

## INFORMATION

on the socio-economic situation in the light of COVID -19 in Afghanistan

requested by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum

March 2021

### Background information:

*The following questions relate primarily to the situation with regard to the COVID-19 crisis and are intended to provide an overview of the current state of affairs and - as far as possible - future developments. If the future development is not foreseeable or difficult to assess, please note this accordingly. When answering the questions, please focus primarily on the cities of Mazar-e Sharif and Herat.*

### COVID-19 general

1. What is the current number of people who have fallen ill and what assumptions can be made about the number of "undetected cases"?

The COVID-19 pandemic in Afghanistan is part of the worldwide pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The virus was confirmed to have spread to Afghanistan when its index case, in Herat, was confirmed on 24 February 2020.

Below find some developments and figures related to COVID-19 in Afghanistan:

#### August 2020

On 5<sup>th</sup> August 2020, an official survey from the Afghan Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) reported that approximately a third of the country's population, or roughly 10 million people, had contracted COVID-19.

#### October 2020

On 13 October, Abdul Hakim Tamanna, Head of the Herat Health Department, reported that 156 students and teachers in Herat Province had tested positive (out of 386 tested). He said that 35 to 60 students learn in a single room due to a lack of facilities and the failure to heed social distancing guidelines. This development shows the confined conditions under which students have to study and exemplarily show the difficulties of tackling COVID-19 in Afghanistan.

#### December 2020

According to the Afghan MoPH, as of 19 December there has been a total of 50,536 cases in the country. Of those, a third were in Kabul. However, due to the lack of easily accessible testing facilities in December 2020, the Ministry estimated the actual number of positive cases to be much higher.

#### January 2021

On 4 January 2021, the MoPH called on the public to limit their travels over the next weeks to contain a possible movement of the mutated version of the virus to Afghanistan.

Between 18 and 20 January 2021, India announced it would supply COVID-19 vaccines to Afghanistan. On 25 January 2021, Tahir Qadiry (Charge d'Affaires) announced that 500,000 vaccines would be given to Afghanistan from India.

On 27 January 2021, it was announced that Afghanistan received \$112 million from the World Health Organization's COVAX program, which covers 20 per cent of the population.

## February 2021

On 7 February 2021, the Government of Afghanistan announced plans to vaccinate 60 percent of the population as the first 500,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine arrived in Kabul from India. It was announced that 150,000 health workers should be vaccinated first, followed by adults with health problems.

As of 15 February 2021, there have been 55,514 confirmed positive cases out of 275,559 tests, with 48,395 recoveries and 2,427 deaths (at least 87 of whom are healthcare workers) across all 34 provinces in the country. Kabul Province has the highest number of COVID-19 cases in Afghanistan at 18,362, followed by Herat with 9,146 cases, and then Balkh with 3,382.

## March 2021:

In Afghanistan, as of 17 March 2021, there have been 56,016 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 2,460 deaths, reported to WHO<sup>1</sup>. As of 10 March 2021, a total of 34,743 vaccine doses have been administered.

## 2. Which government measures are currently in force?

### 2.1. Are there currently curfews in the cities of Herat and Mazar-e Sharif?

Currently, there are no curfews in the cities of Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e Sharif. However, the Afghan MoPH has encouraged people to keep physical distancing of at least one to two meters, wear a medical mask, wash hands with water and soap for 20 seconds and to avoid gatherings.

### 2.2. How are violations of the implemented measures punished by the government / police?

Violations of the implemented measures are currently not punished by the government or law enforcement.

### 2.3. What measures to support the population have been or are being implemented by the government?

The Afghan MoPH has taken action to prepare for and respond to COVID-19, implementing the following public health measures:

#### a. Case Finding and Detection:

Case finding and detection is covered through two types of health worker teams:

*Rapid Response Teams (RRTs)* visit suspected COVID-19 patients in their homes. The number of active RRTs differs from province to province as their size and scope depends on the COVID-19 situation in the respective province. For instance, in Kabul, there are currently 12 RRTs.

*Fix Teams* are stationed in hospitals and check suspected COVID-19 patients in hospitals. Fix teams are available in every public hospital as well as in two state hospitals in Kabul admitting COVID-19 patients (Afghan-Japan Hospital and Mohammad Ali Jenah Hospital). In Kabul, there are 15 fix teams.

#### b. Treatment:

COVID-19 patients can be diagnosed and treated in-patient in public hospitals (until capacities for COVID patients are exhausted). State run hospitals offer basic services related to COVID-19 free of charge, including a molecular-biological COVID-19 testing (PCR-test).

---

<sup>1</sup> WHO, *Country information Afghanistan*. Available at <https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/af> (accessed 15 March 2021)



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The UN Migration Agency

In those private hospitals which were authorized by the government to treat COVID-19 infected patients, services are charged for. A PCR-test for COVID-19 costs 3500 Afghanistan Afghani (AFN) (37.36 EUR)<sup>2</sup>.

Public hospitals do not have sufficient testing capacities for the whole population. However, in-patients can get cost free PCR-tests during their stay in the hospital. Generally testing has become more easily accessible since February 2021 because more hospitals received the permit from the government to do Corona testing. For example, in Kabul testing is done in Afghan-Japan Hospital, Ali Jannah hospital, City hospital, Alfalah laboratory or the German clinic.

As in 2020, the biggest part of COVID-19 patients is in home care (isolation). However, home care and isolation is very challenging to impossible for most patients, as spatial living conditions are very limited in Afghanistan. Between May and August 2020, IOM Afghanistan in coordination with the Afghanistan Protection Cluster, conducted a monitoring survey among undocumented returnees from Iran and Pakistan. According to this report, 96 per cent of surveyed returnees from Pakistan and Iran indicated having nowhere to self-isolate<sup>3</sup>. This monitoring was repeated between 1 November to 31 January during which 1,845 surveys were conducted (in the following cited as January 2021 IOM Afghanistan COVID-19 Protection Monitoring Report). Once again, the vast majority of respondents (94%) report they have nowhere to go in the event of needing to self-isolate due to COVID-19 infection, which, coupled with increased overcrowding related to moving in with relatives puts key preventative measures to contain onward transmission out of reach for the vast majority of undocumented returnee households.<sup>4</sup>

c. Awareness Raising:

Awareness-raising efforts include the dissemination of information through social media, billboards, flyers as well as elders in the communities. According to the January 2021 IOM Afghanistan COVID-19 Protection Monitoring Report, surveyed returnees still reported a very low overall awareness of COVID-19 related restrictions as well as the believe in wide-spread conspiracies around COVID-19.

d. Vaccination Campaign:

Afghanistan received 500,000 doses of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine from India. The vaccines were produced by the Serum Institute of India (SII), which is producing the AstraZeneca/Oxford University vaccine for mid- and low-income countries.

Vaccination has started in Afghanistan on 23.02.2021. According to the national vaccination plan, health workers, security force members, teachers and government employees will receive the vaccine first. As of 10 March 2021, a total of 34.743 vaccine doses have been administered.

### 3. What is the capacity utilisation of (public and private) hospitals?

Numbers of new cases steadily mounted over the quarter as temperatures plummeted. By mid-November 2020, official MoPH tracking data started to reflect suspicions a second wave was hitting, with daily confirmations jumping from 86 per day in the first week to 209 a day by week three. Infections continued to rise – as of 4 February 2021, 55,256 people across Afghanistan are confirmed to have had COVID-19, resulting in 2,407 deaths (MoPH) until February 2021, the majority of which were men aged 50-79.

---

<sup>2</sup> All exchange rates in this document have been calculated using OANDA Currency Converter (rate as of 17 March 2021):

[www.oanda.com/lang/de/currency/converter](https://www.oanda.com/lang/de/currency/converter)

<sup>3</sup> IOM, *COVID-19 Protection Monitoring May – July 2020* (Kabul, 2020). Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/iom-covid-19-protection-monitoring-may-july-2020> (accessed 22 September 2020).

<sup>4</sup> IOM, *COVID-19 Protection Monitoring November 2020 – January 2021* (Kabul, 2020). Available [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/covid-19\\_protection\\_monitoring\\_report\\_iom\\_20210222.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/covid-19_protection_monitoring_report_iom_20210222.pdf) (accessed 17 March 2021).

As in 2020, misinformation and associated stigma of COVID19 is still fatal for some and poses a threat to measures to control the virus in the short- and longer-term (through vaccination drives and minimization of viral mutations / new variants).

**4. Is there sufficient medical equipment (PPEs, drugs, respirators) available? If not: In which area is there a special need?**

There are ventilators available for 10 per cent of ICU beds in Kabul as well as in the provinces. The personnel hired in response to COVID-19 has been trained by the government and organizations at the beginning of the pandemic.

**5. Are hotels / tea houses / other accommodation facilities currently open?**

They are open only for limited customers. Hotels, tea houses and accommodation facilities are open for business travellers only. The customers should obey social distance and wearing face mask.

## Labour market

**1. How has the labour market developed since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis?**

As in 2020, there is no official government statistics available to show how the labour market has been impacted. The Directorate of Labour Market at the Afghanistan Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Afghan MoLSA) has recently launched an assessment of the labour market, which is yet to be published. However, existing evidence indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on the economic situation in Afghanistan, including the labour market.

Undocumented returnees from Pakistan and Iran were hit very hard by the economic consequences of the pandemic. According to the January 2021 IOM Afghanistan COVID-19 Protection Monitoring Report, throughout the survey period, loss of livelihoods has been the most widely reported effect of COVID-19, this effected 93% of undocumented returnees. In January 2021, almost 2/3 of undocumented returnees report having no buffer at all in the event of being unable to work outside.

The deep and sustained impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Afghanistan's economy means poverty rates are expected to remain high for 2021. The GDP is expected to have contracted in excess of 5% in 2020 (IMF). By the end of 2021, Afghanistan's unemployment rate has risen to 37.9%, up from 23.9% in 2019.<sup>5</sup>

**2. Which job opportunities are available to an unskilled worker without special work experience in Afghanistan? What is the average wage of an unskilled worker?**

Generally, unskilled workers generate their income as day labourers, street vendors or by running small shops. The average wage for an unskilled worker depends, for a day labourer, it is approximately 5 USD (4,19 EUR) per day.

**3. What is the current situation for day labourers?**

Overall, the situation is very difficult for day labourers as many economic sectors have been negatively impacted by the lock down and restriction measures related to COVID-19. Small and big enterprises usually

---

<sup>5</sup> IOM, *COVID-19 Protection Monitoring November 2020 – January 2021* (Kabul, 2020). Available at: [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/covid-19\\_protection\\_monitoring\\_report\\_iom\\_20210222.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/covid-19_protection_monitoring_report_iom_20210222.pdf) (accessed 17 March 2021).

provided direct working opportunities for day labourers. The loss of jobs in these businesses has hit the day labourers hard.

#### 4. What measures is the Afghan government taking to support unemployed people?

There is no state support for unemployed persons.

There are a few websites with job announcements. For employment in the public sector, the Civil Service Commission Management Directorate (CSMD) of the Civil Service Commission and Administrative Reform announces vacant positions online on [www.iarcsc.com](http://www.iarcsc.com).

Vacant positions with NGOs, as well as with international and local companies are gathered on these websites:

- [www.acbar.org](http://www.acbar.org)
- [www.jobs.af](http://www.jobs.af)
- [www.duty.af](http://www.duty.af)
- <http://wazifa.af>
- <http://indeed.af><sup>6</sup>

#### 5. Are measures taken by the government to create new jobs?

According to the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF, 2017-2021)<sup>7</sup>, the government has planned on focusing on several sectors to create jobs. In particular, it is focusing on comprehensive agriculture and private sector development programs. According to ANPDF, Afghanistan's GDP rises and falls with the performance of its agriculture, which is a source of jobs for at least 40 per cent of the population and makes up a significant share of the current exports. Job-generating initiatives include:

- Expanding the land under irrigation from 2.2 to 2.7 million hectares
- Increasing wheat production from 4.5 to 5.9 million metric tons
- Building efficient and competitive markets
- Enabling SMEs, particularly export-focused Afghan-owned firms
- Encouraging domestic and international investment

Further initiatives by the ANPDF include:

- A Mineral and Resource Development Program
- Energy and infrastructure development
- The advancement of regional integration
- Increasing labour productivity and investing in human capital
- An Urban Development Program

However, in a recent report published by the Asian Development Bank, a sharp decline of economic growth is reported in Afghanistan as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and continued security and political challenges. Based on the report, boarder closures and lock downs/restrictions in the major cities have

---

<sup>6</sup> IOM, *Country Fact Sheet Afghanistan* (Berlin, 2019). Available at [https://files.returningfromgermany.de/files/CFS\\_2019\\_Afghanistan\\_EN\\_.pdf](https://files.returningfromgermany.de/files/CFS_2019_Afghanistan_EN_.pdf) (accessed 17 March 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF, 2017 – 2021)*. Available at <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/afg148215.pdf> (accessed 17 March 2021).

disrupted trade and transportation and undermined industry and services in the country. As in 2020, these factors continue to reduce employment opportunities.

**6. Are there social and governmental support mechanisms for the unemployed in Afghanistan (e.g. AMS) and how do they currently operate?**

No, there is no assistance during the duration of unemployment.

**7. Is it possible to register as a jobseeker in Afghanistan with an office / organisation?**

There are some consultancies that charge a small fee for assisting people in finding jobs. However, successes have been small due to the high level of unemployment and there have been cases of fraud, which has led to a decreased trust by the population in such consultancies.

Jobseekers can get information on relevant vacancies through the Afghan MoLSA and through ACBAR ([www.acbar.org](http://www.acbar.org)), a non-governmental organization based in Afghanistan. Returnees can send their CV to both organizations and ask for consultation.<sup>8</sup>

## Economy and supply situation

**1. How has the economy developed since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis?**

The deep and sustained impact of the COVID19 crisis on Afghanistan's economy means poverty rates are expected to remain high for 2021. In Kabul (98%), Balkh (93%) and Saripul (87%), people's primary concern relating to COVID19 was loss of employment – unlike the majority who cited 'fear of death' – reflecting the particular poverty impacts for those reliant on daily wage jobs in urban areas, as well as continued strain on already depleted.<sup>9</sup>

The economy is expected to contract by up to five percent in 2020 with the negative impacts of the COVID-19 virus overshadowing improvements in weather conditions. Additional substantial downside risks remain, including political instability, deterioration of security conditions, premature reduction in aid flows, and further adverse regional economic or political developments. Poverty is expected to remain high, driven by weak labour demand and security-related constraints on service delivery.

The COVID-19 crisis will have a serious and sustained impact on Afghanistan's economy. Recovery is expected to take several years, with new investment constrained by political uncertainties, continued insecurity, and questions around ongoing international support. For development partners, the highest priority is ensuring continued and predictable grant support.

**2. Which areas were / are particularly affected by the COVID-19 crisis?**

According to an assessment conducted by Afghanistan Center for Excellence, the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 crisis are:

- Non-food manufacturing
- Handicrafts and clothing

<sup>8</sup> IOM, *Country Fact Sheet Afghanistan* (Berlin, 2019). Available at [https://files.returningfromgermany.de/files/CFS\\_2019\\_Afghanistan\\_EN\\_.pdf](https://files.returningfromgermany.de/files/CFS_2019_Afghanistan_EN_.pdf) (accessed 17 March 2021).

<sup>9</sup> IOM, *COVID-19 Protection Monitoring November 2020 – January 2021* (Kabul, 2020). Available [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/covid-19\\_protection\\_monitoring\\_report\\_iom\\_20210222.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/covid-19_protection_monitoring_report_iom_20210222.pdf) (accessed 17 March 2021).

- Agri-food processing
- Fitness and health
- Non-profit (NGO) and humanitarian

The sectors least affected are:

- Information technology (IT), media and communications
- Management consulting and legal
- Finance and accounting

**3. What has been the development of food prices since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis? Which further developments can be expected?**

For the time being (March 2021) there is no lockdown in Afghanistan; borders are open and all items including food can be imported and exporting from Afghanistan. However, the COVID-19 crisis resulted in a significant spike in food prices in 2020. Food prices have currently stabilized at a high level: According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, wheat flour prices were stable from November to December 2020, but remain at levels 11% higher than the previous year and 27% higher than the three-year average. Overall, food prices in main markets in December 2020 remained above average, mainly due to higher prices of imported food items.

**4. What is the current situation in agriculture?**

Impacts of COVID-19 on the agriculture sector have been limited in 2020. Afghanistan's farmers are currently starting in the new agricultural year, it can not be predicted if there will be a COVID-19 related impact in 2021.

**5. What is the current situation with regard to food supply and access to drinking water?**

As stated under question three, at the beginning of the lockdown, there was a spike in the food prices but later on due to different interventions, the prices went down. However, access to drinking water was not affected as many of the households either have a well inside the house or receive drinking water through a centralized water distribution channel.

**6. Do buses / shared taxis / airplanes currently run between the provinces and the cities? What is the current situation with regard to freedom of movement?**

Buses, shared taxis and airplanes currently run between the provinces and cities. The current situation has caused no restriction with regard to the freedom of movement.

## Returnees

**1. Is it currently possible for Afghan citizens to enter Afghanistan (voluntarily)?**

Yes.

**2. Are border crossings currently closed?**

No.



**3. Is Afghanistan currently accessible by air?**

**3.1 If so, which cities are currently served (internationally)?**

There are international flight connections to Kabul and Mazar. Please note that these flight connections are unreliable, in times of a pandemic flights are frequently cancelled or postponed.

Flights to Kandahar are to date (18 March 2021) not possible, it is not predictable when international flights to Kandahar will be possible again.

**3.2 Are COVID-19 tests currently taking place at the airports? If so, what does this procedure look like?**

As of March 2021, no COVID-19 tests are taking place at the airports in Afghanistan. Entry health screening (assessing symptoms and body temperature measurement) is conducted for arriving passengers.

**4. What is the current situation regarding IOM reintegration projects?**

**4.1 How many people have already been accepted to the current Restart III project?**

As of 18 March 2021, there is a total of 105 RESTART III project applications accepted by the BFA and IOM.

**4.2 Is it currently possible to return from Austria to Afghanistan voluntarily and / or with IOM support?**

As far as flight connections towards Afghanistan are available and entry regulations in Afghanistan allow it, a voluntary return from Austria to Afghanistan is possible. Turkish Airlines as well as Emirates provide flight options via Istanbul (in case of TK)/ Dubai (in case of Emirates) to Kabul. Participation in the reintegration project RESTART III is possible, but subject to approval from BFA and IOM. Please note that flight restrictions and/or entry regulations may be subject to change anytime according to COVID-19 developments.

**4.3 Have project participants returned to Afghanistan voluntarily from Austria since the beginning of the crisis?**

As of 18 March 2021, 86 RESTART III project participants voluntarily returned to Afghanistan from Austria. Throughout the first project year, in 2020, a total of 69 RESTART III beneficiaries voluntarily returned to Afghanistan, with the highest peaks in August 2020 (13 voluntary returns from Austria) and September 2020 (19 voluntary returns from Austria).

**4.4 How is the current IOM support on site? Especially in the cities of Herat and Mazar-e Sharif?**

Currently support can be provided by IOM at the airport in Kabul, in the main IOM office in Kabul as well as and in the seven sub-offices (including Herat and Mazar-e Sharif). IOM staff is partially in home-office, but returnees can access IOM offices. Please note that this may be subject to change anytime according to COVID-19 developments. Returnees are still encouraged to minimize their visits to the IOM offices and instead address issues and seek consultation through phone or any other available online tools. Reintegration support has been adapted to the restrictions in place, e.g. virtual counselling is offered in Austria as well as in Afghanistan, reimbursement of in-kind assistance is possible, participants are encouraged to open a bank account to facilitate cash and reintegration in-kind assistances.

**4.5 How are the projects of the persons who recently returned to Afghanistan in the course of the IOM reintegration projects developing?**

As of 18 March 2021, 58 RESTART III project participants have submitted to IOM their reintegration plans and related supporting documents, of which 42 returnees have already received at least a part of their reintegration assistance (which is usually provided in two tranches).



**5. Which kind of support does IOM provide to forced returnees (from Austria) on site (especially in the cities of Herat and Mazar-e Sharif)?**

Generally, IOM offers a small cash grant of 147 EUR equivalent in local currency at Kabul International Airport as part of the RADA-project<sup>10</sup>. This amount aims to assist returnees with covering their immediate needs such as finding temporary accommodation for up to five nights in Kabul, paying for in-country onward transportation and covering food refreshments. This support is only available only for returnees arriving through Kabul International Airport.

**6. What other organisations are active for forced returnees in Afghanistan?**

The Ipso (International Psychosocial Organization)<sup>11</sup> is an international non-profit organization that offers psychosocial services for returnees (please note that limited resources). There might be some other private initiatives or NGO's that provide some basic support to returnees. However, they are subject to permanent changes and have very few resources, therefore they are not listed.

**6.1 What services are provided by these organisations for forcibly returnees?**

IPSO provides psychosocial services for returnees. However, services are limited due to scarce resources.

**6.2 Which ones operate specifically in Mazar-e Sharif and Herat?**

IPSO also operates in Mazar-e Sharif and Herat. IOM Kabul is not aware of any other organization that provides support to returnees.

## Women and children

**1. Did the COVID-19 crisis had an impact on domestic violence?**

The corona virus pandemic has put additional strain on the already weak health system and exacerbated the underlying protection and gender-based vulnerabilities of children and women UNICEF).<sup>12</sup>

Levels of domestic violence are generally high in Afghanistan: 87 per cent of Afghan women reportedly experience at least one form of physical, sexual or psychological violence.<sup>13</sup>

Times of crisis are commonly related to a rise in domestic and intimate partner-related violence<sup>14</sup>. In April 2020 Oxfam carried out an assessment on COVID-19 related threats for women in Afghanistan, conducted through 34 qualitative interviews with female Oxfam-beneficiaries, women's rights activists, civil society actors and government representatives. Respondents overall expressed their fear that the number of women experiencing violence will increase due to the COVID-19 situation especially due to economic constraints and stress related to the lock down as well as cramped living conditions. Ninety-seven per cent of female respondents reported that gender-based violence has increased since the outbreak of the coronavirus disease. Women's rights' activists also pointed out that traditional and informal conflict resolution mechanisms such as Shuras and Jurgas are not available now due to the ban of public and social

<sup>10</sup> IOM, *Reintegration and Development Assistance in Afghanistan (RADA)* (Kabul, 2019). Available at <https://afghanistan.iom.int/rada-factsheet> (accessed 17 March 2021).

<sup>11</sup> International Psychosocial Support Organization (Ipso), *About us*. Available at [www.ipscontext.org](http://www.ipscontext.org) (accessed 17 March 2021).

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF, *Afghanistan* (2021). Available at <https://www.unicef.org/media/87886/file/2021-HAC-Afghanistan.pdf> (accessed 10 March 2021).

<sup>13</sup> UNFPA Afghanistan, *Gender-based Violence*. Available at <https://afghanistan.unfpa.org/en/node/15232> (accessed 10 March 2021)

<sup>14</sup> Harvard Medical School, Center for Primary Care, *A Second, Silent Pandemic: Sexual Violence in the time of COVID-19* (1 May 2020). Available at <http://info.primarycare.hms.harvard.edu/blog/sexual-violence-and-covid> (accessed 10 March 2021)

gatherings. This leads to decreased mitigation and resolution options for conflicts and disputes within a family unit and could further heighten tensions.<sup>15</sup>

the situation in woman shelters continues to be over-crowded in 2021. Women shelters in Herat are especially crowded, due to the vicinity to the Iranian border and the increasing return movement of Afghans from Iran.

## 2. Did the COVID-19 crisis had an impact on child labour?

According to various sources such as UNICEF<sup>16</sup> the corona pandemic has had a severe economic impact on vulnerable groups, children and families. They were affected by multiple shocks with urgent, life-saving services. Therefore, child work was used by many poor families as a coping mechanism for the impacts of COVID-19 across the country. Further, the types of work children are undertaking – such as informal street work, including begging – exposes children to high risk of exploitation and abuse.

Overall, the crisis and its economic hardships led to an increase in child labor since its start 2020. Additionally, for the period of November 2020 to January 2021, rural areas were hit by a long winter. Outside the cities, the population makes its daily living from agriculture and their harvests but in many cases was not sufficient for the whole families. Furthermore, the pandemic reduced job opportunities especially in rural areas, therefore children were sent to cities and neighbouring countries for work.

In average, in the first months of 2021, one in three children was sent to work. Increases in child labour are most reported in non-urban areas such as Saripul (61%) and Ghor (57%)<sup>17</sup>. These two regions faced additional hardship due to drought.

In addition to the rise in child labor, school closures during 2020 (in winter semester 2020/2021 schools were opened only for 6 weeks) will have lasting impacts on already fragile demographics. Very likely, girls and child labourers will have a higher risk of dropping out from school. Work within the home tends to fall to girls has also increased during the pandemic. As a result, the increase of child labor and reduction of education will result in negative consequences for the younger generation, especially from poorer families, in Afghanistan.

## 3. Do families (in need) receive special assistance from the government?

In March 2021, there were no projects led or financed by the Afghan Government to support poor families.

## 4. Are schools in Afghanistan currently open, or if not, how does Afghanistan intend to proceed in the future?

With date 17. March 2021, all public schools are closed in Afghanistan. However, according to the information from Ministry of Education, the government envisages to open all grades of public schools by 24. March 2021 if covid-19 pandemic situation allows so.

Private schools are partly open, if they are able to implement security/health plans.

---

<sup>15</sup> OXFAM, *A new surge to Afghan women: COVID-19*. Oxfam Briefing Note (Oxfam in Afghanistan, 2020). Available at <https://asia.oxfam.org/latest/policy-paper/new-surge-afghan-women-covid-19> (accessed 17 March 2021).

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF, *Afghanistan* (2021). Available at <https://www.unicef.org/media/87886/file/2021-HAC-Afghanistan.pdf> (accessed 10 March 2021).

<sup>17</sup> IOM, *COVID-19 Protection Monitoring November 2020 – January 2021* (Kabul, 2020). Available at: [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/covid-19\\_protection\\_monitoring\\_report\\_iom\\_20210222.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/covid-19_protection_monitoring_report_iom_20210222.pdf) (accessed 17 March 2021).



International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
The UN Migration Agency

#### Disclaimer

The return-related information contained in this document was collected with great care. However, IOM gives no guarantee as to the accuracy or completeness of the information, nor does it endorse any views, opinions or policies of organizations or individuals referred to in this document. This document does not take any position related to economic, political or security situation in the country. IOM accepts no responsibility for any conclusions made or any results which are drawn from the information provided in this document.