



INFORMATION UP-DATE

on the socio-economic situation in Afghanistan

requested by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum

17 September 2024

General Note on price information in this document:

The prices indicated in this document originate from February 2024. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Afghanistan, these prices have been very stable since then and can be considered still as current as of September 2024. However, please be aware that minor monthly fluctuations may occur.

1. Is IOM operating in Afghanistan at the moment?

There are no updates to the information provided in February 2024. For the complete answer, please refer to the response to info request Afghanistan 2024, ELAK Number 2024 – 0.014.826.

2. Medical Care and NGOs

2.1 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. According to the Human Rights Watch, there was a sharp reduction in funds for Afghan hospitals post-Taliban takeover as the funds were mainly provided by the former government's budget, leading to a loss of staff and to cuts in services. Additionally, medical staff also partly fled the country or stopped working out of fear. Due to these reasons, hospitals have faced downsizing and closures, resulting in increased strain on remaining facilities and a lack of primary healthcare access for many communities. Due to the decrease in staffing and funding, patients who would typically seek treatment at primary care centres are now turning to secondary and tertiary healthcare facilities for assistance. Out-of-pocket health spendings were estimated 77.2 per cent per capita in 2021, and government health spending was only 3.3 per cent.¹

The ongoing funding shortages have already prevented 3 million people from accessing primary and secondary healthcare services. Without further funding, critical life-saving programs – including mobile health and nutrition teams that service hard-to-reach areas inpatient treatment for severely malnourished children with medical complications; psychosocial and protection support for children; mine action; food

¹ World Health Organization. Global Health Expenditure Database. Available at https://apps.who.int/nha/database/country_profile/index/en. Accessed 21 February 2024.

and livelihood assistance; and provision of dignity kits for women and girls of reproductive age during sudden-onset crises – risk further reduction and closure.²

A Human Rights Watch Report additionally highlights medicine supply shortages due to import challenges as well as a surge in patient numbers, whereas many conditions are linked to poor nutrition.³ In this context, the World Food Programme stated in February 2023, that Afghanistan was at its highest risk of famine in the last 25 years, mainly due to people's lack of money to buy food.⁴ Additionally, other medical conditions have also burdened the healthcare system. In 2023, there were 25,856 reported cases of measles, resulting in 64 deaths. In January 2024, 3,730 new suspected measles cases were reported, resulting in 14 deaths. This shows 129 per cent increase in the number of cases compared to the previous month.⁵ Moreover, between January and December 2023, 222,230 cases of diarrhea were reported, out of which 126,791 (57.1%) were under-five children. Outbreaks of acute watery diarrhea with dehydration occurred in 334 districts.⁶

As reported the IOM country update provided on 12 April 2022, the World Bank programme which provided funding for essential healthcare facilities and paid for the salaries of healthcare workers through the Sehatmandi Project for Afghanistan⁷ under the previous government halted in 2021 its activities⁸ and did not resume them since.

Until August 2023, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) paid supplemental salaries for more than 10,000 doctors, nurses, and other staff at 33 hospitals serving 26 million people across Afghanistan. ICRC also paid for drugs and other medical supplies, as well as running costs of the hospitals, such as electricity, ambulance services, lab tests, and food for patients. The ICRC programme ended in August 2023. Since the termination of the ICRC healthcare support activities, other actors have taken up donor-funded payments to the healthcare sector. Main donors include the U.S. Agency for International

² OCHA, *World Refugee Day highlights the continued Afghan Refugee and Displacement Crisis* (11 August 2024) Available at <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-update-june-2024> Accessed 30 August 2024.

³ Human Rights Watch, *Disaster in the Foreseeable Future: Afghanistan's Healthcare Crisis*. (12 February 2024) Available at www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/12/disaster-foreseeable-future/afghanistans-healthcare-crisis#_ftn41. Accessed 21 February 2024.

⁴ World Food Program Afghanistan, *Situation Report*. (5 February 2023) Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/wfp-afghanistan-situation-report-05-february-2023>. Accessed 21 February 2024.

⁵ Reliefweb, *Afghanistan Health Cluster Bulletin, January 2024* (25 February 2024) Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-health-cluster-bulletin-january-2024> Accessed 21 February 2024.

⁶ Reliefweb, *Afghanistan: Infectious Disease Outbreaks - Epidemiological week #52, 2023 (24—30 Dec 2023) Situation Report #52* (3 January 2024) Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-infectious-disease-outbreaks-epidemiological-week-52-2023-24-30-dec-2023-situation-report-52> Accessed 21 February 2024.

⁷ World Bank Group. *Afghanistan Sehatmandi Project*. Available at <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P160615>. Accessed 21 February 2024.

⁸ NPR, *Afghan Health Minister: Health Care Is 'On The Verge Of Collapse'* [Press release]. (18 September 2021) Available at www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2021/09/18/1038068777/afghan-health-minister-health-care-is-on-the-verge-of-collapse-but-imoptimistic. Accessed 21 February 2024.



Development (USAID),⁹ Global Fund,¹⁰ Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation,¹¹ the Government of Canada,¹² GAVI Alliance¹³ and others.

Despite the presence of international donors, a pressing need for immediate donor assistance has been reported for at least 36 hospitals previously financed by the ICRC to sustain critical services. While the above listed donors have responded to the UN's calls for humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan, only 40 per cent of the required USD 412 million for critical health services in 2023 has been committed.

The de facto Health Ministry officials refused to comment regarding the allocation of limited domestic resources for the health sector. The De facto Authorities (DfA) in Afghanistan do not publicly disclose its budget and national spending.

To underscore the crucial importance of ramping up investment in healthcare services provision in Afghanistan, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched an alert in August 2023. WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, stated in the alert: "The situation in Afghanistan is grave, and the lack of resources and funding to support health workers and facilities is putting countless lives at risk. Women and children are suffering the most. I call on donors to give generously so that we can continue our life-saving work".¹⁴

This WHO alert highlighted the dire consequences if the underfunding continues in Afghanistan's healthcare system. "The situation in Afghanistan is critical, and it demands urgent attention. For a country already affected by decades of conflict, underfunding of the healthcare system is a critical humanitarian concern. The consequences of this underfunding cannot be overstated. I want to thank our current partners who have provided support thus far, but also to call on them to redouble their efforts", said WHO Representative to Afghanistan, Dr. Luo Dapeng, in the alert.

In 2024 so far two healthcare facilities, in the province of Faryab and Hirat, were hit by attacks, whereby eight healthcare providers were severely affected. During the attacks, seven members from the health care personnel were detained by the attackers and one person was severely injured. In the aftermath, one hospital in Hirat closed.¹⁵

⁹ www.usaid.gov/afghanistan Accessed 20 February 2024.

¹⁰ www.theglobalfund.org/en/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹¹ www.gatesfoundation.org/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹² www.canada.ca/en.html Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹³ www.gavi.org/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹⁴ World Health Organization. *Afghanistan's Health System Suffers Critical Underfunding, Calls for Donor Support*. (18 August 2023) Available at www.who.int/news/item/18-08-2023-afghanistan-s-health-system-suffers-critical-underfunding--calls-for-donor-support Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹⁵ Reliefweb, *Attacks on Health Care in Afghanistan* (January – July 2024), (25 August 2024) Available at <https://reliefweb.int/map/afghanistan/attacks-health-care-afghanistan-january-july-2024> Accessed 18 September 2024.

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

Among those most affected by Afghanistan's healthcare crisis are people with disabilities. Due to decades of conflict and poor maternal health care, Afghanistan has one of the largest populations in the world of people with disabilities. Because of aid shortfalls, the few services for people with disabilities, including physical rehabilitation and mental health support, have largely disappeared.¹⁶ The pervasive lack of protective mechanisms and social awareness surrounding disability continue to pose formidable challenges for individuals with disabilities, with women being disproportionately affected.¹⁷

Some hospitals and NGOs are actively engaged in providing services to individuals affected by physical and psychological disabilities in Afghanistan. Presently, the International Psychosocial Organization¹⁸ operates in all 34 provinces of the country. Additionally, organizations such as IOM, Action Contre la Faim (ACF),¹⁹ INTERSOS,²⁰ Premiere Urgence Internationale (PUI),²¹ HealthNet TPO²² and the International Medical Corps (IMC)²³ offer psychosocial services. Moreover, the ICRC²⁴ and Handicap International²⁵ provide assistance specifically tailored to people with disabilities

3. Work and living conditions

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

General information on price developments following the August 2021 political changes: As a result of the inflation in Afghanistan surged, peaking at 18.3 per cent in July 2022. However, it subsequently plummeted into deflation, reaching -9.0 per cent in March 2024. Similarly, food inflation decreased from +26 per cent in June 2022 to -13.8 per cent in March 2024.

The persistent deflation is reflecting a fall in food prices and weak consumer demand. While deflation support low food prices, limited number of job opportunities and low wages will continue to weaken household purchasing power.²⁶

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Afghanistan: Aid Cutbacks, Taliban Abuses Imperil Health*, (12 February 2024) Available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/12/afghanistan-aid-cutbacks-taliban-abuses-imperil-health> Accessed 18 September 2024.

¹⁷ United States Institute for Peace, *The Challenges Facing Afghans with Disabilities* (29 February 2024) Available at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/02/challenges-facing-afghans-disabilities> Accessed 18 September 2024.

¹⁸ <https://ipsocontext.org/> Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹⁹ www.actioncontrelafaim.org/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

²⁰ www.intersos.org/en/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

²¹ www.premiere-urgence.org/en/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

²² www.healthnettpo.org/en Accessed 21 February 2024.

²³ <https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/> Accessed 21 February 2024.

²⁴ www.icrc.org/de Accessed 21 February 2024.

²⁵ www.handicap-international.de/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

²⁶ Reliefweb, *Afghanistan: Countrywide Weekly Market Report: Issue 212: Week 3 - August 2024* (26 August 2024) Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-countrywide-weekly-market-report-issue-212-week-3-august-2024> Accessed 18 September 2024.

While the food sector has benefited from better supply, weakened demand due to low purchasing power is a major driver of the deflationary process that started in April 2023 and is persisting through February 2024. This protracted deflationary process stems from a confluence of factors, including the adverse ramifications of the opium ban, the shrinking of the money supply, and the appreciation of the Afghan Afghani (AFN).²⁷ The dynamics of rental prices in urban centers like Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif are influenced by various factors, including location, furnishings, and the overall quality of accommodation. As illustrated in the table below, IOM provides a comparative analysis of average rents both within and outside the city center. The data²⁸ was predominantly sourced from rental companies and homeowners. It is organized according to the number of beds in the apartment, offering insights into the fluctuations in rental pricing across different residential settings.

Type	Kabul		Herat		Mazar Sharif	
	City Center (CC)	Outside CC	City Center	Outside CC	City Center	Outside CC
2 Beds	AFN ²⁹ 10,000 (EUR 126.64)	AFN 7,000 (EUR 89.29)	AFN 7,000 (EUR 89.29)	AFN 5,500 (EUR 70.16)	AFN 6,500 (EUR 82.92)	AFN 4,500 (EUR 57.40)
3 Beds	AFN 13,000 (EUR 165.83)	AFN 9,000 (EUR 114.81)	AFN 10,000 (EUR 127.56)	AFN 7,000 (EUR 89.29)	AFN 9,000 (EUR 114.81)	AFN 6,000 (EUR 76.54)
4 Beds	AFN 17,000 (EUR 216.86)	AFN 12,000 (EUR 153.08)	AFN 15,000 (EUR 191.35)	AFN 10,000 (EUR 127.56)	AFN 12,500 (EUR 159.46)	AFN 8,500 (EUR 108.43)

3.2 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?

The volatility in food prices remains a significant concern for residents in Afghanistan, with fluctuations driven by a complex interplay of factors.³⁰ The country's economic stability is intricately tied to ongoing drought conditions, policy shifts by the DfA, and the exchange rate between the U.S. Dollar (USD) and the AFN. These factors collectively contribute to the uncertainty surrounding food costs, impacting the overall well-being of the population. Ongoing droughts affect agricultural productivity, leading to shortages and increased prices for essential food items, while policy changes directly influence trade, production, and distribution channels.³¹

²⁷ World Bank Group, *Afghanistan Development Update April 2024* (April 2024) Available at <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/18a1ccff0457effb0a456c0d4af7cce2-0310012024/original/Afghanistan-Development-Update-April-2024.pdf> Accessed 18 September 2024.

²⁸ Price information was collected by IOM field staff on 28 January 2024. The accuracy of the price information was confirmed by IOM field staff for September 2024.

²⁹ AFN = Afghan Afghani; All exchange rates in this document have been calculated using OANDA Currency Converter (rate as of 18 September 2024) <https://www.oanda.com/currency-converter/de>.

³⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, *World Food Situation: Food Price Index*. (n.d.) Available at www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/. Accessed 21 February 2024.

³¹ World Food Programme, *Afghanistan*. (31 March 2023). Available at www.wfp.org/countries/afghanistan. Accessed 19 February 2024.

Please see the requested food prices below. IOM staff interviewed retail shops in the local markets and collected firsthand information from the field on 28 January 2024 and with accuracy confirmed for September 2024, in the respective provinces.

Items	Kabul	Herat	Mazar
1 piece of bread	AFN 10 (EUR 0.13)	AFN 10 (EUR 0.13)	AFN 10 (EUR 0.13)
50 kg of flour	AFN 1,400 (EUR 17.86)	AFN 1,600 (EUR 20.41)	AFN 1,350 (EUR 17.22)
25 kg of rice	AFN 3,000 (EUR 38.27)	AFN 2,200 (EUR 28.06)	AFN 2,200 (EUR 28.06)
7 kg of beans	AFN 800 (EUR 10.21)	AFN 770 (EUR 9.82)	AFN 780 (EUR 9.95)
5 liters cooking oil	AFN 450 (EUR 5.74)	AFN 700 (EUR 8.93)	AFN 380 (EUR 4.85)
1 kg of chicken	AFN 250 (EUR 3.18)	AFN 220 (EUR 2.81)	AFN 220 (EUR 2.81)
1 liter of fuel	AFN 70 (EUR 0.89)	AFN 64 (EUR 0.82)	AFN 67 (EUR 0.85)

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

The Afghanistan labour market was paralyzed by COVID-19 and the change in administration.³² Most of the sectors have been devastated; however, agricultural stability keeps a proportional pace. More than half a million people have lost or been pushed out of their jobs in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover.

The Afghan labour market faces significant challenges amidst the country's fragile economy and weak private sector. Following a 25 per cent economic contraction over the past two years, recovery prospects are further hindered by the DfA's restrictive policies on women's education and work.¹⁰

Numerous businesses are facing challenges in maintaining full operations. The primary constraint reported by businesses is reduced demand, followed by uncertainty regarding the future and limitations in banking system functionality. Private businesses face challenges in accessing financial services, further hampering economic stability and growth prospects. According to the second and third rounds of the World Bank Private Sector Rapid Survey conducted in May-June 2022 and in March-April 2023, slightly more than half of the surveyed firms in Afghanistan are operating at full capacity, while another third are operating below capacity. Employment in surveyed firms dropped by 61 per cent below pre-crisis levels by November 2021. By June 2022, although there was some recovery, employment in participating firms remained 50 per cent below pre-crisis levels.³³ ³⁴ Surveyed businesses also cited additional difficulties,

³² UN News, *Afghanistan: 500,000 jobs lost since Taliban takeover*. (21 January 2022). Available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/01/1110052>. Accessed 21 February 2024.

³³ World Bank, *Afghanistan Overview* (Last updated October 2023). Available at [www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Afghanistan%20Welfare,\(garment%20and%20food%20processing\)](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Afghanistan%20Welfare,(garment%20and%20food%20processing)). Accessed 18 February 2024.

³⁴ World Bank, *Afghanistan Private Sector Rapid Survey - Round 2*. (2022). Available at <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/25bc69f199bac8b41cc393c9d964e40f-0310012022/original/AFG-PSRS-R2-Report-Final.pdf>. Accessed 21 February 2024.

including inefficiencies in the payment system, increased operating costs, limited availability of imported inputs, and difficulties in obtaining loans.³⁵

In June 2024 ReliefWeb reports that consumer demand has waned, hitting small and medium enterprises hard. Employment remains substantially below pre-August 2021 levels, with a 58 percent employment gap. Economic hardship and heightened poverty, aggravated by political shifts, have caused a rise in job seekers and informal employment, exacerbating unemployment.³⁶

Another development, that influences the national economy and labour market is the DfA's efforts to combat drug cultivation in Afghanistan. According to a report by the Crisis Group issued in September 2024, the drug ban, which has resulted in a 95 per cent decrease in opium cultivation since 2022, includes measures such as arresting drug users, destroying crops, and closing drug trade locations. However, this ban has severely impacted livelihoods in rural areas already suffering from an economic crisis and the DfA lacks the resources to facilitate other forms of employment. Poppy cultivation, being highly profitable, is crucial for the survival of many farmers, especially women who have limited job opportunities outside agriculture. Due to the measures taken by the DfA farmers have lost an estimated \$1.3 billion annually, or 8 per cent of GDP in 2023.³⁷

3.4 Women's employment situation:

Since the Taliban regained power in August 2021, they have issued over 50 decrees aimed at restricting women's public and private roles. On 24 December 2022, the DfA issued a decree aimed to restrict female employment with NGOs which was subsequently extended to UN agencies in April 2023. The DfA also announced that cosmetic work is against Islamic law, banning women's work in salons in summer 2023.

Non-observance of purdah (referring to the strict separation of men and women in society and a veil covering their face³⁸) and hijab (referring to the scarf on women's head)³⁹ have also been used as reasons to justify prohibitions on women's employment. Women's access to services and employment outside the home has become largely dependent on them having a male guardian available to escort them.⁴⁰

³⁵ World Bank. *Afghanistan Private Sector Rapid Survey - Round 2*. (2022). Available at <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/25bc69f199bac8b41cc393c9d964e40f-0310012022/original/AFG-PSRS-R2-Report-Final.pdf> Accessed 21 February 2024.

³⁶ Reliefweb, *Afghanistan: Monthly Market Report: Issue 49: June 2024* (11 July 2024) Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-monthly-market-report-issue-49-june-2024#:~:text=KEY%20HIGHLIGHTS.%20Macroeconomic%20Highlights.%20%E2%80%A2%20Afghanistan's%20economic%20growth> Accessed 18 September 2024.

³⁷ Crisis Group International, *Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs* (12 September 2024) Available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/340-trouble-afghanistans-opium-fields-taliban-war-drugs> Accessed 13 September 2024.

³⁸ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/> Accessed 04 September 2024

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ UN Women, *Afghanistan Gender Country Profile 2024* (2024) Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/Gender-country-profile-Afghanistan-en.pdf> Accessed 4 September 2024.

As a result, female-owned businesses are particularly impacted, with twice the likelihood of reporting security issues compared to male-owned businesses.⁴¹ Since the Taliban takeover, women's representation in the labour market is estimated to be at its lowest level in the last 20 years. Employment for women, in surveyed firms in the second round of the World Bank Private Sector Rapid Survey (conducted in May-June 2022), remained 62 per cent lower than before August 2021, indicating a disproportionate impact on women in the labor market.⁴² Small and women-owned firms are more prone to closure, indicating their heightened vulnerability to economic shocks compared to men-owned businesses. There has been a notable decline in female employment in this round, with a majority of women now working for women-owned businesses.⁴³ Women report limiting their employment efforts to DfA-approved and socially acceptable forms, such as home-based work in feminized industries, such as embroidery and handicrafts. The overall figures for unemployed women have more than doubled since the Taliban takeover.⁴⁴ Consequently, the number of firms without female employees has climbed to 50 percent.^{45 46} The above-mentioned crack-down on poppy cultivation, has a serious impact on women who have limited job opportunities outside agriculture. The Taliban's crackdown has devastated the economic outlook for farmers and rural laborers with few other employment options. Women are particularly affected by this ban.⁴⁷

Girls can only go to school until grade six (6 years of primary education). Girls and women are banned from attending secondary education beyond grade six and are banned from attending all tertiary education, including universities. Despite an increase in primary school attendance and narrowed gender gaps, millions of children, especially girls, remain out of school due to limited access. After the prohibition on girls attending secondary school was enforced, merely 3 per cent of them are enrolled in secondary

⁴¹ World Bank, *Afghanistan Overview* (Last updated October 2023) Available at [www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Afghanistan%20Welfare,\(garment%20and%20food%20processing\)](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Afghanistan%20Welfare,(garment%20and%20food%20processing)). Accessed 18 February 2024.

⁴² World Bank. *Afghanistan Private Sector Rapid Survey - Round 2*. (2022) Available at <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/25bc69f199bac8b41cc393c9d964e40f-0310012022/original/AFG-PSRS-R2-Report-Final.pdf> Accessed 21 February 2024.

⁴³ World Bank Group, *World Bank Survey: Afghanistan's private sector still facing significant challenges to survive* (19 March 2024) Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/03/19/afghanistans-private-sector-still-facing-significant-challenges> Accessed 6 September 2024.

⁴⁴ UN Women, *Afghanistan Gender Country Profile 2024* (2024) Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/Gender-country-profile-Afghanistan-en.pdf> Accessed 4 September 2024.

⁴⁵ World Bank, *Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating Challenges, Confronting Economic Recession and Deflation* (April 2024) Available at <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/18a1ccff0457effb0a456c0d4af7cce2-0310012024/original/Afghanistan-Development-Update-April-2024.pdf> Accessed 4 September 2024.

⁴⁶ International Labour Organization, *Women bear brunt of Afghanistan job losses* (7 March 2023) Available at <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/women-bear-brunt-afghanistan-job-losses> 5 September 2024.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group International, *Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs* (12 September 2024) Available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/340-trouble-afghanistans-opium-fields-taliban-war-drugs> Accessed 13 September 2024.

education. Meanwhile, among boys aged 13-18, the percentage receiving secondary education stands at 44 per cent.⁴⁸

On August 21, 2024, the DfA introduced a new law to "Promote Virtue and Eliminate Vice", adding to the existing restrictions on women. Over the past three years, numerous decrees have barred women and girls from activities outside their homes, including education, employment, and travel without a male guardian. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) expressed concerns about this law, highlighting its extensive restrictions on personal conduct and the broad enforcement powers granted to morality police.⁴⁹ The laws empower the Ministry of propagation of virtue, prevention of vice and hearing complaints (MOPVPE) to be at the front line of regulating personal conduct and administering punishments like warnings or arrest if its enforcers allege that Afghans have broken the laws.

IOM continues membership and participation in the UN Country Team (UNCT), Humanitarian Access Working Group (HAWG), Security Cell, Security Management Team, Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group and other coordination forums. IOM will continue to closely monitor any changes in the implementing environment in relation to the potential involvement of this law in close coordination with the colleagues from Access & Liaison and Office of Staff Security (OSS) and will prioritize the safety and security of its staff.

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

Based on the IOM Economic Resilience Employee Report covering Kabul, Herat, and Mazar Sharif, findings reveal distinct patterns in the average daily wages earned by individuals in these cities. In Kabul, the average daily wage falls within the range of AFN 300 to 500 (EUR 3.83 - 6.38), reflecting the diverse economic landscape and opportunities available in the capital city. For Herat, the report indicates that the average daily wage earner receives a slightly narrower range, spanning from AFN 250 to 350 (EUR 3.19 - 4.46). This could be indicative of the economic dynamics unique to Herat, which may differ from Kabul. Lastly, in Mazar-i-Sharif, the average daily wage is noted to be ranging around AFN 200 (EUR 2.55). These variations in daily wages across the cities underscore the localized economic conditions, encompassing factors such as industry composition, demand for labour, and regional economic development, providing a nuanced understanding of the economic resilience in different urban centres.

⁴⁸ World Bank, *Afghanistan Overview*. (Last updated October 2023) Available at [www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Afghanistan%20Welfare,\(garment%20and%20food%20processing\)](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Afghanistan%20Welfare,(garment%20and%20food%20processing)) Accessed 18 February 2024.

⁴⁹ For more information on this law see for example Forbes: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2024/08/26/talibans-law-promoting-virtue-and-eliminating-vice-or-as-we-call-it-gender-apartheid/>

On average for the whole country, in June 2024, an unskilled worker can gain AFN 317 (EUR 4.04) per day whereas a skilled worker can gain AFN 655 (EUR 8.35) per day.⁵⁰ The national average expected monthly income for full-time unskilled workers is AFN 3.362 (EUR 42.89), which can only afford 64 per cent of the World Food Programme's (WFP's) in-kind food basket (AFN 5.232/ EUR 66,74).⁵¹

3.6 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?

There are no outages in areas which could have been reached via phone or internet before the Taliban takeover. In fact, telecom and internet services have improved since the fall of the previous government, due to a decline in conflict nationwide and the ease with which telecom businesses can expand their service offerings. In Afghanistan, the availability of internet and telecommunication services is widespread, covering the majority of the country except for a few isolated and sparsely inhabited settlements situated outside major towns.

The Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority (ATRA) asserts that telecommunication services in the country have witnessed improvement, returning to a level comparable to that before the collapse of the former government. This suggests a concerted effort to restore and maintain essential communication infrastructure crucial for various aspects of daily life, economic activities, and nationwide connectivity. The comprehensive coverage of internet and telecommunication services, barring a few remote areas, underscores the commitment to ensuring connectivity and communication accessibility for the Afghan population, even amidst challenges and changes in the political landscape. Currently, five telecommunication companies are active in Afghanistan, including the state-owned fixed-line operator Afghan Telecom, and the four mobile (GSM) operators: Afghan Wireless Communication Company (AWCC), Roshan, MTN Afghanistan, and Etisalat Afghanistan.

While traditional media platforms such as TV and radio continue to operate, their content faces censorship and self-censorship, resulting in a decline in public trust in information sources and reduced access to reliable and dependable information. Afghans have begun to exercise self-restraint on social media and in their daily interactions due to uncertainty and fear regarding their speech.⁵²

There were 7.88 million internet users in Afghanistan at the start of 2024, when internet penetration stood at 18.4 percent. For perspective, these user figures reveal that 34.93 million people in Afghanistan

⁵⁰ Reliefweb, *Afghanistan: Monthly Market Report: Issue 49: June 2024* (11 July 2024) Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-monthly-market-report-issue-49-june-2024#:~:text=KEY%20HIGHLIGHTS.%20Macroeconomic%20Highlights.%20%E2%80%A2%20Afghanistan's%20economic%20growth> Accessed 18 September 2024.

⁵¹ Reliefweb, *Afghanistan: Monthly Market Report: Issue 50: July 2024* (12 August 2024) Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-monthly-market-report-issue-50-july-2024#:~:text=Macroeconomic%20Highlights.%20The%20economic%20growth%20in%20Afghanistan%20continues%20to%20be> Accessed 18 September 2024.

⁵² Internews, *The Information Ecosystem in Afghanistan and Implications for Humanitarian Action: Format Analysis*. (2 January 2024). Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/information-ecosystem-afghanistan-and-implications-humanitarian-action>. Accessed 19 February 2024.

did not use the internet at the start of 2024, suggesting that 81.6 percent of the population remained offline at the beginning of the year.

A total of 27.67 million cellular mobile connections were active in Afghanistan in early 2024, with this figure equivalent to 64.6 percent of the total population.⁵³

While there have been reports of the isolated regional shutdown orders, and the media as a whole has been largely censored, the Taliban has sought to continue developing local Internet infrastructure, including upgrading the country's mobile network to 4G.^{54 55}

4 Travel in Afghanistan

There are no updates to the information provided in February 2024. For the complete answer, please refer to the response to info request Afghanistan 2024, ELAK Number 2024 – 0.014.826.

5 Banking system and money transfer

5.1 Is it currently possible to transfer money to Afghanistan?

Yes, it is possible to transfer money both locally and from abroad in Afghanistan. Various partners and agencies facilitate fund transfers from international sources, and there are also Hawala companies operating in the country. Hawala is a Money or Value Transfer Service (MVTs) that has been used for centuries, originating in the Middle East and South Asia.

Before the Taliban takeover, the hawala system occupied a grey zone in Afghanistan — not entirely licit, nor illicit. Hawala has been linked to crime, money laundering and terrorism financing in Afghanistan and globally, but it is also crucial in remittances and money transfers where Afghans would not otherwise be able to access financial services.⁵⁶ Some estimates suggested that 90 per cent of Afghanistan's financial transactions ran through hawala, with over 900 providers operating across the country.⁵⁷ It is primarily used for legitimate purposes, including personal and business financial transactions, as well as for sending remittances by migrants and refugees to family members. Cultural preferences, convenience, low-threshold accessibility, low processing fees, reliability, and faster value transfer services are some of the reasons for using Hawala.

Before the Taliban regained authority in Afghanistan, only 15 per cent of Afghans had bank accounts and even fewer used their bank accounts regularly. Access to formal finance was also already highly gendered:

⁵³ Kemp S, *Digital 2024: Afghanistan, Data Reportal* (23 February 2024) Available at <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-afghanistan> Accessed 30 August 2024.

⁵⁴ Mitchell R, *Afghanistan: Developing and Maintaining Internet Resilience in the Face of Conflict*, *Internet society* (29 February 2024) Available at <https://pulse.internetsociety.org/blog/afghanistan-developing-and-maintaining-internet-resilience-in-the-face-of-conflict> Accessed 30 August 2024.

⁵⁵ Shires J and Wilkinson I, *The Internet under Attack*, *Chatham House* (23 August 2024) Available at <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/08/internet-under-attack/03-internet-resilience-afghanistan> Accessed 30 August 2024.

⁵⁶ IOM Global, *Remittances to Afghanistan are lifelines: They are needed more than ever in a time of crisis*, Available at <https://weblog.iom.int/remittances-afghanistan-are-lifelines-they-are-needed-more-ever-time-crisis> Accessed 30 August 2024..

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Only 7 per cent of women across the entire country had access. While the formal banking system had been expanding in Afghanistan prior to the Taliban's takeover, the informal sector and hawala system still dominated.⁵⁸

Currently, IOM is utilizing three money service provider companies operating within Afghanistan to support beneficiaries through cash-based assistance. Furthermore, IOM is planning to pilot mobile money under its Cash-Based Interventions (CBI) response.

But it is unclear whether the hawala system, which still relies on hard currency, can continue to function properly amidst the wider economic crunch. The lack of cash means Hawaladars may not be able to disburse funds as they did previously, in a similar fashion to cash-strapped formal banks. Those Afghans who do manage to leave the country may face difficulties finding work, while those left behind may face difficulties withdrawing funds sent their way.⁵⁹

Challenges in the banking sector are affecting both domestic and international transactions. Correspondent banks have limited transactions with Afghan banks, directly affecting private sector trade activities and increasing transaction costs.⁶⁰

5.2 Is it possible to transfer money via local banks?

Yes, it is possible to transfer money through local banks in Afghanistan; however, recipients in remote areas might encounter challenges in accessing banks due to coverage limitations and Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements. The KYC policy is a mandatory framework for banks and financial institutions to identify customers. Each customer is required to provide credentials to prove their identity and address.

IOM utilizes money transfer through local banks to reach beneficiaries; however, challenges have been encountered in terms of meeting KYC requirements.

5.3 What other ways of transferring money are currently possible?

Various money transfer methods are utilized in Afghanistan, including the Hawala system, Money Service Providers (MSPs), mobile money services (which are utilized by a limited number of people due to low technology usage), and traditional bank transfers.

⁵⁸ IOM Global, *Remittances to Afghanistan are lifelines: They are needed more than ever in a time of crisis*, Available at <https://weblog.iom.int/remittances-afghanistan-are-lifelines-they-are-needed-more-ever-time-crisis> Accessed 30 August 2024.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ World Bank Group, *World Bank Survey: Afghanistan's private sector still facing significant challenges to survive* (19 March 2024) Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/03/19/afghanistans-private-sector-still-facing-significant-challenges> Accessed 6 September 2024.

5.4 Is there currently enough cash available in Afghanistan?

According to the UNDP report on Changes in Afghan Economy, Households and Cross-Cutting Sectors,⁶¹ before the regime change, Afghanistan's banking system primarily focused on three key functions: facilitating money transfers, collecting deposits, and investing funds with the de facto Central Bank (DAB). Following the regime change, the banking system in Afghanistan experienced a significant deterioration, primarily attributed to bank runs (meaning a large group of depositors withdraw their money from banks at the same time) and a loss of public confidence. This crisis resulted in substantial withdrawals of deposits from banks, causing a sharp decline in both total deposits and outstanding loans. The abrupt halt in international aid, coupled with shrinking bank balance sheets, had a direct impact on the money supply, leading to a substantial reduction in real terms. The de facto DAB's inability to produce AFN banknotes, along with the freezing of foreign currency reserves, aggravated both domestic and foreign currency liquidity shortages within the economy.

The UNDP report⁶² further states that the limited capacity of the de facto DAB to print new banknotes has left most of the circulating currency in poor condition, rendering it ineffective for transactions. It is important to note that currency in circulation has accounted for more than 60 per cent of the money supply in the last two years. However, since October 2022, the de facto DAB has initiated the transfer of new banknotes from abroad to replace the deteriorated ones, on a one-to-one basis. Yet, to bolster AFN liquidity and support economic activity, there is a pressing need for a net injection of new banknotes, to ensure that the currency in circulation aligns with the economy's requirements.

There is no reported significant cash shortage for UN agencies and other providers of humanitarian assistance. However, service providers are occasionally required to transport cash from one location to another, especially in emergencies where a high number of beneficiaries are targeted with Cash-Based Interventions (CBI). As of the latest information, millions of dollars, averaging USD 80 million per shipment, have been transported to Afghanistan in the past three months, with deliveries to Kabul occurring within 10 to 14 days. The cash is placed in designated UN accounts in private banks. While this may contribute to financial liquidity, broader economic challenges persist, with the UNDP reporting that 69 per cent of Afghans lacking access to basic resources.⁶³

6 Is it currently possible to obtain documents in Afghanistan?

There are no updates to the information provided in February 2024. For the complete answer, please refer to the response to info request Afghanistan 2024, ELAK Number 2024 – 0.014.826.

A final note on women's representation, advocacy, and engagement in Afghanistan:

According to reports, the current situation of women workers in Afghanistan is dire due to the policies enforced by the Taliban since their takeover in August 2021. The Taliban has systematically marginalized women and girls, seeking to erase them from public life. They have implemented bans on education, restricted access to employment, and imposed severe restrictions on women's freedom and mobility.

The current situation for women workers in Afghanistan is characterized by significant challenges and limitations. The Taliban's policies have restricted access to employment opportunities, preventing women from contributing to the workforce. Even in areas where women are allowed to work, they face numerous obstacles and limitations. The restrictions on women make it difficult for them to travel to workplaces or engage in certain occupations. Despite these challenges, Afghan women workers have demonstrated remarkable resilience and determination. Many have sought alternative ways to contribute to their families and communities, such as starting small businesses from home or engaging in informal work arrangements.

Following a 20 December 2022 decree banning Afghan women's higher education and a 24 December 2022 decree banning Afghan women from working for (I)NGOs, on 4 April 2023, the DfA issued a ban on Afghan women working with the United Nations (UN). This was followed by a review period, where the UNCT imposed a system-wide alternative work modalities (AWM) arrangement. At the end of this period, on 4 May 2023, the arrangement was halted as actors were able to coordinate respective ways of working that upholds humanitarian commitments and imperatives.

Throughout 2023 and the first half of 2024, IOM has remained committed to ensuring women's meaningful engagement and participation throughout its programming and interventions. IOM has continued to advocate with the DfA at all levels to preserve women's inclusion and participation — among both female staff and beneficiaries — promoting an all-principled response. IOM has also consistently adapted its ways of working to reflect the fluid operational context and prioritize staff safety, wellbeing, and mental health.

The new law "Promote Virtue and Eliminate Vice" published on the 21st of August 2024 significantly deepens the already severe curtailment of the rights of Afghan women and girls, including requirements for women to cover their entire bodies and faces, and it forbids women's voices in public. Women are also prohibited from interacting with non-Muslims, using public transport alone, and looking at men to whom they are not related by blood or marriage. Only 1 per cent of women surveyed by UN Women feel like they have influence over decision-making in their communities; 64 per cent indicate that they do not feel safe leaving their homes by themselves compared to 2 per cent of men; and 8 per cent indicated knowing at least one woman or girl who has attempted suicide since August 2021.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ UN Women, *UN Women deeply concerned by new Afghanistan morality law* (28 August 2024) Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/statement/2024/08/un-women-deeply-concerned-by-new-afghanistan-morality-law> Accessed 5 September 2024.



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