



INFORMATION

on the socio-economic situation in Afghanistan

requested by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum

ELAK 2021-O. 218.973

12 April 2022

1. Is IOM operating in Afghanistan at the moment?

Yes, IOM is operating in Afghanistan at present.

1.1. If yes: In what regard?

IOM is operating in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. IOM's activities focus predominantly on lifesaving humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable populations, such as the provision of non-food-items (NFIs), cash assistance and health and protection services. IOM also provides quick impact community infrastructure projects and emergency livelihoods to prevent the collapse of communities most affected by the ongoing socio-economic crisis. For a more detailed overview on the current operations, please refer to the latest [Afghanistan situation report](#)¹.

1.2. What are the future plans of IOM work in Afghanistan?

In the wake of the August 2021 Taliban takeover, Afghanistan is currently faced with a humanitarian catastrophe, a collapsing economy, cash shortage, disruption in supply routes, human rights violations, hunger, and poverty. IOM Afghanistan is expanding its operation exponentially to respond to this multitude of challenges. IOM Afghanistan has secured funding from the Delegation of the European Union to Afghanistan (EUD), the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan and other donors to support affected populations through area-based, multi-sectoral approaches targeted at vulnerable populations with providing life-saving humanitarian support and trying to enhance the resilience of the affected communities.

IOM operates in several critical sectors in Afghanistan and is expanding its scope of operations given the recent change in context. IOM has been a key provider of Emergency Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI), Migration Health (both at border crossing points and internally through Mobile Health Teams), Protection, Cross Border Return and Reintegration, Stabilization, Reintegration and Resiliency, and is expanding programmatically to include Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) activities. IOM is working to strategically align with other actors in the region (both local and international) to ensure complementarity of operations and activities, while aligning with the country's national strategic frameworks of the Afghan Crisis Response Plan 2020-2022 and the Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2022. IOM will continue to increase its scope of work to meet the rising demand for services.

1.3. What is the status of the IOM programs "Restart III" and "RADA"?

RESTART III:

Due to the Taliban takeover in August 2021 and the resulting security concerns, IOM issued a full suspension of all Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) movements to Afghanistan in effect since 16 August 2021. Hence no support for voluntary return within the project RESTART III has

¹ IOM, Afghanistan Situation Report (22–28 November 2021).
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IOM%20Afghanistan%20Situation%20Report%20%2314%20-%2022-28%20November%202021.pdf> (last accessed 15 March 2022).



been provided since then. Project participants who returned to Afghanistan before 16 August 2021 were supported with counselling and cash for in-kind assistance up to the outstanding eligible amount.

RADA:

The Reintegration and Development Assistance in Afghanistan (RADA) was launched in 2017. Since then, IOM established over 100 community development projects, including socio-economic infrastructure such as irrigation canals, marketplaces, schools and over 150 enterprises (start-ups and scale-ups) and provided technical and vocational education and apprenticeship programs to Afghan returnees.

Further, IOM supported the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) and its departments at provincial level, as well as the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) with technical assistance to strengthen their capacity in the development of return and reintegration policies. IOM also established Reintegration Information Centres (RICs) in several high-return provinces and supported the MoRR and the DoRR in running them.

Further, IOM provided persons who returned to Afghanistan under the Joint Way Forward framework and additional agreements on returns from other countries, with immediate reception assistance at the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, including medical screening, basic treatment, and counselling as well as cash assistance up to an amount of approximately EUR 140 upon arrival.

Revised activities in RADA:

IOM in Afghanistan has been implementing the EU funded Reintegration, Development and Assistance in Afghanistan (RADA) programme since 2017. The RADA project has been responsive to the changing development needs since 15 August 2021, which in practical terms means that structural development support such as working with the government and local authorities has been halted. IOM Afghanistan in coordination with the donor halted all activities containing any contribution to the de facto authorities which could be considered an infringement of sanctions. Technical assistance to the DoRR and the MoRR and its departments at the provincial level have stopped.

Prior to August 2021, RADA implemented economic and community infrastructure (e.g., irrigation channels, flood protection walls, marketplaces). Recently, the project has been urged to shift focus to addressing basic needs (e.g., access to basic services such as WASH and health facilities) to respond to emerging humanitarian needs resulting from the changing context.

Regarding economic development, as opposed to providing support to new businesses through provision of in-kind grants and technical and vocational education and training in first 5 years of the project, RADA will mainly focus on retaining existing jobs through on-the-job training and supporting existing businesses, during the 6th year of the implementation, ensuring that any gains made are not lost.

Moreover, IOM was compelled to halt activities regarding immediate reception assistance as a result of the halting of flights to Afghanistan.

2. Is it possible for Afghan citizens to acquire a Tazkira and/or a passport in Afghanistan at the moment?

The issuance of passports and national ID-cards was put on hold for two months following the August 2021 change of administration. The spokesperson of Taliban government, Zabihullah Mojaheed, announced on 28 September 2021 that the government would resume issuing passport and national ID-cards, but the issuance of passports remained mostly halted. At province level, the de- facto authorities have stopped the issuance of new passports in Bamian, Daikondi and Kandahar as well. According to news reports, the de- facto authorities were supposed to re-open the passport application system on 6 April 2022. However, according to the website of the Passport Department of the Ministry of Interior (<https://passport.moi.gov.af>), the issuance of new passports is on hold until further notice. According to

news reports as of 9 April 2022, passport issuance is supposed to be reintroduced after the month of Ramadan².

Passports may be issued to individuals who have already registered their identities prior to the change of the government in August 2021 and to individuals in need of medical treatment in other countries³. Previously, obtaining a new passport took only between three and five workdays, however, under the current administration, the process can take up to one and half month. The increasing number of applicants and the inability of the government in utilizing the online application system have led to many interruptions in processing the applications.

For obtaining national ID-cards, the National Statistics and Information Authorities (NSIA) are responsible. The NSIA offices resumed their activities two months after the collapse of the previous government. The NSIA has 104 centres across Afghanistan, including 25 centres in Kabul province.⁴

2.1. Are there any changes regarding the requirements to obtain such documents since the Taliban takeover?

The Ministry of Interior re-opened passport department offices in 15 of the 34 provinces and the Ministry of the Interior requires applicants to obtain a passport in their province of origin⁵. However, as described above, functioning of these departments remains unclear.

2.2. Does the newly issued passport and Tazkira look the same as before the Taliban takeover or were there any changes made so far? (Are changes planned in the future?)

Based on information provided by an employee of the Central Passport Department, as of January 2022, no changes have been made to the layout of passport. The passport is issued with the same logo, design, and stamp of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Only the fee has increased by Afghan Afghani (AFN) 500 (EUR 5.08)⁶.

Likewise, there haven't been any changes in the design, text, or logo of the National ID/Tazkira. However, the online registration system is currently operational only in Kabul.

2.3. Is it possible to acquire a Tazkira and/or passport from outside of Afghanistan? If yes, how does it currently work? What is the role of the Afghan embassies/consulates at the moment? Are they providing services to Afghans abroad?

Yes, a number of embassies and consulates have been given permission to issue passports or Tazkiras. Recently, the Minister of Foreign Affairs announced that the government has sent 5000 passports to

² Tolonews.com (9 April 2022). Passport Processing Resumes in Kabul [Press release]. <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-177494> (last accessed 11 April 2022).

³ Hindustantimes.com (5 October 2021). Afghanistan to resume issuance of passports, ID cards after months of delay [Press release]. www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/afghanistan-to-resume-issuance-of-passports-id-cards-after-months-of-delay-101633428274954.html (last accessed 15 March 2022).

Ranjan, R. (26 September 2021). Afghanistan passports and national identity cards to be changed by Taliban: Reports [Press release]. www.republicworld.com/world-news/rest-of-the-world-news/afghanistan-passports-and-national-identity-cards-to-be-changed-by-taliban-reports.html (last accessed 15 March 2022).

Khaama Press (25 September 2021). Current National IDs, passports valid, will change in future: Taliban [Press release]. www.khaama.com/current-national-ids-passports-valid-will-change-in-future-taliban-57567547/ (last accessed 15 March 2022).

⁴ Asian News International (12 October 2021). National Identity Card centres to reopen in Afghanistan [Press release]. www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/national-identity-card-centres-to-reopen-in-afghanistan20211012091845/ (last accessed 15 March 2022).

⁵ Information provided through a recent interview with an employee of the Central Passport Department.

⁶ All exchange rates in this document have been calculated using OANDA Currency Converter (rate as of 09 March 2022): www.oanda.com/lang/de/currency/converter.

the United Arab Emirates.⁷ There are also reports⁸ that the Afghan Embassy in Iran and the Afghan Embassy in Pakistan are able to extend existing passports until 2025 for a fee of USD 85 (EUR 78.05) for Iran and USD 150 (EUR 137.74) for Pakistan. According to information provided by IOM Tehran, the issuance of a Tazkira for Afghans residing in Iran is a lengthy and uncertain process. Applicants sometimes have to wait for two months or more for the first appointment with the Afghan embassy in Iran to file an application for the issuance of a Tazkira. As the Tazkira is issued in Afghanistan, applicants need to introduce a person in Afghanistan to follow up their request on behalf of them and to conduct the necessary paperwork in Afghanistan. Absence of a trustworthy person in Afghanistan to fulfil the paperwork is one of the challenges that applicants face who have lived abroad for years and who have lost their family ties in Afghanistan. The process is further complicated for undocumented Afghan migrants having no proof of identity. Having a Tazkira is a precondition for the issuance of a passport.

3. What is the current status of the banking system in Afghanistan?

Ten days after the Taliban takeover, banks opened to the public. However, the Central Bank of Afghanistan (DAB) advised banks to limit their services due to the cash shortage in the country. The restrictions are as follows:

- **Individual account holders:** Weekly limit for withdrawal of USD 400 (EUR 367.31) per week per account. Currently, only the Afghanistan International Bank (AIB) in Kabul can pay out USD 400 or AFN 30,000 (EUR 367.31) per customer per week. In provinces, some banks pay only an equivalent of USD 100–200 (EUR 91.83–183.66) per week depending on the availability of funds. Currently paying daily expenses in USD is only possible in larger shops, most daily purchases are made in the local currency.
- **Corporate clients:** Can process domestic transfers to other banks; withdrawals are limited to up to 5 per cent of their balance or USD 25,000 per month (EUR 22,957), whichever is lower. However, this limit does not apply to new cash deposits, these can be withdrawn fully. With regards to international transfers, the DAB directed banks resumed processing of outgoing international transfers to corporate customers on 28 December 2021, subject to pre-approval by DAB and to the below-summarized restrictions.

International outgoing transfers are limited to purchase of below items (to be evidenced by applicable documents):

- Food
- Medicine
- Fuel (including gas)
- Hygiene items
- Electricity
- Raw material and spare parts for manufacturing
- Transportation and communication
- System maintenance
- Other payments deemed necessary by the DAB

Transfers are limited up to 25 per cent of the total account balance of each vendor. If a 25 per cent limit of balances is reached, no further withdrawals are allowed. However, the ceiling of 25 per cent does not apply to fresh deposits in cash.

⁷ Information retrieved from the Facebook page of the Central Passport Department of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, link currently not available.

⁸ Information received by Afghan nationals residing in Iran and Pakistan, who have been successful in extending their passports.

3.1. Are the banks open to the public?

Yes, banks are generally open to the public.

3.2. Can people withdraw money?

Yes, but the above listed limitations apply.

3.3. Which banking services are currently provided?

Cash withdrawal and customer services, such as account opening and closing, are currently active. Deposit facilities, such as for electricity bills deposits, are open as well. Online banking systems are currently not working.

3.4. How is it possible to transfer money to Afghanistan at the moment?

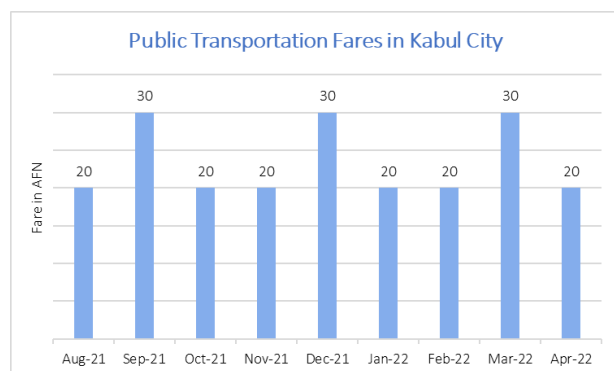
Currently, many residents use the “Hawala system”: making cash payments to a Money Service Provider (MSP) in one country and receiving the same amount, deducted by a commission charge through an MSP in Afghanistan or vice versa. Besides, the Western Union and SWIFT Money Transfer systems are active in Afghanistan.⁹

4. How is the status of the public transport?

4.1. Did anything change in regard to public transport/bus services since the Taliban takeover (prices, frequency, availability)?

Public transport and bus services are available 24 hours. Due to the ongoing economic crisis and resulting increase in poverty, the demand for transportation between cities and within cities has decreased drastically.

There had been fluctuations in public transport prices throughout 2021 – 2022, which can be retrieved from this chart, indicating the prices (in AFN) for public transport of 5–10 km distance with a small van in Kabul city between August 2021 and April 2022:



4.2. What airports are currently operating in Afghanistan with international flights?

Kabul, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif and Kandahar airports are currently operating international flights to and from Iran, Qatar, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

⁹ Afghanistan International Bank (28 December 2021). AIB -Afghanistan International Bank [Position statement]. www.aib.af/ (last accessed 15 March 2022).

4.3. What airports are currently operating in Afghanistan with national flights?

Jalalabad, Khost, Lashkargah, Farah, Kunduz, Faiz Abad, Kandahar and Balkh airports are currently operating national flights only.

4.4. Are there reports about cars/buses/taxis stopped on the roads by Taliban or others at the moment?

The Taliban continues to stop and search vehicles. On 26 December 2021, the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice issued a directive which limits the ability of women to travel further than 72 kilometres, unless they are accompanied by a close male relative. The decree also advised taxi drivers to offer rides only to women wearing an Islamic hijab or a headscarf.

5. COVID-19

5.1. What is the current situation in hospitals in Afghanistan regarding COVID-19?

Afghan-Japan Hospital in Kabul was previously the specialized centre for COVID-19. The centre had stopped its work due to staff strikes for not receiving salaries, and only recently resumed its activities in February 2022.¹⁰ There are no up-to-date statistics and reliable estimates regarding the current COVID-19 situation in Afghanistan.

5.2. Are there any restrictions in place at the moment?

There are no COVID-19 restrictions currently in place.

6. Medical Care and NGOs

6.1. What is the current situation in hospitals in Afghanistan? (resources/money to pay employees, medication, medical equipment)

The healthcare system in Afghanistan has been badly affected following the Taliban takeover in August 2021. The World Bank programme which provided funding for essential healthcare facilities and paid for the salaries of healthcare workers through the Sehatmandi Project for Afghanistan¹¹ under the previous government, halted its activities¹². Since November 2021, UNICEF and the WHO secured access to USD 100 million funds to support primary and secondary healthcare facilities across 34 provinces¹³. However, there are still many gaps to address.

Afghanistan is currently facing numerous outbreaks including acute watery diarrhoea, measles, dengue fever, COVID-19, and malaria, which have increased the burden on the already fragile healthcare system. Despite all efforts, more than 1,200 healthcare facilities and over 11,000 health workers are not yet covered through the support provided by the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) or the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). This includes the majority of hospitals designated for COVID-19 care. Public hospitals have shortages of resources, employees' salaries are not paid, medication and medical equipment will run out soon¹⁴.

¹⁰ Tolo News (8 November 2021). Afghan-Japan Hospital Faces Lack of Equipment, Medicine [Press release]. <https://tolonews.com/health-175268> (last accessed 15 March 2022).

¹¹ World Bank Group. Afghanistan Sehatmandi Project. <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P160615>

¹² NPR (18 September 2021). Afghan Health Minister: Health Care Is 'On The Verge Of Collapse' [Press release]. www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2021/09/18/1038068777/afghan-health-minister-health-care-is-on-the-verge-of-collapse-but-im-optimistic (last accessed 15 March 2022).

¹³ World Health Organization, Afghanistan Emergency Situation Report (15 January 2022). <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-emergency-situation-report-issue-10-15-january-2022> (last accessed 15 March 2022).

¹⁴ Ibid.

6.2. Are there any hospitals/NGOs operating at the moment, that take care of people with physical and psychological disabilities?

According to IOM Afghanistan, hospitals and NGOs are active in providing services to people affected by physical and psychological disabilities. Currently the International Psychosocial Organization is active in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. In addition, Action contre la Faim (ACF) and INTERSOS are active in providing psychosocial services. The ICRC and Handicap International provide services to people with disabilities.

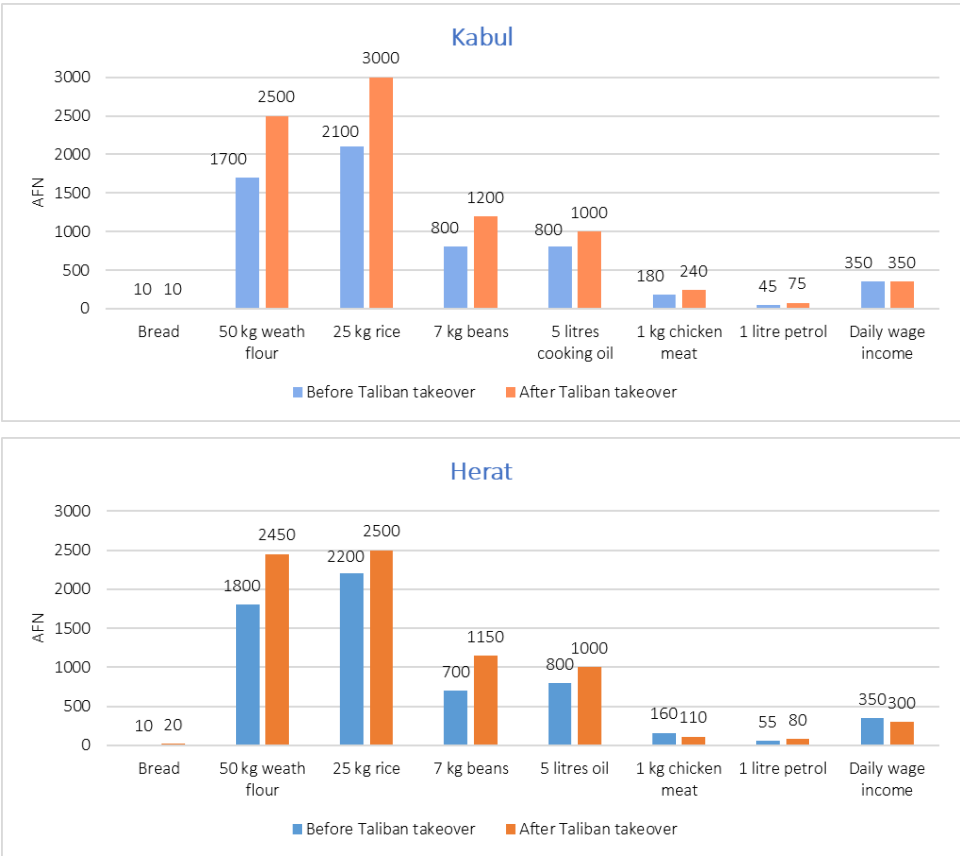
7. Work and living conditions

7.1. What are the current average rents in the cities of Kabul/Herat/Mazar?

In Kabul, the average monthly rent for a three-bedroom apartment is USD 120–150 (EUR 110.19–137.74), which was USD 250–300 (EUR 229.57–275.48) in the past. The monthly rent for a simple house with three bedrooms located in a suburban area is around USD 100 (EUR 91.83). In Mazar-i-Sharif and Herat, this rate is USD 150 (EUR 137.74) per month for a three-bedroom apartment, and for a location far from the city centre it is USD 80 (EUR 73.46) per month.¹⁵

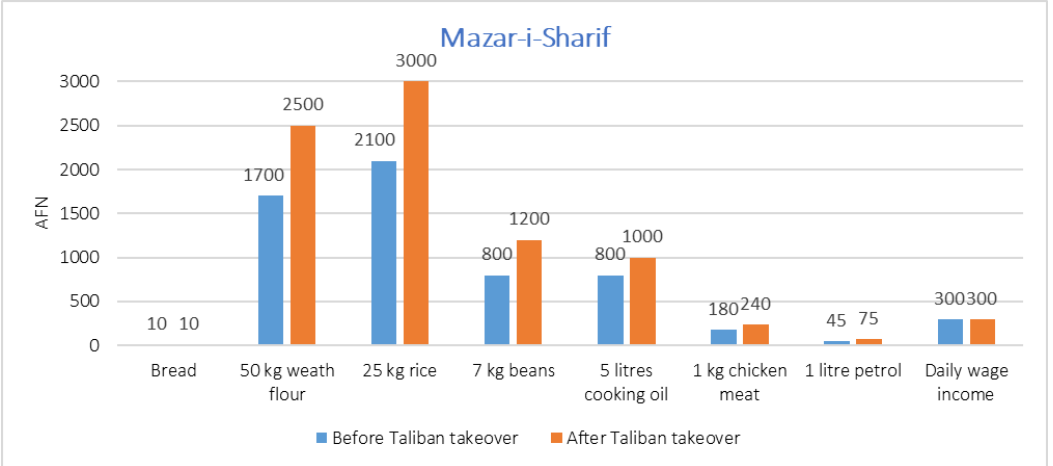
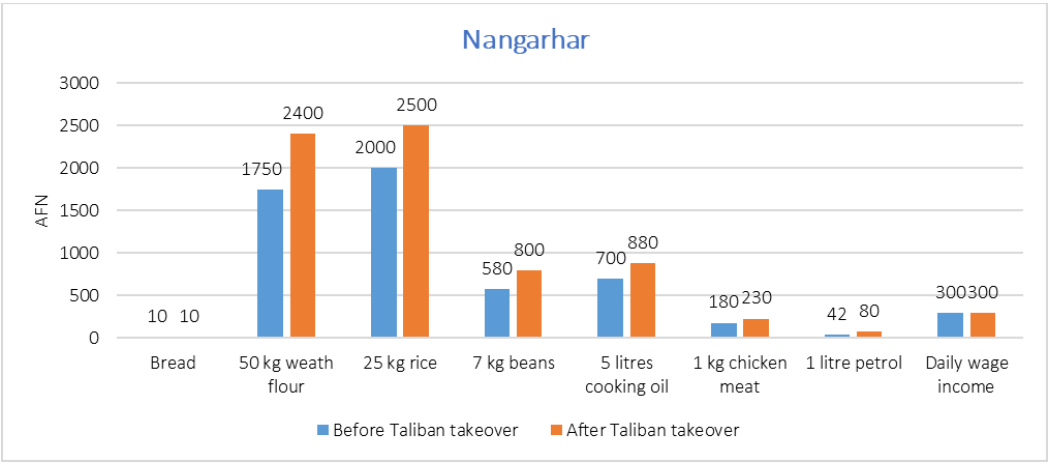
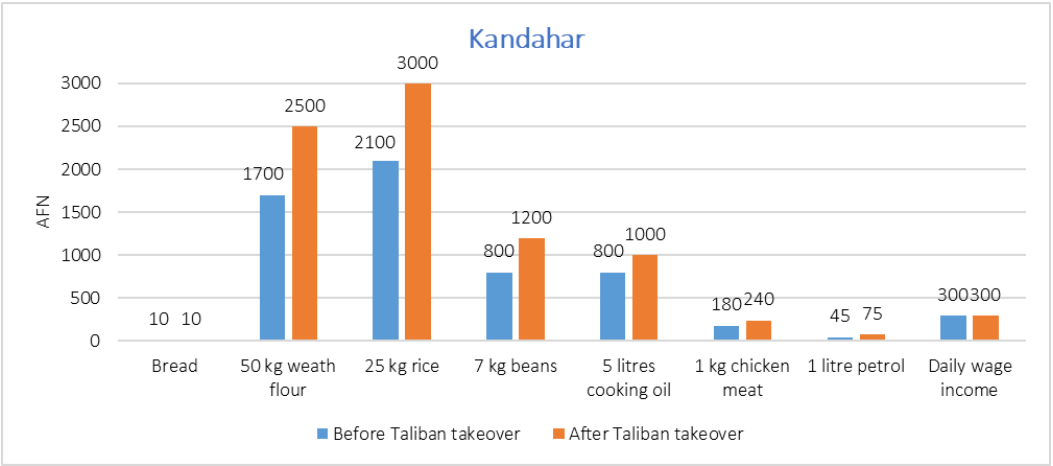
7.2. Have food prices changed since the Taliban takeover? If possible, could you give examples of food prices in the cities of Kabul/Herat/Mazar at the moment?

Please find below an overview table on average food prices, as well as prices for petrol and daily wagers’ income¹⁶.



¹⁵ The information was collected through interviews with 5 real estate agents and 7 house owners in Herat, Kabul, Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif between 23–25 December 2021.

¹⁶ The information was collected through interviews with vendors from Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar and Mazar-i-Sharif between 23–25 December 2021.



8. What is the current situation on the labor market? What changes have occurred since the Taliban takeover?

The COVID-19 pandemic and the Taliban takeover in August 2021 have both contributed to a massive increase in the unemployment rates across the country. According to the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, in October 2021 it was stated that in Herat province alone 99 per cent of respondents lost employment and 97 per cent reported to have lost income¹⁷. Most of the government-affiliated employees as well as companies sub-contracted by the government or international organizations are out of work. Many companies and NGOs have stopped working or reduced their activities to a minimum. The cash shortage and the disruption in supply chains combined with loss of investments and customers have affected the private sector enormously, forcing businesses to move to neighbouring countries, close their doors or let go of their employees to reduce costs.

9. What are the current average earnings of a daily wage earner?

A daily worker earns up to AFN 350 (EUR 3.55) per day. However, daily work can mostly be found for only two days a week. Finding daily work has become challenging as many who had previously worked with companies, NGOs, or the government currently look for daily labour to compensate for the lost income.

10. Are hotels and tea houses currently open?

Yes, however the demand for hotels has decreased because of a lack of visitors.

11. Are telecommunication and internet services operating in all Afghanistan at the moment? Are there any outages in areas which could have been reached via phone or internet before the Taliban takeover?

Yes, internet and telecommunication services are available in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, and the services are provided by different companies. In some remote areas, the quality of the internet is poor. In general, the quality of internet service is better in cities than in rural areas. The World Bank estimates that only 13.5 per cent of Afghans currently have access to the internet¹⁸.

Disclaimer

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

¹⁷ IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix: Emergency Event Tracking Herat Province (12 October–15 November 2021). <https://displacement.iom.int/reports/afghanistan-emergency-event-tracking-herat-province-12-october-15-november-2021> (last accessed 15 March 2022).

¹⁸ Deutsche Welle (30 August 2021). Will the Taliban restrict internet access in Afghanistan? [Press release]. www.dw.com/en/will-the-taliban-restrict-internet-access-in-afghanistan/a-59029364 (last accessed 15 March 2022).