



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note **Afghanistan: unaccompanied children**

Version 3.0

October 2021

Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into 2 parts: (1) an assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note - that is information in the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw - by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- that the general humanitarian situation is so severe that there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of serious harm because conditions amount to inhuman or degrading treatment as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iii\) of the Immigration Rules](#) / Article 3 of the [European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#)
- that the security situation is such that there are substantial grounds for believing there is a real risk of serious harm because there exists a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in a situation of international or internal armed conflict as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iv\) of the Immigration Rules](#)
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- a claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate and balanced, which is compared and contrasted where appropriate so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture is provided of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote. Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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Assessment

Updated: 11 October 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution and/or serious harm by the Taliban, non-state actors and/or by wider society due to their vulnerability as an unaccompanied child.

1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 Full consideration of the child's asylum claim must take place before consideration is given to any other forms of leave.

1.2.2 A decision on whether a child faces a risk of serious harm or persecution should be based on their individual circumstances and the country situation at the time of the decision.

1.2.3 Where the child made an asylum and/or human rights claim before the Taliban had taken de facto control of Afghanistan, decision makers should (where appropriate) provide them with the further opportunity to explain what they now fear on return given the significantly changed country circumstances.

1.2.4 For further analysis and information on additional profile-specific characteristics see the relevant [Country Policy and Information Notes](#) on:

- Fear of the Taliban
- Security and humanitarian situation

1.2.5 For a definition of an unaccompanied child, see the [Asylum Instruction on Children's asylum claims](#).

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the 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 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 Convention reason(s)

2.3.1 Particular social group (PSG).

2.3.2 In the reported determination of [LQ \(Age: immutable characteristic\) Afghanistan \[2008\] UKAIT 00005](#), heard 6 October 2006 and promulgated on 15 March 2007, the Asylum and Immigration (AIT) Tribunal concluded that a person's age was an immutable characteristic so that children from Afghanistan constituted 'a particular social group' for the purposes of the Refugee Convention (paragraph 7).

2.3.3 In the country guidance case [HK & Ors \(minors, indiscriminate violence, forced recruitment by Taliban, contact with family members\) Afghanistan CG \[2010\] UKUT 378 \(IAC\)](#), heard on 15 July 2010, the Upper Tribunal found that [LQ](#) is not to be regarded as any form country guidance nor precedent for any general proposition that all children in Afghanistan form a particular social group irrespective of their particular family circumstances (para 42).

2.3.4 The Court of Appeal (England and Wales) in [HK \(Afghanistan\) & Ors v Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2012\] EWCA Civ 315](#), heard on 9 February 2012 and promulgated 16 March 2012, concurred with the findings in [HK & Ors](#), noting that the UT held that if the unaccompanied child has family to whom they can return, then [LQ](#) will be inapplicable (para 8).

2.3.5 Although unaccompanied children from Afghanistan with no family to return to could form a PSG, this does not mean that establishing such membership is sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed in each case is whether the particular child has a well-founded fear of persecution on return on account of their membership of such a group.

2.3.6 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Children's asylum claims](#).

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2.4 Family tracing and links with Afghanistan

2.4.1 In the reported case [JS \(Former unaccompanied child – durable solution\) \(Afghanistan\) \[2013\] UKUT 568 \(IAC\) \(29 August 2013\)](#), heard on 14 March 2013 and 25 June 2013, and promulgated on 29 August 2013, the Upper Tribunal held '...in practice, where the appellant has positively stated he does not want his family to be traced, has every incentive to mislead about his family history if advancing a false picture of events, and where in the absence of reliable data from the appellant the respondent would have no information with which to make tracing inquiries in Afghanistan, that it is improbable that a failure of the tracing duty is likely to be material' (paragraph 39).

2.4.2 The Court of Appeal held in [EU \(Afghanistan\) & Ors v Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2013\] EWCA Civ 32 \(31 January 2013\)](#), heard on 17 December 2012, that 'Unaccompanied children who arrive in this country from Afghanistan have done so as a result of someone, presumably their families, paying for their fare... The costs incurred by the family will have been considerable, relative to the wealth of the average Afghan family... [the family] are unlikely to be happy to cooperate with an agent of the Secretary

of State for the return of their child to Afghanistan...’ (paragraph 10). The Court dismissed EU’s appeal on the grounds that there was no link between the Secretary of State’s breach of duty to endeavour to trace his family and EU’s claim to remain in this country (paragraph 22).

- 2.4.3 Afghan migrants usually maintain contact with their families in their home country but the quality of the contact may depend on how long the person has been abroad, if they lived elsewhere before they left the region, for example in Iran or Pakistan, and whether their family still lives in Afghanistan. However, it is likely that an unaccompanied child leaving their family behind in Afghanistan will have maintained contact (See [Family contacts and networks](#) and [Family tracing](#)).
- 2.4.4 For further guidance on tracing the family members of unaccompanied asylum seeking children see the [Asylum Instruction on Family Tracing](#) and [Asylum Instruction on Children’s asylum claims](#).

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2.5 Risk

a. On the basis of being a child

- 2.5.1 Simply being a child from Afghanistan does not of itself give rise to a well-founded fear of persecution for a Convention reason. The Court of Appeal considered unaccompanied children in [HK \(Afghanistan\) \[2012\]](#) and held that ‘The onus is on the asylum seeker to make good the asylum claim, and that applies to children as it does to adults’ (paragraph 34).
- 2.5.2 In [LQ](#), the Tribunal held that ‘At the date when the appellant’s status has to be assessed he is a child and although, assuming he survives, he will in due course cease to be a child, he is immutably a child at the time of assessment. (That is not, of course, to say that he would be entitled indefinitely to refugee status acquired while, and because of, his minority. **He would be a refugee only whilst the risk to him as a child remained**)’ (paragraph 6 – emphasis added).
- 2.5.3 In the case of [ST \(Child asylum seekers\) Sri Lanka \[2013\] UKUT 292 \(IAC\) \(25 June 2013\)](#), heard 30 April 2013 and promulgated on 25 June 2013, the Tribunal made clear findings that risk on return must be assessed as at date of decision; and this assessment cannot be negated by granting another form of leave to remain. The Tribunal held that ‘It is clear that the grant of the status of refugee cannot be evaded by the respondent in effect saying that although there is a risk of ill-treatment today, the Secretary of State proposes to grant discretionary leave to remain until the risk has diminished. Where an asylum claim is determined substantive and the criteria for the status are met, there is a right to the status...’ (paragraph 27).
- 2.5.4 Equally, the Court of Appeal held in [EU \(Afghanistan\) & Ors v Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2013\] EWCA Civ 32 \(31 January 2013\)](#), heard 17 December 2012, that ‘... to grant leave to remain to someone who has no risk on return, whose Convention rights will not be infringed by his return, and who has no other independent claim to remain here... is to use the power to grant leave to remain for a purpose other than that for which it is conferred’ (paragraph 6).

- 2.5.5 [ST](#) held that any risk of serious harm that **might** happen to a child in his or her country of origin does not necessarily make that child a refugee (paragraph 22 – emphasis added).
- 2.5.6 In the case of [KA \(Afghanistan\) & Ors v Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2012\] EWCA Civ 1014 \(25 July 2012\)](#), the Tribunal considered ‘the eighteenth birthday point’:
- ‘Although the duty to endeavour to trace does not endure beyond the date when an applicant reaches that age [18], it cannot be the case that the assessment of risk on return is subject to such a bright line rule. The relevance of this relates to the definition of a “particular social group” for asylum purposes. In [DS](#), Lloyd LJ considered [LQ](#) (Age: immutable characteristic) Afghanistan [2008] UKAIT 00005 in which the AIT held that “for these purposes age is immutable”, in the sense that, although one’s age is constantly changing, one is powerless to change it oneself. Lloyd LJ said (at paragraph 54):
- “that leaves a degree of uncertainty as to the definition of a particular social group. Does membership cease on the day of the person's eighteenth birthday? It is not easy to see that risks of the relevant kind to who as a child would continue until the eve of that birthday, and cease at once the next day.”
- ‘Given that the kinds of risk in issue include the forced recruitment or the sexual exploitation of vulnerable young males, persecution is not respectful of birthdays – apparent or assumed age is more important than chronological age. Indeed, as submissions developed there seemed to be a degree of common ground derived from the observation of Lloyd LJ.’ (paragraph 18).
- 2.5.7 In the case of [ZH \(Afghanistan\) v Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2009\] EWCA Civ 470 \(07 April 2009\)](#), on eligibility for UASC Discretionary Leave, the Court of Appeal held that:
- ‘The mere fact that a child applicant for asylum falls within the policy of the Secretary of State is not in my judgment of itself sufficient to discharge the burden on the child applicant to demonstrate that he is at real risk, or there is a serious possibility that he will be persecuted if returned. The threshold for what amounts to persecution is relatively high, the policy sidesteps that difficulty by being broader in scope. The unaccompanied child does not have to demonstrate that he would be at real risk of persecution if returned to fall within the Secretary of State's policy. All he has to demonstrate is that he is unaccompanied, that his parents cannot be traced and that adequate reception arrangements cannot be made for him. Thus the policy is plainly broader in scope for perfectly understandable policy reasons than the narrower definition of what amounts to refugee status. Thus it does not follow automatically, simply from the fact that a child falls within the Secretary of State's broader policy, that there is a real risk or a serious possibility that that particular child's basic human rights will be so severely violated that he will suffer what amounts to persecution’ (paragraph 10).
- 2.5.8 For guidance on the UASC leave policy, see the [Asylum Instruction on Children's asylum claims](#).

b. General risk

- 2.5.9 Following the official withdrawal of US troops, which began on 1 May 2021, the Taliban launched a military offensive across the country, quickly gaining control of most districts and ending in the seizure of Kabul on 15 August 2021 (for more information see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban](#)).
- 2.5.10 In addition to the general risks resulting from insecurity and the humanitarian situation (see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#)), children may face human rights violations including: physical abuse, sexual abuse, trafficking, forced labour, and disruption to education, particularly for girls who may be prevented from attending school under Taliban rule (see [Violence against children](#) and [Education](#)). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated some risks, with child marriage and child labour on the rise as families look for solutions to the disruption of income caused by the pandemic. Discrimination and social stigma faced by children with disabilities continued to hinder their access to education and health care (see [Impact of COVID-19](#) and [Children with disabilities](#)).
- 2.5.11 Boys may be at risk of forced dancing and sexual exploitation (bacha bazi) – typically by men in authority, tribal leaders, warlords, members of organized crime groups and clergy. However, under previous Taliban rule this practice was outlawed (see [Bacha bazi](#)). Girls may be at risk of forced marriage (see [Child marriage](#)). Street children, not all of whom are orphans, face threats of violence and exploitation (see [Street children](#)).
- 2.5.12 In the CG case of [HK and others \(minors- indiscriminate violence – forced recruitment by Taliban – contact with family members\) Afghanistan CG \[2010\] UKUT 378 \(IAC\)](#), heard 15 July 2010, the UT held that while forcible recruitment by the Taliban cannot be discounted as a risk, particularly in areas of high militant activity or militant control, evidence is required to show that it is a real risk for the particular child concerned and not a mere possibility (paragraph 34).
- 2.5.13 Boys, typically madrassa-educated young Pashtuns from rural communities, may be recruited by non-state armed groups, including the Taliban, and used in armed conflict. A 2020 study on 3 Taliban-controlled areas indicated that direct forced recruitment by the Taliban did not generally occur. However, children may be coerced into joining the Taliban or other armed non-state groups through, for example, indoctrination or financial benefit. It is not clear whether children continue to be recruited following the Taliban takeover (see [Child recruitment to armed groups](#)).
- 2.5.14 Available country information does not indicate that there are very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to justify a departure from the findings in [HK and Others](#).
- 2.5.15 In regard to unaccompanied children, in the Country Guidance case of [AA \(unattended children\) Afghanistan CG \[2012\] UKUT 16 \(IAC\) \(01 February 2012\)](#), heard on 28 October 2010 and 23 May 2011, the UT held ‘... 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' (paragraph 93ii).

- 2.5.16 As held by the UT in [AA \(unattended children\)](#), decision makers must take into account such risks 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).
- 2.5.17 Available country information does not indicate that there are very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to justify a departure from the findings in [AA \(unattended children\)](#). Evidence continues to indicate that unaccompanied children may be at risk of, among other things, violence, sexual abuse, forced recruitment, abduction and trafficking, child marriage and child labour. However, each case must be considered on its facts and decision makers must establish whether such treatment is sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition that it will reach the high threshold of being persecutory or otherwise inhuman or degrading treatment.
- 2.5.18 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Children's asylum claims](#).

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2.6 Protection

- 2.6.1 The Taliban have taken de facto control of Afghanistan and announced that they intend to re-establish the Islamic emirate and implement (their version of) Sharia law. Therefore, where a person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the Taliban, they will not be able to obtain protection.
- 2.6.2 If the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from an actor other than the Taliban, it is too soon to determine whether the Taliban would be either willing or able to offer them protection.
- 2.6.3 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.7 Internal relocation

- 2.7.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the Taliban, who now control virtually the whole country, it is unlikely there will be a safe place that they would not be at risk from the Taliban and they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.7.2 For further guidance on internal relocation, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.8 Return and reception arrangements

- 2.8.1 If adequate and sustainable reception arrangements with family members cannot be made, and there is no current prospect of them being made, and but for this it would be reasonable for the child to return, decision makers

must consider granting UASC leave under paragraphs [352ZC to 352ZF of the Immigration Rules](#).

- 2.8.2 For further guidance on reception arrangements for the return of unaccompanied children, see the [Asylum Instruction on Children's asylum claims](#).

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2.9 Certification

- 2.9.1 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.

- 2.9.2 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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Country information

Section 3 updated: 29 September 2021

3. Demography

3.1 Population

- 3.1.1 Estimates of the total population varied from between 32.2 million (2019-2020 estimate)¹ and 37.4 million (July 2021 estimate)². The CIA World Factbook estimated 40.62% of the population was under the age of 15³. More than 50% the population was under 18⁴ ⁵. According to the Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015, 58% of children under the age of 5 were unregistered, and only 20% of those registered had birth certificates⁶.

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3.2 Family structure and dynamics

- 3.2.1 Cultural Atlas, a collaborative project between SBS (Special Broadcasting Service – Australia), International Education Services (IES) and Multicultural NSW (New South Wales), noted in regard to family dynamics, 'Family roles vary between ethnicities, socio-economic statuses and regions.

Nevertheless, a traditional patriarchal age hierarchy prevails throughout all. The eldest male has the most authority and decision-making power and usually controls all family spending. Every decision has to be approved by the husband or father.'⁷

- 3.2.2 UNICEF noted in its Child Notice Afghanistan 2018, which provided the situation for children based on publicly available information as at November 2018:

'Family structure follows a very traditional, patriarchal structure and is centred on notions of honour and shame, governed by tribal codes and interpretations of Islam. The father is seen as the breadwinner, and the wife is seen as the mother. The man generally is the primary decision maker and discipliner in the family. Within the home, the parents are seen as responsible for the upbringing of the child, with support from extended family. Outside of the family, religious leaders, community elders, teachers and mullahs are all seen as responsible for providing guidance in upbringing. Sons are raised to help their father, learning how to provide for the family and become a future breadwinner for their own future family. Daughters are raised to focus more on domestic skills, with social norms attaching honour to preparing for a future marriage.'⁸

- 3.2.3 The UNICEF Child Notice Afghanistan also noted 'Households in Afghanistan have on average 7.7 members and 3.7 children under the age

¹ NSIA, '[Afghanistan population estimates](#)' (page 1), June 2019

² CIA World Factbook, '[Afghanistan](#)' (People and society), updated 8 September 2021

³ CIA World Factbook, '[Afghanistan](#)' (People and society), updated 8 September 2021

⁴ NRC, '[If you're a 13-year-old living in Afghanistan](#)', 30 January 2019

⁵ Saleem, Z, '[An overview of Child's Rights in Afghanistan: Legislation...](#)', 11 May 2020

⁶ CSO, '[Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015](#)' (page 11), January 2017

⁷ Evason, N, Cultural Atlas, '[Afghan Culture](#)' (Family), updated January 2019

⁸ UNICEF, '[Child Notice Afghanistan](#)' (page 21), 2018

of 15. Household with 6 to 8 persons are the most common household sizes, but more than half of the Afghan population lives in household with nine persons or more.⁹

- 3.2.4 A study by the research organisation, Samuel Hall, published June 2020, referred to family attitudes towards the responsibilities of children:

‘Prevailing narratives of childhood present a picture of young adulthood that begins quite early. Past research had shown that children are frequently in positions where they have to work, support families, and even act as spouses or parents before age 18. “There is a general rule in Afghanistan: when a person is above 10, he is no longer a child,” confirmed a social worker. As soon as a child hits puberty, according to this narrative, they may be considered an adult, with adult responsibilities.

‘Our research reveals, however, a more nuanced vision of this narrative. On the one hand, children take on significant responsibilities in their household – especially where the head of household is absent or unable to work, the burden of providing for the family most commonly falls on the child...

‘On the other hand, parents acknowledge their child’s right to childhood, even in later stages of adolescence. One father emphasised this: “My child was young, and I saw him as a child, but because of economic problems he went to Iran with my approval; he was 15-16 years old when he migrated to Iran”.¹⁰

- 3.2.5 The UNICEF Child Notice Afghanistan noted ‘Customary practices in Afghanistan make decisions on the age of maturity based on physical and mental maturity. A study by the Peace Training and Research Organization shows that social norms in Afghanistan view transition from child to adult as occurring sometime starting from 13-18 years old.’¹¹

- 3.2.6 The UNICEF Child Notice Afghanistan cited an undated report by War Child UK on juvenile justice in Afghanistan, in which it stated:

‘Afghan life and culture very much revolve around families and clans. The laws and moral standards are based on these blood ties much more than on the state and the “rule of law” like in countries such as the UK. Less emphasis is placed on individual rights, and the notion of children’s rights isn’t as understood or enshrined in the same way as in other countries. Given the decades of conflict that have plagued the country, families do their best to protect their children – especially the girls. Home is usually considered to be the safest place for them, but this sometimes comes at the cost of their education or social life.’¹²

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⁹ UNICEF, ‘[Child Notice Afghanistan](#)’ (page 21), 2018

¹⁰ Samuel Hall, ‘[Coming back to Afghanistan: Deported minors’ needs...](#)’ (pages 3-4), June 2020

¹¹ UNICEF, ‘[Child Notice Afghanistan](#)’ (page 59), 2018

¹² UNICEF, ‘[Child Notice Afghanistan](#)’ (page 22), 2018

4. Taliban takeover

4.1 Rule of law

- 4.1.1 For information on the Taliban and its takeover of Kabul (and the country more broadly), see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban](#). See also the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).
- 4.1.2 General statements by the Taliban indicated that Sharia law will be applied¹³, though it is unclear exactly how the Taliban plan to govern the country.
- 4.1.3 UN officials called on the Taliban and all relevant parties to uphold the rights of children, especially girls and their right to education¹⁴.
- 4.1.4 At the time of writing, it remained unclear how children's rights would be affected or whether the republic-era laws pertaining to children would remain in place.
- 4.1.5 For information on living under the Taliban, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban](#).

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5. Humanitarian situation

5.1 Needs and assistance

- 5.1.1 UNICEF reported in its Afghanistan Humanitarian Situation Report for the period 1 to 20 August 2021 that 9.7 million children were in need of humanitarian assistance. The report noted the support it was providing in relation to health, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and nutrition – an estimated 11,000 children aged under 5 were found to be suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM) in the first 2 weeks of August. In addition, UNICEF noted:

'In August 2021, UNICEF scaled up its child protection response by providing immediate and life-saving services to children affected by conflict and displacement. At the time of writing, immediate cash assistance, transportation, referral to medical service and other services have been provided to a total of 330 children, including 83 boys and 247 girls. Psychosocial support was also provided to 1,462 children (762 boys and 700 girls) and their caregivers or parents. These children are from the conflict affected IDP families including separated children as a result of the recent active fighting in North, Northeast, South, Eastern and West Region provinces.'¹⁵

- 5.1.2 In a press briefing on 30 August 2021, UNICEF Afghanistan Representative, Hervé Ludovic De Lys, spoke of '... a child protection crisis in a country that is already one of the worst places on earth to be a child.'¹⁶ He added

¹³ Al Jazeera, '[Explainer: The Taliban and Islamic law in Afghanistan](#)', 23 August 2021

¹⁴ UN Office of the Special Representative '[Afghanistan: "Children have suffered..."](#)' 31 August 2021

¹⁵ UNICEF, '[Afghanistan Humanitarian Situation Report, 1-20 August 2021](#)', 29 August 2021

¹⁶ UNICEF, '[Afghanistan "a child protection crisis in a country already one of the..."](#)', 30 August 2021

‘Against a backdrop of conflict and insecurity, children are living in communities that are running out of water because of the drought. They’re missing life-saving vaccines, including against polio, a disease that can paralyze children for life. Many are so malnourished they lie in hospital beds too weak to grasp an outstretched finger.’¹⁷

- 5.1.3 UNICEF noted in its humanitarian situation update for the period 21 to 31 August 2021 that:

‘The funding suspension of the Sehatmandi project which is the backbone of the health system in Afghanistan has critical negative implications for the delivery of the health services in Afghanistan. More than 2,300 health facilities are affected by this decision, with reports indicating growing gaps in the delivery of life-saving interventions including routine immunization services, limited medicine and supplies, and lack of salaries for health personnel. Over 80 per cent of life-saving nutrition services for children and women are provided through these health facilities. Nutrition counsellors, whose work will also be stalled, provide critical support and counselling for breastfeeding mothers and one-on-one advice on feeding young children. Provision of iron, folic acid and vitamin and mineral tablets and powders, critical in these times of rapidly diminishing access to food, will also be jeopardized. Likewise, critical nutrition information on treatments will no longer be available, limiting the ability to obtain updates on the nutrition situation in the country. With one million children under five projected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition this year, such suspensions in service provision will have a devastating impact on the nutritional situation of children.

‘Hunger is likely to increase in the coming months as wheat and other food prices are climbing daily notwithstanding the compounded impacts of the meagre harvest season ends and the harsh Afghan winter that will begin in two months from now.’¹⁸

- 5.1.4 Further updates from UNICEF available at [Updates | ReliefWeb](#).
- 5.1.5 See also the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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5.2 Impact of COVID-19

- 5.2.1 Reporting on the year 2020, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) noted:

‘The economic, psychological and social stress from the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated risks for children with recruitment into armed groups, child marriage and child labour all on the rise. COVID-19 has quickly changed the context in which children live. Quarantine measures, school closures and restrictions on movement have disrupted children's routine and social support structures, while also placing new stressors on parents and caregivers who often have to find new childcare options or forgo work. Stigma and discrimination related to COVID-19 may make children more

¹⁷ UNICEF, ‘[Afghanistan “a child protection crisis in a country already one of the...”](#)’, 30 August 2021

¹⁸ UNICEF, ‘[Humanitarian Situation Report, 21-31 August 2021](#)’ (pages 1 to 2), 13 September 2021

vulnerable to violence and psychosocial distress. Of the 18 per cent of households who reported a change in behaviour (indicating a sign of distress/mental health problems) in the 2020 WoA [Whole of Afghanistan] assessment, half reported angry, aggressive and violent behaviour change due to poverty and distress, which increases the risk that children experience greater levels of domestic and GBV [gender-based violence] in their homes.¹⁹

5.2.2 Analysis by World Vision, dated November 2020, noted:

‘COVID-19 in Afghanistan is having a catastrophic impact on millions of vulnerable families. Even before the pandemic emerged, 93 percent of Afghan households survived on less than [US]\$2 per day so the vast majority of families have virtually no capacity to absorb the economic shock of COVID-19 and the resulting loss of livelihoods. Border closures have also meant a drastic reduction in exports and a sharp decline in remittances. In addition, the price of staple foods continues to increase, making it harder and harder for families to feed themselves, support their children and meet basic needs....

‘The children of Afghanistan, especially those already suffering from poverty and inequity, are among the most vulnerable to the harsh socioeconomic impact of COVID-19. A third of the population – including 7.3 million children will face food shortages due to the impacts of the current pandemic according to Save the Children. Child mortality, malnutrition, forced marriages, sexual abuse, child labour and other forms of violence and exploitation and are all common challenges for the average child. With the addition of COVID-19 and its immediate and secondary impacts, children are now more anxious and worried than ever before and at greater risk of facing physical, sexual and emotional violence, especially as the economic impacts of the crisis set in with poverty rates and hunger in the country rising.²⁰

5.2.3 Reporting specifically on the risk of child labourers, the United States Department of State Report on Human Rights Practices 2020, published 30 March 2021 (USSD HR Report 2020) noted:

‘According to the International Labor Organization and UNICEF, millions more children were at risk of child labor due to COVID-19, because many families lost their incomes and did not have access to social support. Child labor was a key source of income for many families and the rising poverty, school closures, and decreased availability of social services increased the reliance on child labor. Many children already engaged in child labor were experiencing a worsening of conditions and working longer hours, posing significant harm to their health and safety.²¹

5.2.4 For more information on COVID-19 see the UNOCHA’s [situation reports](#).

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¹⁹ UNOCHA, ‘[Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021](#)’ (page 35), December 2020

²⁰ World Vision, ‘[Breaking point: COVID-19 and the Child Protection...](#)’ (page 2), 12 November 2020

²¹ USSD, ‘[2020 Human Rights Report](#)’ (section 7c), 30 March 2021

5.3 Children with disabilities

- 5.3.1 Human Rights Watch (HRW), reporting on the barriers faced by women and girls with disabilities, dated April 2020, noted, ‘Afghanistan has one of the largest populations per capita of persons with disabilities in the world. At least one in five Afghan households includes an adult or child with a serious physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychosocial disability.’²² The report added ‘Poor prenatal health care is directly related to some childhood disabilities, including cerebral palsy, which is characterized by motor difficulties, often accompanied by visual, hearing, and learning disabilities. Cerebral palsy is the most prevalent childhood disability in Afghanistan.’²³
- 5.3.2 Describing the social stigma faced by persons with disabilities, HRW noted ‘Entrenched discrimination means that persons with disabilities face significant obstacles to education, employment, and health care’ and that they also faced ‘... social isolation, being humiliated in public or within their own families, being considered a source of shame for the family, and being denied access to public spaces and community or family social events.’²⁴
- 5.3.3 The UNOCHA noted ‘Assessments indicate that during situations of hostilities and displacement, children with disabilities are at heightened risk of separation from their families, violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Many struggle with marginalisation, stigma and discrimination, while displacement impedes dignified access to basic services.’²⁵

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5.4 Unaccompanied and separated children

- 5.4.1 On 31 August 2021, executive director of UNICEF, Henrietta Fore, told American news channel, CNBC, that the children’s agency was “particularly worried” about the high numbers of unaccompanied children in Afghanistan, since recent events unfolded. “Many have been separated from their families. Some have been in the airport area, either just outside the gate or inside the gate,” she said.²⁶
- 5.4.2 In a statement made on 7 September 2021, on unaccompanied and separated children, Fore said:
- “Since 14 August, hundreds of children have been separated from their families amidst chaotic conditions, including large-scale evacuations, in and around the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul. Some of these children were evacuated on flights to Germany, Qatar and other countries.
- “UNICEF and our partners have registered approximately 300 unaccompanied and separated children evacuated from Afghanistan. We expect this number to rise through ongoing identification efforts”.²⁷

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²² HRW, “[Disability is not a weakness](#)”...’ (Summary), 28 April 2020

²³ HRW, “[Disability is not a weakness](#)”...’ (Barriers to health services...), 28 April 2020

²⁴ HRW, “[Disability is not a weakness](#)”...’ (Social stigma and discrimination), 28 April 2020

²⁵ UNOCHA, ‘[Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021](#)’ (page 97), December 2020

²⁶ CNBC, ‘[Afghanistan: UNICEF worried about the future for women and children](#)’, 31 August 2021

²⁷ UNICEF, ‘[Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore...](#)’, 7 September 2021

6. Education

6.1 Access to schools

6.1.1 Reporting on girls' education under Taliban rule, an article in Thomson Reuters Foundation News (Reuters) dated 7 September 2021 noted:

'The Taliban banned almost all education for girls during their 1996-2001 rule.

'After the Islamists were ousted, school attendance rose rapidly, with more than 3.6 million girls enrolled by 2018 – more than 2.5 million in primary school and over 1 million in secondary.

'The increase in girls in secondary education was particularly marked, with nearly 40% enrolled in 2018 compared with 6% in 2003, according to the U.N. children's agency, UNICEF...

'Nonetheless, the country has one of the biggest education gender gaps, with UNICEF saying girls account for 60% of the 3.7 million Afghan children out of school.'²⁸

6.1.2 Reporting on events in 2020, the USSD HR Report 2020 noted:

'The expansion of Taliban control in rural areas left an increasing number of public schools outside government control. The Taliban operated an education commission in parallel to the official Ministry of Education. Although their practices varied among areas, some schools under Taliban control reportedly allowed teachers to continue teaching but banned certain subjects and replaced them with Islamic studies; others provided only religious education. The Taliban continued to limit education for girls, especially for those past puberty.'²⁹

6.1.3 Following the Taliban takeover, the Thomson Reuters article of 7 September 2021 noted that the Taliban have said that girls would not be allowed to go to school with boys, even though there were not enough female teachers for gender-segregated classes. The report added:

'The Taliban have said girls will be able to go to school in line with Islamic law – without clarifying exactly what that means.

'They have said education must be single-sex and that girls can only have female teachers.

'Although many schools remain shut since the militants seized power this month, the Taliban have shared video clips on social media showing girls returning to class.'³⁰

6.1.4 UNICEF's chief of field operations in Afghanistan, Mustapha Ben Messaoud 'expressed cautious optimism about working with Taliban officials following their seizure of power in Afghanistan, citing their early expressions of support for girls' education', reported Reuters on 17 August 2021³¹. The

²⁸ Reuters, '[What will happen to girls' education in Afghanistan under Taliban rule](#)', 7 September 2021

²⁹ USSD, '[2020 Human Rights Report](#)' (section 2a), 30 March 2021

³⁰ Reuters, '[What will happen to girls' education in Afghanistan under Taliban rule](#)', 7 September 2021

³¹ Reuters, '[UNICEF "quite optimistic" after Taliban comments on girls' education...](#)', 17 August 2021

report stated, ‘UNICEF cited some Taliban local representatives as saying they were waiting for guidance from their leaders on the issue of educating girls, while others have said they want schools “up and running”.’³²

- 6.1.5 UNICEF noted in its humanitarian situation report for the period 21 to 31 August 2021 that:

“Cold Climate” schools in 22 provinces have completed or are in the process of completing their mid-year exams. On 24 August, the de-facto authorities instructed schools to reopen for grades one to six for both girls and boys (cold climate). Grade seven and above remain closed – with the exception of some provinces in the North, where all schools opened – awaiting for further instructions that seem to be delayed due to operational challenges, including financial constraints and organization of classrooms in terms of separation of female and male students and ongoing reflection on the inclusion of religious subjects into curriculum. It is not clear how many teachers are reporting back to schools, especially female teachers, but the de-facto authorities announce that all teachers for primary education should report back to work. At the moment, no official data is available on the number of teachers or children reporting to school for grade 1-6 as no national survey has been conducted yet.³³

- 6.1.6 On 31 August 2021, Henrietta Fore, executive director of UNICEF, told American news channel, CNBC, of the agency’s ‘deepest concern’ on the impact of children’s rights and education following the withdrawal of international troops. Fore told CNBC that:

‘... even before the current crisis [UNICEF] had been “working with elements of the Taliban in various parts of the country,” and that in some areas schools are currently open with girls and boys going to school.

“In the past 20 years, we have had a very large gain in education, so we’ve tripled the number of schools,” she added. “We used to have 1 million children going to school [in Afghanistan]; now there are 10 million children, and more than 4 million are girls, we don’t want to go backwards.”³⁴

- 6.1.7 Expressing hope that schools would remain open, Fore said “The Taliban is not monolithic. So each district, each area, each school, is different. And so we talk to all of the relevant authorities and we are encouraging it, but we can use everyone’s advocacy about the importance of going to school for both girls and boys, because boys now are subject to recruitment into many of the local militia”.³⁵

- 6.1.8 Reporting on the period 21 to 31 August 2021, UNICEF noted:

‘Currently 1,234 CBE classes are operational supported by UNICEF and implementing partners. In the current reporting period, 479 grade-1 community-based education classes (CBEs) were established in Faryab and Zabul provinces reaching 22,470 out-of-school children (13,830 girls and 8,640 boys). All 1,243 CBE classes received full teaching and learning

³² Reuters, [‘UNICEF “quite optimistic” after Taliban comments on girls’ education...’](#), 17 August 2021

³³ UNICEF, [‘Humanitarian Situation Report, 21-31 August 2021’](#) (page 3), 13 September 2021

³⁴ CNBC, [‘Afghanistan: UNICEF worried about the future for women and children’](#), 31 August 2021

³⁵ CNBC, [‘Afghanistan: UNICEF worried about the future for women and children’](#), 31 August 2021

materials (TLM) in March 2021. Teachers' salaries were paid until end of June 2021. At the moment, UNICEF is verifying CBE's teachers' salary list to process payments for July and August. In addition, textbooks for 2021-2022 academic year, additional set of TLM and hand-washing stations are in country and available for distribution, pending re-start of logistical operations (delivery and distribution by UNICEF LTA holders and other suppliers).³⁶

6.1.9 Indian news magazine, The Week, reported on 20 August 2021 on Matiullah Wesa, founder of Pen Path, an NGO that helped reopen hundreds of schools across Afghanistan. Wesa told The Week from Kabul that Pen Path '... are determined to continue to campaign for right to education of children, especially girls. His NGO is conducting door-to-door campaigns, distributing books, building libraries in remote areas and launching awareness drives across Afghanistan encouraging people to educate children and protect schools.'³⁷

6.1.10 The Pen Path founder vowed to keep fighting for children's education irrespective of any consequences³⁸, and regularly [tweeted](#) of his drive to promote its importance, especially for girls, as the NGO travelled across the country. On 23 August 2021, Taliban spokesperson Suhail Shaheen [tweeted](#) a video showing girls going to a village school³⁹.

6.1.11 On 29 August 2021 it was reported by the Independent that:

'...interim higher education minister Abdul Baqi Haqqani criticised the current education system that was founded by the international community, claiming that it had failed to adhere to religious principles.

"[The] world tried to take religion out of scientific education, which harmed the people," Mr Haqqani said. He added that "every item against Islam in the educational system will be removed".⁴⁰

6.1.12 On 3 September 2021, Euro News reported on children returning to school under the Taliban regime, which, according to a teacher in Kabul, saw far fewer students attending. The report noted:

'Although the Taliban leaders have made promises not to repeat the brutal practices they used when they were in power between 1996 and 2001, for many Afghans, words are not enough reassurance.

"I am hoping that the Islamic Emirate (Taliban government) will uphold its promises and do as they say so that students can continue with their studies," says Sadia Sherifian, an Afghan school teacher in Kabul.

'She also points out that "there has been a lot of abuse of women during the Taliban's previous rule. That's why girls feel unsafe going to school".

'According to Sherifian, there were around 45 to 50 pupils in the classrooms before the Taliban took over. Now there are only around 15 students in class.'⁴¹

³⁶ UNICEF, '[Humanitarian Situation Report, 21-31 August 2021](#)' (page 3), 13 September 2021

³⁷ The Week, '[An Afghan NGO is determined to educate girls despite Taliban's...](#)', 20 August 2021

³⁸ India Today, '[I can be killed: Afghan educator braces for challenges...](#)', 7 September 2021

³⁹ Shaheen, S (@suhailshaheen1), '[Back to school in a new Afghanistan](#)', 23 August 2021

⁴⁰ Independent, '[Taliban vows to purge education system of anything "against Islam"](#)', 29 August 2021

⁴¹ Euro News, '[Afghan girls feel "hopeless" about their education under Taliban...](#)', 3 September 2021

- 6.1.13 Gandhara, part of the Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty news outlet, reported on 6 September 2021 that many girls' schools in Kabul remained closed⁴².
- 6.1.14 The Guardian reported that a statement by the Taliban education ministry said on 17 September 2021 '... secondary school classes for boys in grades seven to 12 would resume on Saturday [18 September], the start of the Afghan week. "All male teachers and students should attend their educational institutions," the statement said.' However, the announcement did not mention girls⁴³. UNICEF welcomed the news that secondary schools would reopen after being closed for months due to COVID-19, but also expressed concern that girls would not be allowed to return⁴⁴.
- 6.1.15 Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in a statement made on 21 September 2021 that, since the Taliban takeover, 'Women have been progressively excluded from the public sphere. In many areas, they are prohibited from appearing in public spaces without a male guardian. In numerous professional sectors, women face increasing restrictions. To date, girls over the age of 12 have in effect been prohibited from attending school.'⁴⁵
- 6.1.16 As reported by Al Jazeera, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said on 21 September 2021 that they were "finalising things" and that secondary school girls will return to the classroom "as soon as possible".⁴⁶

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6.2 Access to universities

- 6.2.1 A decree applying to private colleges and universities, issued by the Taliban's higher education authority, ordered that female students '... must wear an abaya robe and niqab covering most of the face, ... classes must be segregated by sex – or at least divided by a curtain... should only be taught by other women, but if that was not possible then "old men" of good character could fill in', reported Agence France Presse (AFP) and cited by France24 on 5 September 2021⁴⁷. The decree also stated that men and women should use separate entrances and exits and, to avoid sexes mixing, female students must end their lessons 5 minutes earlier and stay in waiting rooms until the men had left the building⁴⁸.
- 6.2.2 Also reporting on the decree, Gandhara, noted that as well as covering the body, hair and face, 'The garments must be black... and women must also wear gloves to ensure their hands are covered.'⁴⁹
- 6.2.3 Speaking anonymously, a university professor told AFP that it was a difficult plan to put into practice as there were not enough female teachers or classrooms to allow segregation, but added "... the fact that they [Taliban]

⁴² Gandhara, '[Taliban Imposes New Dress Code, Segregation Of Women...](#)', 6 September 2021

⁴³ The Guardian, '[Taliban ban girls from secondary education in Afghanistan](#)', 17 September 2021

⁴⁴ UNICEF, '[UNICEF welcomes reopening of secondary schools...](#)', 17 September 2021

⁴⁵ OHCHR, '[76th session of the United Nations General Assembly Side event...](#)', 21 September 2021

⁴⁶ Al Jazeera, '[Girls to return to secondary schools "soon as possible": Taliban](#)', 21 September 2021

⁴⁷ AFP, '[Taliban order university women to wear face-covering niqab](#)', 5 September 2021

⁴⁸ AFP, '[Taliban order university women to wear face-covering niqab](#)', 5 September 2021

⁴⁹ Gandhara, '[Taliban Imposes New Dress Code, Segregation Of Women...](#)', 6 September 2021

are allowing girls to go to schools and universities is a big positive step”.⁵⁰

- 6.2.4 Media sources reported on the reopening of universities since the Taliban took control, noting that classrooms were divided by a curtain to separate male and female students^{51 52}. Reuters reported on 6 September 2021 ‘Teachers and students at universities in Afghanistan’s largest cities – Kabul, Kandahar and Herat – told Reuters that female students were being segregated in class, taught separately or restricted to certain parts of the campus.’⁵³ A female student told Reuters that ‘Even before the Taliban took over Afghanistan, ... female students sat separately from males. But classrooms were not physically divided.’⁵⁴
- 6.2.5 As universities opened⁵⁵, and a new interim government was formed by the Taliban⁵⁶, its newly appointed Minister for Education, Sheikh Molvi Noorullah Munir, said on 7 September 2021, “No PhD degree, Master’s degree is valuable today. You see that the mullahs and Taliban [leaders] that are in the power, have no PhD, MA or even a high school degree, but are the greatest of all”.^{57 58}

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6.3 Impact of attacks on educational institutions

- 6.3.1 Reporting on 2020 events, the USSD HR Report 2020 noted, ‘Violent attacks on schoolchildren, particularly girls, hindered access to education, particularly in areas controlled by the Taliban. The Taliban and other extremists threatened and attacked school officials, teachers, and students, particularly girls, and burned both boys’ and girls’ schools.’⁵⁹
- 6.3.2 Reporting on the impact of explosive weapons on education in Afghanistan, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), noted in a report published September 2021:

‘Between January 2018 and June 2021, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) identified over 200 reported attacks on schools, school students and personnel, and higher education in Afghanistan that involved explosive weapons. These attacks injured or killed hundreds of students and educators and damaged or destroyed dozens of schools and universities.

‘In the first six months of 2021, more attacks on schools using explosive weapons were reported than in the first half of any of the previous three years. Explosive weapons were used in an increasing proportion of all attacks on education since 2018, with improvised explosive devices most prevalent among these attacks.

⁵⁰ AFP, ‘[Taliban order university women to wear face-covering niqab](#)’, 5 September 2021

⁵¹ Reuters, ‘[A curtain divides male, female students as Afghan universities...](#)’, 6 September 2021

⁵² CNN, ‘[Afghanistan: Curtains separate male and female students...](#)’, 7 September 2021

⁵³ Reuters, ‘[A curtain divides male, female students as Afghan universities...](#)’, 6 September 2021

⁵⁴ Reuters, ‘[A curtain divides male, female students as Afghan universities...](#)’, 6 September 2021

⁵⁵ CNN, ‘[Afghanistan: Curtains separate male and female students...](#)’, 7 September 2021

⁵⁶ Al Jazeera, ‘[Taliban announces new government in Afghanistan](#)’, 7 September 2021

⁵⁷ India Today, ‘[PhD, Master’s degrees not valuable, mullahs greatest without...](#)’, 8 September 2021

⁵⁸ NDTV, ‘[“No PhD, Master’s Degree Valuable,” Says Taliban’s New Education...](#)’, 8 September 2021

⁵⁹ USSD, ‘[2020 Human Rights Report](#)’ (section 6), 30 March 2021

'Attacks with explosive weapons also caused school closures, including when non-state armed groups used explosive weapons to target girls' education.'⁶⁰

6.3.3 The GCPEA report added, '... as Taliban forces regained control of the country in recent months culminating in the taking of Kabul in August 2021, Afghanistan's advancements in providing and protecting education, especially for women and girls, are at risk of being overturned. In the first half of 2021, insecurity forced the closure of over 920 schools, according to the Afghanistan Education in Emergencies Working Group.'⁶¹

6.3.4 Reporting on the severe disruption to education, the GCPEA report also stated:

'In addition to other violence, the use of explosive weapons has produced destructive and deadly impacts on education in Afghanistan that are both direct and wider ranging. Some direct impacts of blasts include damage to education facilities, and civilian casualties. However, explosions can also have indirect and reverberating impacts on education, such as school closures that cause students to miss weeks or months of education, and fear and trauma that prevent students from learning. Even the suspected presence of explosive weapons near a school can inhibit attendance, as revealed in an Afghanistan Protection Cluster survey, which found that 25 percent of children were unable to access schools due to the reported presence of mines or explosives in the first quarter of 2021.'⁶²

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Section 7 updated: 29 September 2021

7. Violence against children

7.1 Child casualties

7.1.1 The Report of the UN Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, dated 2 September 2021, which provided an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan since the issuance of the [previous report](#), dated 15 June 2021, noted:

'During the second quarter of 2021, the country task force on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in armed conflict verified 1,179 grave violations against 1,112 children (673 boys, 420 girls, 19 sex unknown) during the reporting period, including 1,085 children killed or maimed (309 killed and 776 maimed) (647 boys, 419 girls, 19 sex unknown). Of concern, the killing and maiming of children almost doubled compared with the previous quarter. Combined child casualties verified during the first two quarters of 2021 constituted the highest number of children killed and maimed for this time period ever recorded by the country task force in Afghanistan. Anti-government elements were responsible for 594 child casualties, while pro-government forces were responsible for 347. The leading causes of child casualties during the quarter were non-suicide

⁶⁰ GCPEA, '[The Impact of Explosive Weapons on Education...](#)' (page 2), September 2021

⁶¹ GCPEA, '[The Impact of Explosive Weapons on Education...](#)' (page 3), September 2021

⁶² GCPEA, '[The Impact of Explosive Weapons on Education...](#)' (page 4), September 2021

improvised explosive devices (430, or 40 per cent), followed by ground engagements (385, or 35 per cent) and aerial attacks (143, or 13 per cent).⁶³

- 7.1.2 For more information on the general security situation, see also the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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7.2 Child marriage

- 7.2.1 Child marriage in Afghanistan is prevalent and rates suggest at least a third of girls will be married before the age of 18, according to a 2018 UNICEF report⁶⁴. The UNICEF report noted that outside of the then Afghan government's national legislation, which stated marriage for girls under 16 and boys under 18 was illegal, Sharia and customary laws, such as Pashtunwali and other local or tribal rules, were used to govern child marriage⁶⁵.

- 7.2.2 Even whilst civil laws were in place, in August 2019 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) noted that, according to Farzan Hussaini, UNICEF's child-protection chief for western Afghanistan:

'... Shari'a and customary laws hold sway across rural Afghanistan, where the majority of Afghans live.

'According to Islamic law, a marriage is not valid if the individuals are either unwilling or too young to understand the implications that marriage entails. But Islamic law is vague about a specific age that is considered old enough for "understanding," leaving the question up to different interpretations by local religious leaders.

'Hussaini says pronouncements by various local mullahs across Afghanistan, particularly in rural areas with high illiteracy rates, have been used to justify the marriage of children as young as nine.'⁶⁶

- 7.2.3 The 2018 UNICEF report noted in regard to marriage and Islam:

'In Afghanistan, a country that strongly prioritizes Islam and the teachings of the Quran, misinterpretation, wilful or otherwise, may contribute to the normalization of child marriage... in Deobandi Islam, to which the Taliban adheres, it is very common for older men to believe that they have the right to marry off underage girls whenever they see fit, which can explain to some degree the higher number of cases of child marriage during the [1996 to 2001] Taliban regime.'⁶⁷

- 7.2.4 The 2018 UNICEF report also noted, 'In Afghanistan, there are several traditional practices, such as baad, badal, mahr and jirga, which have direct influence on the marriage age of girls in families.'⁶⁸ The report added:

⁶³ UN General Assembly, '[The situation in Afghanistan...](#)' (paragraph 37), 2 September 2021

⁶⁴ UNICEF, '[Child marriage in Afghanistan: Changing the narrative](#)' (page 11), July 2018

⁶⁵ UNICEF, '[Child marriage in Afghanistan: Changing the narrative](#)' (page 16), July 2018

⁶⁶ RFE/RL, '[Boys With Brides: Afghanistan's Untold Dilemma Of Underage...](#)', 12 August 2019

⁶⁷ UNICEF, '[Child marriage in Afghanistan: Changing the narrative](#)' (page 69), July 2018

⁶⁸ UNICEF, '[Child marriage in Afghanistan: Changing the narrative](#)' (page 68), July 2018

'In many areas, tribal jirgas decide on these issues [of marriage] and due to different interpretations of a marriageable age in Islam, most jirgas have come to the consensus that child marriages are not recommended, but are not illegal. In addition to considering Sharia law, jirgas also take into account the tribal code of pashtunwali, which does not always correlate with Islam, but is more focused on maintaining honour in the context of Afghanistan.'⁶⁹

7.2.5 The Asia Foundation 2019 Survey of the Afghan People described the cultural practices relating to marriage of women and girls:

'Baad is the traditional practice of giving away a daughter to another party as a penalty or payment to settle a debt or resolve a dispute, grievance, or conflict between families. Because the exchange is usually one-sided, with the bride going to live with the husband's family, she can often be the target of abuse. Despite awareness campaigns, baad still happens, though according to the Civil and Liberal Initiative for Peace, less frequently as rural areas become more educated. Baddal is the exchange of daughters in marriage between families. This is often a form of forced marriage, and may have economic implications (e.g., there is generally no bride price or dowry involved). ... There has been a slow, steady decline in acceptance of baad and baddal....'⁷⁰

7.2.6 A 2019 UNICEF report indicated the practice of baad was widespread⁷¹.

7.2.7 According to the August 2019 RFE/RL article, boys in rural areas were '... often impelled to marry because of long-held local or tribal traditions – customs on the inheritance rights of widows, the settlement of blood feuds, or prearranged agreements between families to exchange their children for marriage'. The source mentioned that child marriages of boys were less frequent than child marriages of girls and tended to be underreported⁷².

7.2.8 In a December 2020 report on violence against women and girls, UNAMA found that '... the vast majority of child marriages are arranged or condoned by the girls' families.'⁷³ The Report of the UN Secretary General for Children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, covering the period 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2020, said 'Girls were often subjected to early marriages and engaged in domestic labour or other household work and activities. Those trends were exacerbated in 2020 owing to the socioeconomic impact of the measures taken in response to COVID-19, including lockdowns.'⁷⁴

7.2.9 Following the Taliban takeover, there were accusations of women and girls being forced to marry Taliban fighters^{75 76}.

7.2.10 A report by the Associated Press (AP), dated 3 September 2021, noted that following evacuations from Afghanistan, US officials at intake centres in the United Arab Emirates and Wisconsin had '... identified numerous incidents in which Afghan girls have been presented to authorities as the "wives" of

⁶⁹ UNICEF, '[Child marriage in Afghanistan: Changing the narrative](#)' (page 68), July 2018

⁷⁰ Asia Foundation, '[A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2019](#)' (page 201), 2019

⁷¹ UNICEF, '[Preserving hope in Afghanistan: Protecting children...](#)' (page 13), 2019

⁷² RFE/RL, '[Boys With Brides: Afghanistan's Untold Dilemma Of Underage...](#)', 12 August 2019

⁷³ UNAMA, '[In Search of Justice for Crimes of Violence Against Women...](#)' (page 15), December 2020

⁷⁴ UN Security Council, '[Children and armed conflict in Afghanistan](#)' (paragraph 28), 16 July 2021

⁷⁵ France24, '[Taliban all smiles in captured Afghan city as northern blitz rolls on](#)', 11 August 2021

⁷⁶ The National, '[Taliban trying to force girls as young as 13 into marriage](#)', 3 August 2021

much older men.⁷⁷ According to a document seen by the AP, the US State Department ‘... has sought “urgent guidance” from other agencies after purported child brides were brought to Fort McCoy in Wisconsin. Another document, described to the AP by officials familiar with it, says Afghan girls at a transit site in Abu Dhabi have alleged they have been raped by older men they were forced to marry in order to escape Afghanistan.’⁷⁸

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7.3 Child labour

7.3.1 The USSD HR Report 2020 noted ‘Child labor remained a pervasive problem.’⁷⁹ The USDOL noted in its 2019 report that ‘Children in Afghanistan engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in armed conflict and forced labor in the production of bricks and carpets, each sometimes the result of human trafficking.’⁸⁰

7.3.2 The USSD HR Report 2020 expanded on other forms of child labour, noting: ‘Child laborers worked as domestic servants, street vendors, peddlers, and shopkeepers. There was child labor in the carpet industry, brick kilns, coal mines, and poppy fields. Children were also heavily engaged in the worst forms of child labor in mining, including mining salt; commercial sexual exploitation including bacha bazi... transnational drug smuggling; and organized begging rings. Some forms of child labor exposed children to land mines. Children faced numerous health and safety risks at work.’⁸¹

See also [Bacha bazi](#).

7.3.3 The same report further noted that ‘Some children were forced by their families into labor with physical violence. Particularly in opium farming, families sold their children into forced labor, begging, or sex trafficking to settle debts with opium traffickers. Some Afghan parents forcibly sent boys to Iran to work to pay for their dowry in an arranged marriage. Children were also subject to forced labor in orphanages run by NGOs and overseen by the government.’⁸²

7.3.4 In a study on the impact of COVID-19 on children, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) noted ‘According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (Child Protection Secretariat) data there have been 2.1 million working children before the Coronavirus crisis, of which 1.3 million were engaged in hard labor, but this figure has risen dramatically since the outbreak of Coronavirus, and the overall number of working children has reached 2.5 million, of whom 1.5 million are engaged in hard labor.’⁸³

7.3.5 Reporting on the impact of COVID-19, Save the Children noted in 2020, ‘... there is a rise in exploitation of children as a negative coping mechanism, including child labour with children aged between 10 and 16 years increasingly involved in carrying loads, shoe polishing, car washing and

⁷⁷ AP, ‘[Afghan Evacuation Raises Concerns About “Child Bride” Cases](#)’, 4 September 2021

⁷⁸ AP, ‘[Afghan Evacuation Raises Concerns About “Child Bride” Cases](#)’, 4 September 2021

⁷⁹ USSD, ‘[2020 Human Rights Report](#)’ (section 7c), 30 March 2021

⁸⁰ USDOL, ‘[2019 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor](#)’ (section II), 30 September 2020

⁸¹ USSD, ‘[2020 Human Rights Report](#)’ (section 7c), 30 March 2021

⁸² USSD, ‘[2020 Human Rights Report](#)’ (section 7c), 30 March 2021

⁸³ AIHRC, ‘[Impact of Covid-19 on the Human Rights Situation of Children...](#)’, 21 November 2020

collection of garbage in the street, which also presents further exposure to COVID-19.⁸⁴

See also [Impact of COVID-19](#).

- 7.3.6 The Household Emergency Assessment Tool (HEAT) for December 2020 indicated that, of the 1,507 households (9,633 individuals) assessed across 19 provinces, 99% of households reported their children did not attend school and of those, 19% said they had stopped sending their children to school so they (the children) could work⁸⁵.
- 7.3.7 A study by Samuel Hall on behalf of War Child UK (WCUK) on the return and reintegration needs of minors deported from Iran to the Western region (Herat and Badghis) of Afghanistan, published February 2021, found that 'Many children work upon return. 62% of minor deportees surveyed were employed in some capacity; when compared to national child labour rate estimates of 40%, child labour seems to be more prevalent and a higher risk for deportees than for non-deportees, increasing deportee vulnerability.'⁸⁶

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7.4 Physical and sexual abuse

- 7.4.1 EASO noted in a December 2017 report, 'Child abuse is endemic in Afghan society, and sexual abuse of children remains a pervasive problem, with girls being most frequently abused in their families or communities, and boys being subjected to abuse by men external to their families.'⁸⁷
- 7.4.2 In its Annual Report for 2020, when referring to conflict-related sexual violence against children, including rape and bacha bazi, UNAMA noted it was 'rarely reported and inadequately addressed...'⁸⁸
- 7.4.3 In regard to under-reporting, UNAMA noted '... there is a "culture of silence" and stigmatization in which shame is placed on the victims rather than the perpetrators. Victims feel unable to share reports of the harm they suffered due to feelings of guilt and humiliation; many are themselves blamed for being sexually abused or raped, and are often shunned by their communities – or even threatened – if the allegations come to light.'⁸⁹
- 7.4.4 In a study based on 1,000 children from the provinces of Balkh, Jowzjan, Sar-e Pul, Nangarhar, and Kabul (street working children only), published in August 2017, Save the Children found that 91% of children in Afghanistan in the study faced some sort of abuse⁹⁰. Corporal punishment was routinely used against children in schools and at home^{91 92}.
- 7.4.5 According to the same 2017 Save the Children study, child respondents experienced high levels of all types of violence, including exposure to

⁸⁴ Save the Children, '["Everything has changed"...](#)' (page 8), 2020

⁸⁵ REACH Initiative, '[HEAT Afghanistan](#)', December 2020

⁸⁶ Samuel Hall, '[Coming back to Afghanistan...](#)' (page 26), 24 February 2021

⁸⁷ EASO, '[Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms](#)' (page 67), December 2017

⁸⁸ UNAMA, '[Annual Report 2020](#)' (page 35), February 2021

⁸⁹ UNAMA, '[Annual Report 2020](#)' (page 35), February 2021

⁹⁰ Save the Children, '[Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices...](#)' (page 1), August 2017

⁹¹ IWPR, '[Afghanistan: Spare the Rod, Spoil the Child](#)', 17 March 2017

⁹² Save the Children, '[Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices...](#)' (page 1), August 2017

violence, psychological violence, physical and emotional neglect, physical violence, and sexual abuse. According to the study, sexual abuse was very likely to be underreported. Only 9% of children reported not experiencing any type of violence. Children from urban areas reported experiencing more violence than children in rural areas. Almost 50% of the children experienced at least one form of psychological violence at home, including shouting, insults, blaming for parent's misfortune, cursing, public embarrassment, threats of abandonment, and locking out of home⁹³. Lack of awareness, unemployment, drug abuse and poverty were given as the main reasons for violence against children⁹⁴.

7.4.6 The AIHRC report on the human rights situation of children in 2020, based on a study of 5,318 children, published February 2021, found that children were victims of psychological, physical, sexual and economic violence⁹⁵. The report stated 'In the fiscal year 1399 (2020), of the 5,318 children included in the study, 1,391 (26.2%) were victims of violence, while in 1398 (2019), 535 (10.2%) of the 5,248 children included in the study were victims of violence; thus, in 1399 (2020) incidents of violence against children increased by 16%. Among 1,391 children who were victims of violence, 948 (68.2%) were boys and 443 (31.8%) were girls.'⁹⁶

7.4.7 Of those 1,391 children who were exposed to violence in 2020, the AIHRC reported '511 (36.7%) incidents were perpetrated by police officers, 241 (17.3%) by family members, 111 (8%) by employers, and 81 (5.8%) by teachers, 55 (4%) by other children and 392 (28.2%) by other people.'⁹⁷

7.4.8 A study by AIHRC on the impact of Covid-19 on children, published November 2020, noted:

'According to the Commission's database, the level of violence against children in the first six months of this year [2020], during the quarantine period, was 141 cases, indicating a 13.5% decrease compared to the first six months of 1398 [2019], with 163 cases registered. Data from the Ministry of Interior also show that there have been 30 cases of violence against children during the quarantine, indicating a decrease of 68.4% compared to first six months in which 95 cases of violence against children were recorded. This reduction may be due to limitations on travel and movement during the quarantine period, which restricted victims' opportunity to go to the judiciary and register the case, while the actual level of violence against children may have been much higher.

'According to the Ministry of Interior, 9.6% of violence against children has been committed by their parents, 12% by other family members, and 78.4% by non-family members.'⁹⁸

7.4.9 The Report of the UN Secretary General, dated 2 September 2021, noted in regard to women and girls:

⁹³ Save the Children, '[Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices...](#)' (page 36), August 2017

⁹⁴ Save the Children, '[Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices...](#)' (page 1), August 2017

⁹⁵ AIHRC, '[The Human Rights Situation of Children in 1399 \(2020\)](#)', February 2021

⁹⁶ AIHRC, '[The Human Rights Situation of Children in 1399 \(2020\)](#)', February 2021

⁹⁷ AIHRC, '[The Human Rights Situation of Children in 1399 \(2020\)](#)', February 2021

⁹⁸ AIHRC, '[Impact of Covid-19 on the Human Rights Situation of Children...](#)', 21 November 2020

'The Taliban taking control of districts had been followed by allegations of regression in the enjoyment by Afghan women and girls of their fundamental rights and freedoms, specifically access to education, access to health clinics, the right to work and freedom of movement, owing to the directive that women were to be accompanied by a male family chaperone when leaving the home and the reinstatement of strict dress code. In several locations, the Taliban had reportedly threatened that violation of those rules would result in harsh punishments. There were reports of women having been flogged and beaten in public because they had breached the prescribed rules. In one case in Balkh Province, on 3 August, a women's rights activist was shot and killed for breaching the rules.'⁹⁹

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7.5 Bacha bazi

7.5.1 The US Department of Labor (USDOL) noted in its 2019 report on child labour that:

'Boys across the country are subject to commercial sexual exploitation through the practice of bacha bazi, which typically entails keeping a male or transgendered child for the purpose of sexual gratification. Although bacha bazi is illegal, it is defended by some as a cultural practice. The perpetrators include police commanders, military members, tribal leaders, warlords, members of organized crime groups, clergy, and other men, typically with some authority or financial influence, who conspire to make boys available for sex. In some cases, these boys may also be forced to serve tea or dance at parties. According to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), the practice exists in all provinces of the country. Orphans, runaways, school dropouts, and other marginalized youth are particularly at risk.'¹⁰⁰

7.5.2 Sources reporting prior to the Taliban takeover indicated that bacha bazi, which was a criminal offence, commonly occurred within the Afghan National Security Forces, who recruited boys for the practice^{101 102 103}.

7.5.3 The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) noted in its June 2019 report that, 'Human rights observers have reported that bacha bazi saw a resurgence in the years following the removal of the Taliban (who outlawed the practice), including in political circles and among senior members of the police and Afghan security forces.'¹⁰⁴

7.5.4 The DFAT report also indicated that 'Although it occurs nationwide, the practice [of bacha bazi] is reportedly most prevalent in conservative rural areas, particularly among Pashtun groups in the south and southeast and Tajik groups in the north.'¹⁰⁵

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⁹⁹ UN General Assembly, '[The situation in Afghanistan...](#)' (paragraph 41), 2 September 2021

¹⁰⁰ USDOL, '[2019 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor](#)' (section I), 30 September 2020

¹⁰¹ USDOL, '[2019 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor](#)' (section I), 30 September 2020

¹⁰² USSD, '[2020 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)', 25 June 2020

¹⁰³ UNAMA, '[Annual Report 2020](#)' (page 35), February 2021

¹⁰⁴ DFAT, '[Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan](#)' (paragraph 3.81), 27 June 2019

¹⁰⁵ DFAT, '[Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan](#)' (paragraph 3.80), 27 June 2019

7.6 Street children

- 7.6.1 A report by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), dated December 2016, noted that UNICEF estimated that about 60,000 children were working in the streets of Kabul, although the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) estimated this to have exceeded 100,000¹⁰⁶. The IWPR added that children begging or selling goods were a familiar sight in cities across the country, adding that not all street children were orphans; some were sent out to earn money by their families as they had no other means of support¹⁰⁷. The IWPR report cited Sadiq Sadiqi, then spokesman for the Ministry of Interior Affairs, who said ‘street children faced a constant threat of violence.’¹⁰⁸
- 7.6.2 EASO reported in a 2017 report that most street children were boys, adding ‘In the cities, street children in particular face a lot of threats: risk of trafficking, sexual abuse, kidnapping, drug addiction and recruitment by insurgents or as drug runners’ and that urban displaced youth in Kabul were ‘... vulnerable to being targeted for recruitment and pressured to engage in criminality or gangs.’¹⁰⁹
- 7.6.3 A 2018 research report on child labour, by the independent Afghanistan Public Policy Research Foundation (APPRF), noted:
‘Children working “in the street” as well as in other families’ households may be particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Presence on the streets, unprotected, presents a grave danger to many young boys who are at risk of being kidnapped, sexually assaulted or enslaved, and sometimes killed... There is a substantial amount of anecdotal evidence about the sexual abuse of young boys who work on the streets as beggars, peddlers, shoe shiners, tea makers, and car cleaners.’¹¹⁰
- 7.6.4 The USSD HR Report 2020 noted ‘... NGOs and government offices reported large numbers of children begging and living in the streets of major cities.’¹¹¹
- 7.6.5 On 12 August 2021, Save the Children estimated 72,000 children had arrived in Kabul ‘... with many living on the streets, in tarpaulin tents, and going hungry.’¹¹² See also [Conflict-induced displacement](#).

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7.7 Child recruitment to armed groups

- 7.7.1 According to the US Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons report for 2020 (USSD 2020 TiP report):
‘Insurgent groups, including the Taliban and the Islamic State in Khorasan Province, use children in direct hostilities, to plant and detonate improvised explosive devices (IEDs), carry weapons, spy, and guard bases. The Taliban

¹⁰⁶ IWPR, ‘[No Respite for Kabul’s Street Children](#)’, 9 December 2016

¹⁰⁷ IWPR, ‘[No Respite for Kabul’s Street Children](#)’, 9 December 2016

¹⁰⁸ IWPR, ‘[No Respite for Kabul’s Street Children](#)’, 9 December 2016

¹⁰⁹ EASO, ‘[Key socio-economic indicators](#)’, (pages 116, 120 and 121), August 2017

¹¹⁰ APPRF, ‘[Chronic Conflict, Poverty, and Child Labor...](#)’ (page 15), April 2018

¹¹¹ USSD, ‘[2020 Human Rights Report](#)’ (section 6), 30 March 2021

¹¹² Save the Children, ‘[Thousands of children living on the streets in Kabul...](#)’, 12 August 2021

recruits child soldiers from its madrassas in Afghanistan and Pakistan that provide military training and religious indoctrination, and it sometimes provides families cash payments or protection in exchange for sending their children to these schools. Armed groups target children from impoverished and rural areas, particularly those under Taliban control.¹¹³

7.7.2 Referring to recruitment by the Taliban, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) report on Anti-Government Elements, dated August 2020, noted:

‘The Taliban typically recruit young males from rural communities who are unemployed, educated in madrasas and ethnically Pashtun, according to independent Afghanistan expert, Borhan Osman. Recruitment usually occurs through the group’s Military Commission and outreach in mosques, as well as through personal networks and families of fighters, many of whom are motivated by “deep loathing for the Western institutions and values the Afghan government has taken up from its allies”. Rather than paying salaries, the Taliban cover expenses; while the movement has become entrenched in crime and narcotics as fighters keep the spoils of these activities.’¹¹⁴

7.7.3 According to an article in the Long War Journal (LWJ), a project by the non-profit policy institute, the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD), dated February 2020, ‘The Taliban continues to highlight the training of its fighters at its “military camps” that are located somewhere in Afghanistan or Pakistan.’ The report noted that the Mahmud Ghaznawi Military Camp, the location of which was not known, was ‘... one of more than 20 training facilities that have been celebrated by the Taliban since 2014.’¹¹⁵ Another LWJ report, dated 1 April 2020, cited Taliban training camps known as Abu Ubaidah bin Jarrah (in Badakhshan), Abu Dardaa (in Faryab) and Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq (location unknown). The Taliban claimed to have training camps across the country¹¹⁶.

7.7.4 The EASO report on the security situation, dated September 2020, referred to recruits to ISKP (Islamic State Khorasan Province), noting:

‘While the Taliban recruited “typically” unemployed, madrasa-educated young Pashtuns from rural communities, ISKP had cells in urban centres and recruited men and women from middle-class families, with many university students of non-Pashtun origin, predominantly from Kabul City and the surrounding urban centres of Parwan, Kapisa, and Panjsher provinces. According to the research, “with the exception of a minority made up of original Kabulis and a number of Uzbeks from Jawzjan, Takhar, and Faryab provinces in the far north of the country, the membership of ISKP’s Kabul cell is composed of youth from the areas of muqawamat (anti-Taliban resistance)”, who have either settled in Kabul or visit it regularly.’¹¹⁷

7.7.5 The GCPEA noted that, between 2017 and 2019, ‘No incidents of child recruitment were reported at school or while children were en route to or from school during the reporting period. However, there was evidence that

¹¹³ USSD, ‘[2020 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’, 25 June 2020

¹¹⁴ EASO, ‘[Anti-Government Elements](#)’ (page 21), August 2020

¹¹⁵ LWJ, ‘[Taliban promotes “mujahideen” graduates from one of its military...](#)’, 5 February 2020

¹¹⁶ LWJ, ‘[Taliban touts training camps “still going on” that prepare fighters for “war”](#)’, 1 April 2020

¹¹⁷ EASO, ‘[Security Situation](#)’ (page 51), September 2020

families at least perceived that recruitment was a risk for their children in and around school settings... GCPEA also received anecdotal evidence that non-state armed groups recruited children from madrassas during the reporting period.¹¹⁸

- 7.7.6 UNAMA noted in its Annual Report for 2020 that, throughout the year, children continued to be recruited by the Taliban¹¹⁹. UNAMA verified the recruitment and use of 196 boys in 2020, mostly in the north and northeast of the country, and 172 recruits were attributed to the Taliban¹²⁰. In 2019, UNAMA verified 58 children were recruited by the Taliban¹²¹.
- 7.7.7 The Report of the UN Secretary General for Children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, covering the period 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2020, said ‘The Taliban were responsible for the recruitment and use of 230 children (88 per cent), all used in combat roles, for instance, to plant improvised explosive devices, to carry out suicide attacks and to participate in hostilities against government forces, as a result of which some were killed or maimed.’¹²²
- 7.7.8 The same source noted ‘Boys were more likely to be recruited and used than girls, owing partly to cultural norms and religious beliefs. Poverty was also a significant push and pull factor, and boys were more likely to bear the responsibility for meeting the household’s economic needs.’¹²³
- 7.7.9 In 3 separate studies exploring Taliban rule in territories under their control, the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) looked at Andar district in Ghazni province¹²⁴, Nad Ali district in Helmand province¹²⁵, and Dasht-e Archi district in Kunduz province¹²⁶, and in each study, referred to Taliban recruitment methods, which indicated that the Taliban did not use direct force to recruit young male conscripts although some may be coerced.
- 7.7.10 In its first study (based on interviews conducted during July 2020) of Andar district, Ghazni, published 19 October 2020, the AAN noted:
- ‘During our interviews, no one reported young men being conscripted into Taleban ranks. This contrasts with the 1990s when the Taleban were fighting against the Jamiat-led United Front, better known as “Northern Alliance”, and demanded conscripts, including from Andar. Then, Taleban would go to villages to take young students (taleban) either from village mosques or from local madrassas to the frontline for fighting. In addition, the madrassa graduates who were staying at home were also likely to be conscripted.
- ‘When AAN asked the key informants whether this happened nowadays, they unanimously said that the Taleban did not do so, mainly because of the absolute requirement for loyalty from fighters and the danger of infiltration. Voluntary recruitment proved more dependable... Most join for ideological

¹¹⁸ GCPEA, ‘[Education under Attack 2020](#)’ (pages 102-103), 2020

¹¹⁹ UNAMA, ‘[Annual Report 2020](#)’ (page 33), February 2021

¹²⁰ UNAMA, ‘[Annual Report 2020](#)’ (pages 33-34), February 2021

¹²¹ UNAMA, ‘[Annual Report 2019](#)’ (page 24), February 2020

¹²² UN Security Council, ‘[Children and armed conflict in Afghanistan](#)’ (paragraph 25), 16 July 2021

¹²³ UN Security Council, ‘[Children and armed conflict in Afghanistan](#)’ (paragraph 28), 16 July 2021

¹²⁴ AAN, ‘[Living with the Taleban \(1\): Local experiences in Andar district...](#)’, 19 October 2020

¹²⁵ AAN, ‘[Living with the Taleban \(2\): Local experiences in Nad Ali district...](#)’, 18 January 2021

¹²⁶ AAN, ‘[Living with the Taleban \(3\): Local experiences in Dasht-e Archi district...](#)’, 25 January 2021

reasons, not for financial gain, according to the interviewees... they [Taliban] do not suffer a shortage of fighters locally.¹²⁷

- 7.7.11 In Nad Ali district, Helmand province, the AAN (through interviews and author visits over a 2 year period) reported 'The Taleban do not conscript young men into their ranks, partly because they have no shortage of recruits and partly because, unlike the late 1990s/early 2000s, they do not need to forcibly occupy areas.'¹²⁸ However, one informant said "When somebody from the Taleban, for example a commander or a head of a group, is killed, the Taleban pass his duty on to his brother or someone else from his family. If he doesn't have a brother or close relative in his family who can fight in the Taleban's ranks, his duty is then given to his wider relatives".¹²⁹
- 7.7.12 Reporting on Dasht-e Archi district in Kunduz province, the AAN (through interviews conducted in October and November 2020 plus author visits over a 2 year period) noted 'The Taleban do not need conscripts as they can recruit from the madrassas. According to a key informant who lives in a Taleban-controlled area, instead of forcing people to join them, the Taleban encourage villagers to send their children to madrassas for religious study. He said that all madrasa teachers are pro-Taleban and encourage students to join the cause.'¹³⁰
- 7.7.13 A BBC report dated April 2020, indicated that some teenagers were inspired to join the Taliban or Islamic State after viewing their propaganda videos or attending madrassas in Taliban-controlled areas¹³¹.
- 7.7.14 The UN Secretary General's report of 2 September 2021 noted that in the second quarter of 2021, 'The country task force verified the recruitment and use of 26 children (all boys) aged between 12 and 17 years by the Taliban (16), Afghan National Police (6) and pro-government militias (4).'¹³²
- 7.7.15 In a call to end the Taliban's use of child soldiers, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on 20 September 2021, 'Thousands of children may remain in their ranks today. The Taliban's current efforts to establish a government in Afghanistan provide an opportunity for the international community to push for an end to child recruitment, and for the release of children from Taliban forces.'¹³³

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7.8 Retaliatory and targeted attacks

- 7.8.1 According to the UNHCR's Afghanistan Eligibility Guidelines, dated August 2018, which cited a range of sources, anti-government elements (AGEs) have been reported to target family members of persons who are associated with, or perceived to be supportive of: the government and international community, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), which includes police and security services, aid workers and human rights

¹²⁷ AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(1\): Local experiences in Andar district...](#)', 19 October 2020

¹²⁸ AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(2\): Local experiences in Nad Ali district...](#)', 18 January 2021

¹²⁹ AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(2\): Local experiences in Nad Ali district...](#)', 18 January 2021

¹³⁰ AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(3\): Local experiences in Dasht-e Archi district...](#)', 25 January 2021

¹³¹ BBC News, '[Afghanistan: The detention centre for teenage Taliban members](#)', 21 April 2020

¹³² UN General Assembly, '[The situation in Afghanistan...](#)' (paragraph 38), 2 September 2021

¹³³ HRW, 'This is our opportunity to end the Taliban's use of child soldiers'

activists, tribal elders and religious leaders, women in the public sphere or persons perceived as ‘Westernised’¹³⁴. The guidelines noted that targeting takes place ‘... 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 ANDSF have been subjected to harassment, kidnappings, violence, and killings.’¹³⁵

7.8.2 In July 2019, the New York Times reported that the Taliban undertook retaliatory attacks against the families and homes of Afghan soldiers and police officers, including burning down the homes of soldiers’ families when the men served elsewhere¹³⁶.

7.8.3 EASO noted in its July 2020 report on criminal law and customary justice that:

‘In January 2020, Afghan officials accused the Taliban of executing at least six members of the same family, including an infant girl, in a remote village in Faryab province. According to Afghan officials, the Taliban sentenced the family to death for “immoral acts”, accusing them of working in prostitution. However, according to Andkhoy district chief Sultan Mohammad Sanjer, locals claimed that the real reason behind this execution was the fact that a family member was a former Taliban militant who recently took part in the peace process.’¹³⁷

7.8.4 On 10 July 2020, 3 civilian family members of a former local police commander in Panjwai District, Kandahar Province, were killed by Taliban who entered their house. Another 3 were injured¹³⁸.

7.8.5 On 1 January 2021, journalist and activist, Bismillah Adil Aimaq, was murdered after gunmen opened fire on his car in Ghor province^{139 140}. Just under 2 months later, on 25 February 2021, 3 of his family members were killed, one of whom was a 12 year-old girl, and another 5 children were wounded, by gunmen at their home in Ghor^{141 142}. No one claimed responsibility for the killings¹⁴³.

7.8.6 Noting a 33% decrease in casualties from deliberate targeting of civilians compared to 2019, UNAMA stated, in its 2020 Annual Report, that it continued to document targeted attacks, by AGEs, against civilian family members of Afghan national security forces personnel and persons supportive of the Government of Afghanistan¹⁴⁴. The Taliban were also reported to have burnt down houses belonging to family members of ISIL-KP combatants¹⁴⁵.

¹³⁴ UNHCR, ‘[Eligibility Guidelines...](#)’ (page 48), 30 August 2018

¹³⁵ UNHCR, ‘[Eligibility Guidelines...](#)’ (page 48), 30 August 2018

¹³⁶ New York Times, ‘[Seeking Revenge, Taliban Target Afghan Soldiers’ Families](#)’, 10 July 2019

¹³⁷ EASO, ‘[Criminal law, customary justice and informal dispute...](#)’ (page 21), July 2020

¹³⁸ New York Times, ‘[Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020](#)’, 30 July 2020

¹³⁹ DW, ‘[Afghanistan: Gunmen kill prominent journalist and activist](#)’, 1 January 2021

¹⁴⁰ BBC News, ‘[Afghanistan violence: Bismillah Aimaq is fifth journalist to die](#)’, 1 January 2021

¹⁴¹ Gandhara, ‘[Three Killed In Attack Targeting Slain Afghan Reporter’s Family](#)’, 26 February 2021

¹⁴² AMN News, ‘[Afghanistan: Family of murdered journalist Bismillah Aimaq...](#)’, 26 February 2021

¹⁴³ VoA, ‘[Attack Targets Afghan Reporter’s Family, Kills 3](#)’, 26 February 2021

¹⁴⁴ UNAMA, ‘[Annual Report 2020](#)’ (page 51), February 2021

¹⁴⁵ UNAMA, ‘[Annual Report 2020](#)’ (page 55), February 2021

7.8.7 According to media reports, at least 20 children were held hostage by the Taliban as they advanced towards Panjshir valley¹⁴⁶. A report in The Australian (daily newspaper) stated that, on 22 August 2021:

‘... the Taliban abducted local children from Keshen Abad village and demanded the surrender of their fathers... A resistance fighter in Panjshir, Abdul, told The Australian that there had been a fierce response from angry locals about the disappearance of the children and in the ensuing fighting, several hundred Taliban fighters were captured and there were talks to use them to swap for the hostages. He believed that the numbers of children who had been kidnapped was closer to 50.’¹⁴⁷

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7.9 Trafficking

7.9.1 The USSD 2020 TiP report noted ‘Internal trafficking is more prevalent than transnational trafficking.’¹⁴⁸ The same source noted:

‘Most Afghan trafficking victims are children forced to work in carpet making, brick kilns, domestic servitude, commercial sex, begging, poppy cultivation and harvesting, salt mining, transnational drug smuggling, and truck driving. Some Afghan families force their children into labor with physical violence or knowingly sell their children into sex trafficking, including bacha bazi. Opium-farming families sometimes sell their children to settle debts with opium traffickers, and some drug-addicted parents subject their children to sex trafficking or force them into labor, including begging. Some orphanages run by NGOs and overseen by the government subjected children to trafficking.’¹⁴⁹

7.9.2 Although reporting that transnational trafficking was less common than internal trafficking, the USSD 2020 TiP report noted ‘Trafficking networks smuggle Afghan nationals living in Iran to Europe and subject them to sex trafficking and force them to work in restaurants to pay off debts incurred by smuggling fees. Some Afghan traffickers subjected Afghan boys to bacha bazi in Germany, Hungary, Macedonia, and Serbia.’¹⁵⁰

7.9.3 According to the same report, ‘The Iranian government and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps continue to force and coerce Afghan migrants, including children as young as 12 years old, to fight in Iranian-led and -funded Shia militias deployed to Syria by threatening them with arrest and deportation to Afghanistan.’¹⁵¹

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¹⁴⁶ Republic World, ‘[Taliban take 20 children hostage from Kashnabad, Baghlan...](#)’, 22 August 2021

¹⁴⁷ The Australian, ‘[Taliban take children as hostages, Afghanistan evacuee gives...](#)’, 23 August 2021

¹⁴⁸ USSD, ‘[2020 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’, 25 June 2020

¹⁴⁹ USSD, ‘[2020 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’, 25 June 2020

¹⁵⁰ USSD, ‘[2020 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’, 25 June 2020

¹⁵¹ USSD, ‘[2020 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’, 25 June 2020

8. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

8.1 Conflict-induced displacement

- 8.1.1 On 2 August 2021, Save the Children reported on the nearly 80,000 children displaced since June 2021 as violence swept the country. The report noted: ‘Some 80,000 children in Afghanistan have fled their homes since the start of June as violence has swept parts of the country, Save the Children warned today, and are in dire need of food, shelter and medical care.’
- ‘Many of the children are living with their families under tarpaulin sheets held up with sticks, with nothing but a few rugs to soften the hardened clay and some surviving on energy drinks and bread.’
- ‘According to the UN, around 130,000 people have had to leave their homes and villages in the past two months alone, 60% of them children. In total, more than 613,000 people, including 362,000 children, have been displaced over the past 12 months.’¹⁵²
- 8.1.2 A situation update by the UNHCR as of 1 September 2021, indicated there were an estimated 570,482 conflict-induced IDPs in Afghanistan since 1 January 2021, 60% of whom were children. UNHCR noted that, as the security situation stabilised in some areas, some IDPs had started returning to their places of origin¹⁵³.
- 8.1.3 An audio-visual of displaced families was published by UNICEF on 19 August 2021, with a written description stating ‘More than 400 families who have recently fled instability in the northern provinces in Afghanistan are now sheltering in a high-school in Kabul’s seventh district. Families have arrived from Kunduz, Sar-e Pol and Takhar provinces with the bare essentials and are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.’¹⁵⁴
- 8.1.4 For updates on IDPs, see [Updates | ReliefWeb](#), the IOM’s [Displacement Tracking Matrix](#) and the UNOCHA’s [Internal Displacement due to Conflict](#).

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9. Migration

9.1 Decision to migrate

- 9.1.1 A European Asylum Support Office (EASO) report on Afghanistan Networks, published February 2018, indicated that it is usually the extended family who collectively decide to send a minor son to Europe, with the hope they will find work and support the family financially. The report noted, ‘Family members outside of the country have a moral obligation to help support their relatives back home. Many Afghans are worried about developments in the security situation. They consider it useful to have a close family member in the West

¹⁵² Save the Children, ‘[Afghanistan: Almost 80,000 Children Displaced In Past...](#)’, 2 August 2021

¹⁵³ UNHCR, ‘[Afghanistan Situation External Update – 01 September 2021](#)’, 1 September 2021

¹⁵⁴ UNICEF, ‘[Afghanistan/Kabul IDP shelter](#)’, 19 August 2021

in case the situation dramatically worsens, as that person would then be able to help get the rest of the family out.’¹⁵⁵

- 9.1.2 A study by Samuel Hall on behalf of War Child UK (WCUK) on the return and reintegration needs of minors deported from Iran to the Western region (Herat and Badghis) of Afghanistan, published February 2021, noted:

‘The migration decision, in particular when it comes to sending children, is neither hierarchical nor linear. Instances of parents pushing children to move in spite of the child’s desires were uncommon. More frequently, migration is a family decision, a decision which comes after many hesitations, back and forth discussions, and careful considerations. These decisions are also transnational and multi-sited with family networks in Iran weighing in and facilitating the decision making process by committing to providing support after the border crossing. Most strikingly, children often become the “decision maker” and initiate the migration conversation, convincing the family to proceed with an unaccompanied migration to Iran.

‘Children bringing up the migration idea to their parents or family members occurred around half the time in discussions with research participants, highlighting the child’s agency and ownership of the migration decision. In these cases, children often had to work for several weeks, sometimes months, to convince their families to allow them to leave, and were often inspired by existing friends, cousins, or other members of their social networks who had made or were planning to make the journey. One child FGD [focus group discussion] participant in Herat described his own insistence on migrating in the face of an initial family refusal: “Lots of our relatives are there in Iran but my family did not want to let me go there. I contacted my cousin and he also did not want to let me migrate to Iran, he told me to continue my education. But when I insisted, he then agreed, because he is who I am closest to.” A parent in Badghis highlighted a similar dynamic: “I did not want [my child] to migrate. I wanted him to study but he decided to go to Iran and after a few months I agreed to it because our economic situation was so bad”.’¹⁵⁶

- 9.1.3 The Samuel Hall study further noted that some children migrated without telling their parents or discussing in advance. However, the report added:

‘Even in these cases where the child leaves on his own, the decision and journey remain collective, often with friends or neighbours, and the family is included at a later stage in the journey. In addition, the decision to move, and where to move, is influenced by social networks already present in Iran. The majority of families interviewed highlighted the fact that family networks in Iran were crucial in mitigating concerns related dangers for their children on route, as they know that they have someone to take care of their child and provide guidance into finding work and safe living in Iran.’¹⁵⁷

- 9.1.4 Samuel Hall found that most children in the study not only felt compelled to migrate due to economic circumstances, but also due to conflict or climate

¹⁵⁵ EASO, [‘Afghanistan: Networks’](#), (pages 20-21), February 2018

¹⁵⁶ Samuel Hall, [‘Coming back to Afghanistan...’](#) (page 15), 24 February 2021

¹⁵⁷ Samuel Hall, [‘Coming back to Afghanistan...’](#) (page 15), 24 February 2021

concerns, such as the effects of drought¹⁵⁸. Whilst families recognised the risks and dangers of a child migrating alone and would prefer they be accompanied by a trusted adult, the cost of sending 2 people was unaffordable¹⁵⁹.

See also [Family contacts and networks](#).

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Section 10 updated: 29 September 2021

10. Return and reintegration

10.1 Returnees

10.1.1 UNICEF reported in its Child Notice Afghanistan 2018, which provided the situation for children based on publicly available information as at November 2018:

‘Sometimes the children are too scared to go back to their families fearing of any reprisal specially if they haft left the family without permission and consent.’¹⁶⁰ The same report further highlighted ‘Although all Afghan returnees are, by law, entitled to have access to all rights and privileges, in practice, it is very difficult for them to prove their identities as Afghan and retrieve their identity and legal documentation, in part because they have been out of the country for a long time. The case for child returnees, particularly girls, is worse because they are much less similar – from a cultural point of view – to local population and have less connections and personal relations with authorities.’¹⁶¹ The report also noted ‘Insecurity, disputes, intimidation and extortions, mines and unexploded ordinances (UXOs) are among the key factors affecting the physical safety and well-being of returnees’ children.’¹⁶²

10.1.2 According to a 2018 Save the Children report on experiences of child returnees from Europe:

‘The research demonstrates that existing safeguards of children’s rights are not being fully implemented. First, given the current Afghan security context, return cannot be considered a durable solution for a child. Even in zones deemed safe for internal flight alternatives by returning governments, the security context is worsening...

‘Best interests procedures are inconsistently applied. Children are returning to an environment that does not enable them to fully access rights guaranteed in the UNCRC, including the right to protection, education and healthcare. Based on interviews with European government agencies, perceived legal responsibility by returning countries ends when children arrive in Afghanistan. Benefits provided to voluntary returnees (such as in-kind support) are often given at the family level, not necessarily benefiting children, and their type and scope depend on the returning country.’¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Samuel Hall, [‘Coming back to Afghanistan...’](#) (pages 18-19), 24 February 2021

¹⁵⁹ Samuel Hall, [‘Coming back to Afghanistan...’](#) (pages 19-20), 24 February 2021

¹⁶⁰ UNICEF, [‘Child Notice Afghanistan’](#) (page 101), 2018

¹⁶¹ UNICEF, [‘Child Notice Afghanistan’](#) (page 102), 2018

¹⁶² UNICEF, [‘Child Notice Afghanistan’](#) (page 106), 2018

¹⁶³ Save the Children, [‘From Europe to Afghanistan’](#) (page 11), 2018

10.1.3 UNOCHA noted that:

‘2020 was the largest return year on record for undocumented Afghan migrants with 824,000 as of early December, exceeding the 806,000 who returned from Iran and Pakistan in 2018... A survey carried out by the Mixed Migration Center Asia found that nearly half of the returnees interviewed came home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with most citing job loss as their main reason for return. This resulted in 100 per cent of those returning being in need of humanitarian assistance in the second half of 2020 – up from just 20 per cent in 2019. All returnees are again considered in need for 2021.’¹⁶⁴

10.1.4 In regard to children returning to Afghanistan following migration (to Iran), the February 2021 Samuel Hall study noted that, although families were initially happy at their child’s return, the financial stress that followed was worsened due to the increase in day-to-day living costs as well as paying debts owed to smugglers¹⁶⁵.

See also [Impact of COVID-19](#).

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10.2 Reintegration

10.2.1 According to a 2018 Save the Children report on experiences of child returnees from Europe, ‘While most children received some type of pre-return support (41 of the 53), 13 of the 17 parents interviewed who had also returned from Europe confirmed that they had received cash (34), travel costs, transportation (21) and documentation (eight)... only three received a specific reintegration plan.’¹⁶⁶

10.2.2 The Samuel Hall study indicated that ‘Existing reintegration support processes for deportee children, youth, and their families remain limited. While immediate support is given to deported children who identify themselves at the [Afghan-Iranian] border, this support is short lived and does not aim to address the long term needs of the majority of deportees... Material needs categories include HLP [housing, land and property], food and water, livelihoods, health, and education.’¹⁶⁷

10.2.3 As regard access to health, the study found ‘In cases where parents or children identified that they or their child struggled with mental health and were desiring psychological support, access to this support was non-existent, largely due to the prohibitive cost of accessing this support, where it was existent.’¹⁶⁸

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10.3 Family contacts and networks

10.3.1 According to a 2018 Save the Children report on experiences of child returnees from Europe, ‘The child returnees do not always return to their

¹⁶⁴ UNOCHA, ‘[Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021](#)’ (pages 7 and 13), December 2020

¹⁶⁵ Samuel Hall, ‘[Coming back to Afghanistan...](#)’ (page 17), 24 February 2021

¹⁶⁶ Save the Children, ‘[From Europe to Afghanistan](#)’ (page 33), 2018

¹⁶⁷ Samuel Hall, ‘[Coming back to Afghanistan...](#)’ (page 24), 24 February 2021

¹⁶⁸ Samuel Hall, ‘[Coming back to Afghanistan...](#)’ (page 30), 24 February 2021

families' province of origin, which means they are not returning to a social network or stable living conditions. Several of the children (eight [out of 57¹⁶⁹]) had never been to Afghanistan but were born in Iran or Pakistan....

'The vast majority lack access to psychological healthcare, a widespread problem in Afghanistan, and have limited networks beyond their families. Children do not feel included in the communities to which they return.'¹⁷⁰

10.3.2 The EASO report on Afghanistan Networks, published February 2018, stated that Afghans abroad usually maintain close contact with relatives in Afghanistan, adding that '... very few of those who return from Europe have lost contact with their family. The quality of the contact with the family may still depend on how long the person has been abroad, and if they lived in Afghanistan before they left the region.'¹⁷¹

10.3.3 As cited in the EASO report:

'Analyst Martine van Bijlert of the AAN conducted a series in-depth interviews with 12 families in Afghanistan who all had a family member who had left for Europe in 2015. All the families have contact with the migrant, are well informed as to where the person is and of how the family member's situation has been upon arrival in Europe. The analyst interviewed the families in the home country rather than the actual migrant, because:

"[...] it provides insight into the continued linkages with the home front – a factor that tends to be underplayed in asylum interviews. (Many migrants, in particular minors, are coached to claim they no longer have living relatives or that they have lost all contact)".¹⁷²

10.3.4 The EASO report noted that close contact between Afghan migrants and their families in Afghanistan was generally maintained, not least due to an obligation to support relatives and family in the home country. The report added:

'A local UN employee that Landinfo spoke to said that single men who have been outside of the country's borders for a shorter or longer period of time are most likely to have a family in Afghanistan to return to. The source pointed out that most of those who return from Europe are unaccompanied and thus have a family in Afghanistan that they can return to. The exception may be those who have family networks in the neighbouring areas, in Iran or Pakistan.

'Those who have left Afghanistan together with their family network may lack their closest family members upon return. Refugee Support Network (RSN), a London-based charity that has conducted research on Afghan returnees, followed up on 25 Afghans who had a temporary residence permits in the UK until they turned 18, and were then deported to Afghanistan. Most of them (78 %) stayed in Britain for more than five years. The report, which followed the returnees for a period of 18 months, claims that eight of the youths had not been successful in getting in touch with their extended family. In half of

¹⁶⁹ Save the Children, '[From Europe to Afghanistan](#)' (page 28), 2018

¹⁷⁰ Save the Children, '[From Europe to Afghanistan](#)' (page 10), 2018

¹⁷¹ EASO, '[Afghanistan: Networks](#)', (page 23), February 2018

¹⁷² EASO, '[Afghanistan: Networks](#)', (page 23), February 2018

the cases, the reason was that the person's family had left Afghanistan. All the returnees ran into a series of problems and difficulties upon returning, according to the report.¹⁷³

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10.4 Family tracing

10.4.1 According to sources cited in the EASO report, 'families are generally well informed about each other' and, according to an NGO representative, were 'amazing at networking and finding people'. Yet a representative of an international organisation stated 'However, it does sometimes happen that contact is broken or that family members lose each other or are separated on their way to Europe'. The report also noted:

'The village the family comes from is a natural place to start searching for those who want to trace family members. Local communities possess a lot of information about the families in the area and the elders have a good overview.

'The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) runs a project to track family members and also has an online platform where pictures of missing persons can be posted. ICRC works closely with the Red Crescent. ICRC cannot enter all areas of Afghanistan and that is when the Red Crescent is used.'¹⁷⁴

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¹⁷³ EASO, '[Afghanistan: Networks](#)', (page 23), February 2018

¹⁷⁴ EASO, '[Afghanistan: Networks](#)', (page 26), February 2018

Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Taliban and rule of law
- Humanitarian situation for children
- Education
 - Access to
 - Attacks against
- Unaccompanied / separated children
- Displacement
- Violence against children
 - Casualties in the conflict
 - Marriage
 - Labour
 - Abuse
 - Recruitment
 - Trafficking

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

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The information on this page has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: End of section

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and guidance following Taliban takeover in August 2021

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