council on Security and Development, in a section titled “Angry Young Men – A Ready Source of Taliban Recruits”, refers to the motivation of Afghans who join the Taliban as follows:

“There is a high proportion of these young men in Afghanistan – 47.9% of the male population is aged between 15 and 29, a phenomenon known as the youth bulge, which is found in many conflict zones. Afghanistan is also characterised by a weak and unstable labour market: according to the country’s Central Statistics Organisation, 90% of jobs can be classified as vulnerable employment that do not provide stable, secure income. Many of these angry young men join insurgent groups for a regular income and a sense of empowerment and identity they cannot find elsewhere, rather than for ideological reasons. In Afghanistan these young men have a number of serious, legitimate grievances - corruption, civilian casualties, a lack of jobs and services, and a failure to establish the rule of law – which have created high levels of anger among civilian populations.” (International Council on Security and Development (ICOS) (March 2010) *Operation Moshtarak: Lessons Learned*, pp.7-8)

A fact-finding mission report published by the Danish Immigration Service, in a section titled “Recruitment by the Taliban” (section 4.1) refers to information provided by the Afghan Independent Human Right Commission (AIHRC) as follows:

“When asked about whether the Taliban recruit young people by force, AIHRC stated that there are no reports indicating that forced recruitment is taking place by the Taliban. AIHRC explained that most people join the Taliban voluntarily, but the Taliban put pressure on families in the regions where they are in control: they collect money and make them pay ‘zakat’ (religious tax) by paying a fee on their crops. UNHCR referred to a leaked ISAF report on the state of the Taliban in relation to the change of strategy of the Taliban. According to this report, the Taliban do not have difficulties in recruiting people for their force. They have many volunteers and there is a willingness to join the movement. The Taliban may recruit collectively in the villages by offering education to poor people’s sons and by brain washing

people. Considering the acceptance by the local population of the Taliban, it could be assumed that forceful recruitment is not widely taking place, however, UNHCR added that very little is known on this at the present time.” (Danish Immigration Service (29 May 2012) *Report from Danish Immigration Service’s fact finding mission to Kabul, Afghanistan 25 February to 4 March 2012*, p.26)

Referring to information provided by the Afghan NGO Cooperation for Peace And Unity (CPAU) this section of the report states:

“Regarding forced recruitment to the Taliban, CPAU stated that in the Southern provinces it has happened that the Taliban came to a village and asked for a number of foot soldiers. However, it was added that unless there is an emergency situation, the Taliban do not recruit people by force even in the Southern provinces because they do not need to do so. According to CPAU, there are many unemployed young males who for the sake of money and social status will voluntarily join the Taliban who enjoy the support of the community in these provinces. According to CPAU, the local people even consider it as a religiously good deed (‘sawab’) to provide the Taliban with foot soldiers. As CPAU expressed it: ‘if you think that a Taliban commander comes to your house and threatens you to give him your son as a foot soldier you make a big mistake’. Based on its research, CPAU stated that poverty, unemployment, and a desire for higher social status in the community, rather than ideological reasons, are the main factors driving the recruitment to the Taliban. As CPAU explained, the recruited are often ordinary people such as a son of a farmer or a teacher who due to the above mentioned reasons join the Taliban, and many of them do not even know the basics of the Taliban ideology.” (ibid, p.26)

A report published by the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo), in a section titled “General Considerations on the Character of the Conflict and the Attitude Towards Civilians of the Parties in the Conflict” (section 3), states:

“Forced recruitment has not been a salient characteristic of this conflict. The insurgents have made recourse to it only very marginally, mainly forcing male villagers in areas under their control and not sympathetic to the insurgents’ cause to serve as porters. In interviews carried out in several provinces during 2011 with elders and other members of the population, nobody mentioned forced recruitment as an issue, while complaining about Taliban taxation and violence. In some cases of community mobilisation on the Taliban side, community elders might have forced some reluctant families to contribute a male to the *lashkar* as stipulated by the traditions.” (Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo) (9 September 2011) *Afghanistan: Human Rights and Security Situation*, pp.6-7)

In a section titled “Changes in the Attitude of the Parties in the Conflict Over the Course of the Conflict” (section 4) this report states:

“Similarly, the Taliban has been quite ruthless in the recruitment of suicide bombers, taking in young males aged 12-17 as well as adults; from 2010-11 even female suicide bombers made their appearance. Although the evidence does not suggest the forceful recruitment of suicide bombers, it seems clear that young boys, even below puberty, are taken into training/indoctrination

course and may spend there even years, before graduating as proficient suicide bombers. Others seem to be recruited and deployed after relatively short (a few months) training and indoctrination; the large majority of suicide bombers appears to be recruited in Pakistan among Afghans and non-Afghans alike. Often recruits are *madrassa* students, sometimes families linked to the insurgency might volunteer some of their youth for suicide bombing in order to gain status within the organisation.” (ibid, p.8)

In a section titled “Insurgent Controlled Areas” (Section 6.2) this report refers to the situation in Nangarhar province as follows:

“Despite their enhanced presence in Nangarhar, they still do not firmly control any significant portion of territory there. The insurgency in the east is also more diverse than in the south or south-east: the Taliban's Peshawar Shura competes with Hizb-i Islami, some Salafi groups and various Pakistani jihadist organisations, chiefly Pakistani Taliban, Lashkar-e Taiba and Jaish-e Mohammed. The shadow government and the judiciary, therefore, are not as effective. Community support for the insurgents is rare and recruitment is mostly on an individual basis.” (ibid, p.13)

Referring to Nangarhar Province an article from The Express Tribune states:

“Only four or five of Nangarhar’s 22 districts are considered safe with the others controlled or strongly influenced by the Taliban, according to local sources interviewed by AFP. Where Jahanzeb hails from, Pacher Wa Agam district, falls into the latter category. Its instability is a major concern as the country approaches the withdrawal of 75,000 Nato troops by the end of next year. ‘At night-time it is the kingdom of the Taliban,’ Jahanzeb said at the factory where he now works. ‘They are attacking government security checkpoints. The authorities cannot come out of their offices. The presence of the district government is just in name. There is no security.’” (The Express Tribune (29 November 2013) *The Afghan villages where the Taliban rule at night*)

A European Asylum Support Office report on Taliban recruitment strategies, in a section titled “Forced recruitment”, states:

“One of the mechanisms or drivers for recruitment is the use of coercion or the so-called forced recruitment. Generally, sources do not specify what is exactly meant by this. In defining this phenomenon, a distinction should be made between the different, possible actors. Family members or near relatives could use coercion against an individual relative in order to force him to become a fighter. The available information gives indications of economic, religious and other factors pushing a family towards enlisting one of their young males in the Taliban forces or sending them to madrassas where they could be subject to recruitment. The available information does not provide indications on if and how individual families would use coercion against family members. Tribal or community leaders could use coercion against families or individuals in case of community mobilisation for the Taliban’s cause. The available information presents different reasons for communities to join the insurgency, such as loyalty to the old Taliban regime, economic incentives, power play against governmental figures, feuds with other communities and revenge against indiscriminate killings committed by foreign troops. In some tribes (especially among Pashtuns), two specific recruitment mechanisms

could be active within the community mobilisation: an obligated conscript per family for the tribal armed group or Lashkar and the duty to replace killed fighters by relatives (call-ups). In the case of mullahs or religious persons, the available information indicates that they use religious persuasion and indoctrination in the recruitment process. Forced recruitment by Taliban military commanders, leaders or fighters refers to situations where individuals or their families are directly approached and forced to join up under threat of retaliation or violence if they refuse. (European Asylum Support Office (EASO) (10 July 2012) *Afghanistan: Taliban Strategies –Recruitment*, p.41)

In a paragraph headed “Conclusion”, this report states:

“Forced recruitment by Taliban military commanders, leaders or fighters (i.e. situations where individuals or their families are directly approached and forced to join up under threat of retaliation or violence if they refuse) has to be considered as exceptional.” (ibid, p.42)

The conclusion of the EASO report referred to above is challenged in an opinion document from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees which, in paragraph 4, states:

“The report defines ‘forced recruitment’ narrowly, limiting its scope of application to situations where individuals are forced to join the Taliban under the use or threat of immediate violence. The report does not include in this definition Taliban recruitment mechanisms based on broader coercive strategies, including fear, intimidation and the use of tribal mechanisms to pressurize individuals into joining the Taliban. The report’s conclusion that forced recruitment is the exception rather than the rule should therefore not be taken to apply to these other forms of coercive recruitment.” (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (10 July 2012) *Forced recruitment by the Taliban in Afghanistan: UNHCR’s perspective*)

See also paragraph 5 of this document which states:

“In circumstances where recruitment is based at least in part on fear, intimidation, tribal pressures or other coercive elements, it is exceedingly difficult in practice to make a clearcut distinction between individuals joining the Taliban voluntarily and individuals being forcibly recruited.” (ibid)

Similarly, Amnesty International disputes the conclusion of the EASO report as follows

“The EASO report considers ‘forced recruitment’ only in regard to ‘situations where individuals or their families are directly approached and forced to join up under threat of retaliation or violence if they refuse’. In its conclusion the EASO does not acknowledge the situations of persons joining or supporting the Taleban as result of indirect methods of intimidation such as through instilling fear among the local population by threatening night letters, killing individuals, including children, perceived as spies or supporters of the government, the extortion of fines, as well as pressuring individuals to join the Taleban through tribal, family and religious mechanisms, and other indirect means of coercion. Also, in the current context of reintegration and reconciliation efforts with the Taleban, it is expected that more people, including members of ethnic minority groups, may submit to Taleban

demands, fearing reprisals. Amnesty International believes that the EASO report conclusion, that the 'Forced recruitment by Taliban military commanders, leaders or fighters [...] has to be considered as exceptional', is untenable. In the light of UNAMA's authoritative report 'Afghanistan midyear report 2012 Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict' as well as Amnesty International's own research, there seems to be a real risk of forced recruitment by Taleban and other armed groups especially in areas under their control and influence and government justice mechanisms and services are weak." (Amnesty International (10 September 2012) *Amnesty International opinion on the EASO COI Report "Afghanistan: Taliban Strategies – Recruitment"*, July 2012)

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) report referred to by Amnesty International, in a section titled "Community Perceptions: Human Rights in Areas Controlled by Anti-Government Elements", quotes the head of a village in Balkh province as saying:

"For the people in our village, there is no choice. The government has less control and has little to no presence. This has caused the Taliban to act as the only authority to regain strength. The shadow government officials of the Taliban collect taxes. They also force the farmers by gunpoint to share with them a minimum 10 percent of their crops. The Taliban also calls young men into their movement's army of insurgents, and threatens to kill those who are unwilling to serve for their movement." (UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) (July 2012) *Afghanistan: Mid Year Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2012*, p.18)

A report published by Hagar International in a section titled "Child soldiers" (section 1.4.3, paragraph headed "Nangarhar") states:

"Nangarhar province had the most references to child recruitment by military groups, a total of seven times. The interesting difference in Nangarhar was the connection of these military groups not only to armed opposition groups, but also to the ANA. Four stakeholders connected child recruitment for military groups to studying in madrassas in Pakistan. Three highlighted the ANA as recruiting boys." (Hagar International (3 April 2014) *Forgotten No More: Male Child Trafficking In Afghanistan*, p.48)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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