



INFORMATION

on the socio-economic situation in Afghanistan

requested by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum

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Background information:

Methodology:

To respond IOM Austria's inquiry for a Country Information Update, the IOM Afghanistan Stabilization, Reintegration and Resilience team collected information from several internal and external sources. The first part of this document is developed based on interviews with different IOM programmes in three provinces of Afghanistan (Balkh, Herat, and Kabul) between mid-September and mid-October 2022. The second part is prepared based on interviews with the IOM Afghanistan Migration Health Unit (MHU) and 15 entrepreneurs, including seven women entrepreneurs in Balkh, Herat, and Kabul provinces, conducted between mid-September and mid-October 2022. These business owners operate in different sectors such as construction, garment, food, and agricultural businesses. The last part of this inquiry is developed through interviews with a Shiite Muslim religious center and former governments lawyers and prosecutors, conducted between mid-September and mid-October 2022. In addition to the above sources, the team cited other resources such as newspapers, annual report on Afghanistan's socio-economic situation and other relevant articles. In collecting this information, attention was given to fact-checking the shared information and presenting different point of views.

1. Is IOM operating in Afghanistan at the moment?

Yes, IOM is operating in Afghanistan at present, and has been operating continuously in the country since 1992. IOM implements a range of humanitarian assistance, community stabilization and to a lesser extent migration management initiatives in Afghanistan, in cooperation with governmental and humanitarian partners as well as local communities.

a. If yes, in what regard?

IOM is operating in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. Currently, operations focus predominately 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. Beyond, IOM Afghanistan provides quick impact community infrastructure projects and emergency livelihoods to prevent the collapse of affected communities due to the ongoing socio-economic crisis.

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

Crisis situation in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is facing a multi-layered crisis of humanitarian, economic, food and health crises and hinges on systemic collapse. As described in the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly in



September 2022 regarding the situation in Afghanistan, the humanitarian needs continue to rise and affect at least 24.4 million people or nearly 60 per cent of the estimated population.

Following the turbulent transfer of power in August 2021, there has been a serious reduction in access to basic services due to poor governance, and increasing limits on human rights, particularly discrimination towards women and girls, ethnic and religious minorities and LGBTIQ+ community groups. Humanitarian and transitional needs are increasing in a context of extreme political instability and fuelling spiralling humanitarian needs and costs into 2023.

Unprecedented natural hazards, such as earthquakes, climate change, drought and extreme weather events have further amplified the economic crisis and humanitarian emergencies in the country. Particularly Afghans in rural areas, where most residents are unskilled farmers tied to their land, face severe humanitarian crisis.

The collapse of the former government and Afghanistan's isolation from the international financial system since 15 August 2021, global inflation, as well as economic disruption in the neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan, are further amplifying rates of poverty in a collapsing economy which has entered free-fall.

The spread of the COVID-19 virus, a lack of access to safe drinking water, loss of livelihoods due to droughts, as well as the possible outbreak of waterborne diseases, pose a significant threat to the already fragile and underdeveloped health system.

The crisis in the country is further amplified by major cross-border and internal migration dynamics and displacement. The numbers of Afghans who returned to Afghanistan without valid documents or registration in 2022 are almost double those seen pre-pandemic, the majority of whom have been deported from Iran. Between 1 January and 31 August 2022, a total of 615,124 undocumented returnees crossed into Afghanistan (560,709 from Iran and 54,415 from Pakistan). Of the 615,124 undocumented returnees, 334,007 (60%) were deported from Iran. The proportion of deportations has increased since the Taliban takeover. Undocumented immigrants to Iran report gunshot wounds and car accidents caused by smugglers evading border forces, destruction of identity documents and personal property, arbitrary detention, physical torture, forced labour, discrimination, exploitation, and deliberate family separation. Returnees' options are often limited, and their resources depleted.

Child labour is among the negative coping mechanisms utilized by families living in poverty and is one of the top three coping mechanisms employed to deal with the effects of endemic poverty. This applies particularly to boys who are sent to work either within Afghanistan or to neighbouring countries in order to send remittances back home. According to data previously collected by IOM Afghanistan, those migrating outside of the country are predominantly adolescent boys and men who use irregular routes and thus expose themselves to risks of human trafficking, death, or serious injury.

IOM activities in Afghanistan

IOM operates in several critical sectors in Afghanistan and is expanding its scope of operations, given the above outlined situation. IOM has been a key provider of Emergency Shelter and Non-Food Items (ES/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 strategically with other actors in the region (both local and international) to ensure complementarity of operations and activities, while aligning with the country's strategic frameworks (the Afghan Crisis Response Plan 2020–2022 and the



Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2022). IOM will continue to expand its scope of work to meet the increasing demand for services.

IOM operates in coordination with all UN-agencies in Afghanistan through the humanitarian coordination set-up of the cluster system as well as within the Transitional Engagement Framework for 2022. The Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF) is the overarching strategic planning document for the UN system's assistance in Afghanistan. It provides strategic direction and coherence; ensures UN coordination, collaboration, and complementarity of action; and provides a basis for joint risk-sharing and accountability. Its priorities are to: provide life-saving assistance; sustain essential services; and preserve social investments and community-level systems essential to meeting basic human needs. It will do so under common guiding principles that reflect the core values of the UN.

At the global level, IOM is a member of the Steering Group on Solutions to Internal Displacement, which supports the implementation of the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement Action. In Afghanistan, IOM, along with UNDP and UNHCR and other agencies, is member of the core group that supports the UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator on implementing this strategy in the upcoming two years at the country level. The UN is currently in the process of developing the Strategic Framework for solutions to Internal Displacement in Afghanistan. The strategic framework is rooted in practical and actionable measures building on the available space across the entire humanitarian, development, and peace nexus (HDPN). As a member of the core group, and one of the largest UN-agencies supporting internally displaced persons (IDPs) and vulnerable populations in Afghanistan, IOM will work closely along other UN-agencies and NGOs to contribute to finding durable solutions for IDPs who opt for voluntary return in places of origin, local integration or resettlement elsewhere in the country.

c. **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, which are in effect since 15 August 2021. Hence, no support for voluntary return within the project RESTART III has been provided since then. Project participants who returned to Afghanistan before 15 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), which was launched in 2017, aimed to contribute to the progressive achievement of SDG 10.7, "to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed policies".

The project's main outputs were as following:

Output 1: Returnees and communities in areas of high return in Afghanistan share an enabling environment for sustainable reintegration in which returnees reach a level of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their community, and psychosocial well-being that enable them to with (re-) migration drivers.

Under this output, IOM established over 100 community development projects, including socio-economic infrastructure such as irrigation canals, marketplaces, and schools, over 150 enterprises (start-ups and scale -ups) and provided technical and vocational education and apprenticeship programs to Afghan returnees. Project activities under Output 1 are ongoing and the project is set to be completed by 14 March 2023.

Output 2: The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), and its departments at the provincial level, has strengthened capacities to plan, coordinate and facilitate the provision of comprehensive reintegration assistance.

Within this output, IOM supported the Afghanistan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations (MoRR) and the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) with technical assistance to strengthen their capacity in the development of return and reintegration policies. Accordingly, IOM established Reintegration Information Centers (RIGs) in several high return provinces and supported the MoRR and DoRR in running them. This project activity was suspended with takeover by the Taliban regime, and their establishment of de facto authorities (DfA).

Output 3: Persons who are returned to Afghanistan under the Joint Way Forward framework and additional agreements on returns from other countries, are provided with immediate reception assistance at the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan.

The provision of immediate reception assistance at the Kabul airport is currently suspended.

d. Is IOM in contact with former assisted returnees in Afghanistan?

IOM has provided former returnees from European countries with additional in-kind support. IOM Afghanistan's Return, Reintegration and Resettlement (RRR) staff regularly and actively contacts former voluntary returnees in Afghanistan. According to IOM Afghanistan's current RRR focal point, however, most of the returnees, whom IOM Afghanistan had supported, cannot be reached via phone, and their whereabouts are unclear.

I. If yes: How did their businesses far since the Taliban takeover?

Most of the returnees' businesses have been negatively affected by the Taliban takeover, the related political changes and economic turndown. This is mainly due to negative impacts on financial institutions (private banks and the Afghan Central Bank), the disruption of supply chains, export issues, brain drain, and low demand for some of products due to a decrease in purchasing power. Many private banks and financial institutions have been shut down.

Generally, whether a business can currently be sustained, depends on various factors, including the following:

- The products, which the businesses sell, correspond to the most basic needs, and are regularly on demand.
- Raw materials are available at the local market.
Please note that Taliban DfA have established a ban on the import of several materials and products, such as processed food or certain machines, in order to encourage the purchase of domestic products. This ban also includes raw materials, needed by some businesses to sustain their operations.
- The business operators possess the required skills to produce quality products that are competitive on the market.
- Access to financial resources.

COVID-19

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

The below table showcases the COVID-19 cases in Afghanistan reported by the World Health Organization (WHO) in November 2022¹. Kindly note that this table only includes formally recognized COVID-19 cases and that the data on COVID-19 in Afghanistan is scarce. Afghanistan’s health system currently is in poor condition and is affected by various health crises.

# Of Week	# Of Cases	Weekly increase	Deaths
Week 1	813	29	3
Week 2	581	– 323	2
Week 3	584	3	2

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

COVID-19 hospitals in Afghanistan are advised to follow measures and restrictions based on the advice from the WHO and the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and are supported financially by the WHO and UNICEF². The use of PPE, handwashing, physical distancing, and separate wards for COVID-19 patients are among the introduced measures.

Medical Care and NGOs

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

Public hospitals, which are under direct supervision of the Afghan government, have experienced a significant decrease in quality of care as well as number of staff since the regime change. The current DfA are not able to pay the staff’s salaries, which is why many staff have left.

The southern, eastern, and western regions of Afghanistan still have sufficient medical care, as hospitals in these regions are supported by IOM (southern and western regions) and the Health Net Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) (eastern regions). The Central and Northern provinces lack budget and have insufficient services. The biggest shortages in medical care are currently PPE, oxygen, and other related medical services.

Afghanistan currently faces the following medical emergencies (outbreaks of infectious diseases):

- Measles
- Acute watery diarrhoea
- Cholera
- Malaria
- Polio
- Dengue fever

¹ For further reference kindly see the World Health Organization Afghanistan COVID-19 Dashboard available at <https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/af> (accessed 11 January 2023).

² For further reference kindly see the World Health Organization Global Health Emergency Appeal, 2022 (Chapter: Afghanistan) available at https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/emergency-preparedness/jmo_who_ghea-2022_afghanistan.pdf?sfvrsn=35c37990_3&download=true#:~:text=WHO%27s%20objective%20is%20to%20deliver,address%20the%20country%27s%20health%20needs (accessed 11 January 2023).



Malnutrition cases are increasing in children under five and the mortality rates of pregnant and lactating women is increasing due to the worsening economic situation³.

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

Hospitals and NGOs which take care of people with physical and psychological disabilities are currently only operating to a limited extent. Although mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is available, the quality of services is rather low. Generally, there is a lack of awareness regarding mental health conditions and their treatment in Afghanistan and affected individuals and families face severe stigma⁴. Mental health hospitals exist at the regional level, and at provincial level, there are specific wards for mental health issues in each provincial hospital.

Apart from IOM, the following NGOs provide MHPSS services: Health Net TPO, International Medical Corps (IMC), Action Against Hunger (AAH), International Psychosocial Organisation (IPSO) and the Afghan Family Guidance Association (AFGA).

Working and living conditions

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

Province	City Apartment	House (3 rooms maximum)
Kabul	US-Dollar (USD) 200 (EUR 186.84) ⁵	USD 105–115 (EUR 98.09–107.43)
Mazar-e-Sharif	USD 120–150 (EUR 112.10–140.13)	USD 69–92 (EUR 64.45–85.95)
Herat	USD 120 – 150 (EUR 112.10–140.13)	USD 69–92 (EUR 64.45–85.95)

Housing is the one of the major per capita expenses in Afghanistan. IOM Afghanistan’s survey with 15 enterprises and five IOM staff members indicates that an Afghan family living in an urban area spends on average 28 per cent of its monthly income on housing. Houses often lack some basic facilities such as an indoor water pipeline, a bath with warm water as well as cooling and heating systems. City apartments are generally better equipped and thus more costly.

³ Save the Children International (2022) NEW ANALYSIS: The number of people facing extreme hunger is up more than 50% in 3 years with Afghanistan worst hit. Save the Children International. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/new-analysis-number-people-facing-extreme-hunger-more-50-3-years-afghanistan-worst-hit> (Accessed: 11 January 2023).

⁴ Oriya, S. and Alekozai, T. (2022) “The impact of persons with mental health problems on family members and their coping strategies in Afghanistan,” Intervention, 20(1), p. 28. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4103/intv.intv_13_21. (Accessed: 11 January 2023).

⁵ All exchange rates in this document have been calculated using OANDA Currency Converter (rate as of 10 January 2023): www.oanda.com/lang/de/currency/converter.

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? How much is at the moment:

1. 1 piece of bread (Naan)
2. 50 kg of flour
3. 25 kg of rice
4. 7 kg of beans
5. 5 liters cooking oil
6. 1kg of chicken
7. 1 liter of fuel (petrol)

Yes, food prices have increased since the Takeover of the Taliban. Afghanistan’s economy is heavily dependent to the regular physical shipment of United States Dollar (USD); thus, any change in the exchange rate of USD to Afghan Afghani (AFN) leads to fluctuation of the price of food items. In addition, the war in Ukraine and its impact on global food security has put additional pressure on the already fragile food basket in Afghanistan. Moreover, heavy floods in Pakistan and Afghanistan in 2022, the Taliban regime’s high taxation on imported commodities and consumer goods, as well as the increase of fuel prices have added to the price of food items.

Items	Unit	Kabul	Mazar-e-Sharif	Herat	Remark
Bread	1 piece	AFN 10 (EUR 0.10)	AFN 10 (EUR 0.10)	AFN 10 (EUR 0.10)	Each piece of bread is 120 gram in all provinces.
Flour	50 kg	AFN 2400 (EUR 26.73)	AFN 2300 (EUR 25.62)	AFN 2250 (EUR 25.06)	
Rice	25 kg	AFN 3200 (EUR 35.64)	AFN 3000 (EUR 33.42)	AFN 2700–3000 (EUR 30.08–33.42)	
Beans	7 kg	AFN 780 (EUR 8.69)	AFN 750 (EUR 8.35)	AFN 750 (EUR 8.35)	
Cooking oil	5 liters	AFN 720 (EUR 8.02)	AFN 680 (EUR 7.57)	AFN 700 (EUR 7.80)	
Chicken	1 kg	AFN 230 (EUR 2.56)	AFN 200 (EUR 2.23)	AFN 150 (EUR 1.67)	
Fuel	1 liter	AFN 81 (EUR 0.90)	AFN 80 (EUR 0.89)	AFN 75 (EUR 0.84)	

3. What is the current situation on the labour market? What changes have occurred since the Taliban takeover?

The collected data from enterprises and employees in Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat indicates that the amount and frequency of income is decreasing, and there are no signs for reversal. The key reasons for a weak labour market are decreases in buying power, sanctions on the DfA, the closure of banking systems and the DfAs taxation policies.

According to a labour market assessment conducted by IOM Afghanistan between September and October 2022, beyond these factors, there are complementary factors which are less visible, however their impact on the local economy is assumed to be equally high:

- elimination of previous government staff from government entities;
- disallowing female staff to attend their workplace;

- assassination of previous national armed personnel;
- increase of fraud and bribery;
- loss of hope and perspectives for the future;
- increase in kidnapping and illegal arrests of businessmen and doctors;
- increase in child labour.

Interviewees have mentioned that since 15 August 2021, they have spotted a significant rise in the number of children as labour forces and an increase in the number of beggars. The rise in child labour may also be related to the shutdown of schools and universities for females⁶, as well as the predominant focus on religious teachings in schools for males. In Afghanistan child labour is mostly spotted in rural areas, and boys by gender are affiliated with jobs more than 21 hours per week. Afghanistan is still considered one of the deadliest places for children worldwide.

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

According to IOM Afghanistan's survey results from mid-September to mid-October 2022, an Afghan daily wage earner receives approximately AFN 350 (EUR 3.90) for an eight-hour workday⁷. The rate of payment for daily wagers is similar in Kabul, Mazar-Sharif and Herat; however, the frequency of work may differ. A daily wage worker in Kabul can find labour approximately four to five times per week, but in Herat and Mazar-Sharif a daily wage worker only finds work for a maximum three times per week.

Respondents to IOM Afghanistan's survey indicated that most daily wagers find work in construction sites. In Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif, the building of new houses has dropped significantly. Since house building has significant impact on other professions, such as carpentry, house pipelining, and metal work, some other sectors have been badly impacted by this trend as well.

The minimum monthly wage rate in Afghanistan is AFN 5000 (EUR 55.70) for governmental staff. There is no minimum wage in the private sector, as the Afghanistan Labour Law on minimum wage is currently not in effect.

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

Currently, several communication and internet companies in Afghanistan provide services across the country, such as Afghan Telecom, Afghan Wireless, Etisalat, MTN Group, Roshan, Salaam Network, Wasel Telecom, Fiber Noori and others⁸.

There have been no reports of major decreases in access to telecommunication since the Taliban takeover. However, the provinces which showed resistance against the Taliban regime (Panjshir province and Andarab district) had experienced shutdowns of telecommunication and internet services in the past.

⁶ Popalzai, E. and Kottasová, I. (2022) Taliban suspend university education for women in Afghanistan, CNN. Cable News Network. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/20/asia/taliban-bans-women-university-education-intl/index.html> (Accessed: 11 January 2023).

⁷ In September 2020 and in March 2021 (before Taliban takeover) the daily wage for an unskilled worker was reported as approximately USD 5 (AFN 438.85; exchange rate as of 11 January 2023).

⁸ Noori, G.W. (2019) Telecommunications in Afghanistan, iAffairs. Available at: <https://iaffairscanada.com/2019/telecommunications-in-afghanistan/> (Accessed: 11 January 2023).

Marriage and Civil Law

1. Are the Afghan Civil Code and the Shiite Personal Law still in effect?

Please see below answers.

2. Did any laws concerning marriage, registration of marriage, citizenship as well as custody and guardianship change in the last year?

Although Afghan Civil Law of the Republic of Afghanistan (Civil Code) is nominally in effect, judges, prosecutors, lawyers have changed since the Taliban takeover. The judges have been dismissed from their positions and Islamic Emirate (IEA) forces from different backgrounds are now practicing rule of law.

The Shiite Personal Law is still in effect and has been practiced, however, changes have also been recognized in the application of this law. For instance, while the Shiite Personal Law cases were previously handled within the courts run by government, the Taliban DfA refer these cases to the Shiite religious offices which are run independently and not by governments.

Concerning marriage:

I. What are the current legal conditions and provisions for marriage?

Afghan Civil Code Article 60:

Marriage is a contract that legalizes relationship between man and woman with the aim of forming a family and establishes rights and duties of the parties.

Afghan Civil Code Article 61:

(1) Marriage contract shall be prepared and registered, in the official marriage deed, by the relevant office in three copies. The original copy shall be kept in the relevant office and one copy shall be given to each of the parties to the contract. The marriage contract, after registration in the special books, shall be notified to the office of registration of records stated in article (46) of this law.

(2) If registration of a marriage contract is not possible in this manner, it shall be registered in another way that is stipulated for registration of official documents.

II. How does the registration process for marriages work, is registration of marriage a legal requirement and how big is the percentage of registered marriages in general registered?

There is no current information available on formally recognized marriages in Afghanistan.

III. Can a (traditional) marriage that took place in or outside of Afghanistan be registered at a later date?

In the provinces outside of Kabul, marriages that took place in a traditional setting can be formalized at the civil courts. In Kabul, the couple must appear at the family court, accompanied by two witnesses. No information can be provided for marriages that took place outside of Afghanistan.

Concerning citizenship:

I. When is a person considered an Afghan citizen?

The Afghan Law on Nationality is based upon Sharia jurisprudence. Because of stipulations in the Afghan Civil Code, children who are not legitimate or whose parents were not married under Islamic law, cannot obtain Afghan citizenship. Children born in Afghanistan or abroad to at least one Afghan parent within marriage are formally recognized as Afghan national.

II. Is a marriage required for children to obtain the Afghan citizenship if one of the parents is not an Afghan Citizen?

Afghan nationality is typically obtained under the principal of jus sanguinis, thus by birth to a parent with Afghan nationality.

Afghan nationality may also be granted to persons with an affiliation to the country, or to permanent residents who have lived in the country for a given period of time through naturalization. However, since the Taliban takeover, it is unclear if this rule is still applicable.

III. Do children born out of wedlock face legal difficulties?

Yes. In Afghan culture, childbirth out of marriage is highly stigmatized. Women who engage in an extramarital relationship face the risk of death sentence and their children would be ostracized.

Concerning Guardianship:

I. How is custody of children and guardianship currently regulated in Afghanistan?

According to the Afghan Civil Code, after the age of seven for boys and the age of nine for girls, custody belongs to the father. Second in line is the grandfather, followed by the mother. However, in practice, sometimes uncles and male cousins receive the right to custody before mothers do.

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