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COMMON COUNTRY ANALYSIS:

November 2022 Update

United Nations Afghanistan



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Acronyms

ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development
ACG	Afghanistan Coordination Group
AFN	Afghan Afghani (<i>currency</i>)
ANPDF II	Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2021–2025
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CDC	Community Development Council
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
ISIL-KP	Islamic State - Khorasan Province
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STWGs	Strategic Thematic Working Groups
TEF	Transitional Engagement Framework (<i>United Nations</i>)
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
US\$	United States Dollar

1. Executive Summary

This Common Country Analysis (CCA) is the first update of the initial analysis published by the United Nations (UN) in August 2021,¹ just a few weeks prior to the seismic shift caused by the overthrow of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan by the Taliban, which has impacted every facet of life in Afghanistan, particularly for the most vulnerable groups. While Afghanistan had made significant strides towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda over the past two decades — albeit with limited progress in many areas — these gains are currently being reversed, most starkly with the subsequent economic decline and rapid and systematic unwinding of the rights of women and girls.

Since seizing power, the Taliban *de facto* authorities have focused on the transition from insurgency to a government. While the *de facto* cabinet in Kabul was initially the main vehicle for decision-making, influence has increasingly shifted towards the more conservative Kandahar-based Taliban leadership. The *de facto* regime lacks gender, ethnic, religious, political, and geographical diversity. Pre-existing norms around male leadership have been consolidated and legitimized, undoing the gains women have achieved in the past decades in inclusive leadership and representation within public institutions. Restrictions have been imposed on the activities of civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with civic space and freedom of expression and assembly also being severely curtailed, especially for women-led organizations. While there has been a notable improvement in the security situation, lingering tensions and grievances threaten to escalate into violent conflict. Women's security has also deteriorated with reported increased levels of gender-based violence.

Already reeling from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and global economic slowdown, the events of August 2021 and subsequent suspension of non-humanitarian international assistance (which previously accounted for around 40 per cent of GDP), isolation from the international financial system, and weaknesses of the banking sector, have further compounded the country's economic woes. The current crisis has devastated the lives and livelihoods of many Afghans, particularly in rural areas, with women being particularly affected due to further restrictions placed on their movement and ability to work.

Economic shocks have now overtaken conflict and natural disasters as the primary drivers of humanitarian needs. The impact of the multi-faceted economic crisis, recurring drought, disease outbreaks, and lingering effects of decades of conflict, as well as the ongoing Ukraine crisis on already high food prices, have resulted in almost half of the population facing life-threatening levels of acute food insecurity and malnutrition, forcing families to resort to emergency livelihood coping strategies in the absence of any functional safety nets.

Already weak public service delivery capacities have been further eroded by the ongoing economic crisis, inexperienced *de facto* authorities, and discriminatory policies — particularly against women and girls — which further constrain the ability of Afghans to equitably access health, education, water and sanitation, social protection, protection, and justice services, with severe consequences for the fulfilment of human rights, human development, and longer-term national stability and prosperity.

While the situation in the country affects all Afghans to varying extents, some population groups are particularly vulnerable and marginalized, requiring specific attention to ensure they are not left

¹ United Nations Afghanistan, *UN Common Country Analysis 2021*, August 2021.

behind, or exposed to ever greater threats to their security. These include women and girls, children, youth, refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants, ethnic and religious minorities — including Hazara Shias, Sufis, and Sikhs — nomadic pastoralist populations (Kuchis), persons living with disabilities, sexual and gender minorities, and people who use drugs.

Changes in the country context and political dynamics since August 2021 has made it increasingly important for the UN and other international partners to engage a broad range of non-governmental stakeholders in Afghanistan, including at subnational level, to ensure greater participation and inclusivity in the delivery of assistance in support of the Afghan people.

Despite the challenges posed by the current context and operational environment, opportunities exist for the UN and its international and national partners to sustain and consolidate some of the development gains made over the past two decades and to tackle the underlying causes of vulnerability and hardship confronting the people of Afghanistan and to stabilize exponentially increasing humanitarian needs. This will require an integrated approach across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to collectively address the drivers of recurrent humanitarian needs, fragility, and systemic poverty afflicting the country, including through sustained provision of essential services, strengthening economic opportunities and livelihoods, enhancing social cohesion and inclusive decision making, and striving for improved access to justice and greater protection of human rights. It will also be imperative that any support is underpinned by the principle of leaving no one behind and prioritizes those most marginalized, vulnerable, and at risk.

2. Introduction

In 2021, the United Nations in Afghanistan embarked on the development of a new Common Country Analysis as its independent, collective, and forward-looking assessment of the situation in the country through the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. Published in August 2021, the CCA was to provide the analytical foundation upon which the UN would develop a new multi-year integrated strategic planning framework to replace the outgoing '*One UN for Afghanistan 2018–2021*' as the basis of future partnership and engagement with the then-Government and people of Afghanistan.

However, just a few weeks later, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was ousted by the Taliban, who became the *de facto* authorities in the country. This political change impacted not only the political and security situation, but the country's overall development trajectory, with severe implications for human rights and gender equality and women's empowerment. Consequently, the UN in Afghanistan developed the '*Transitional Engagement Framework*' to guide its collective work in 2022 given the change in political context, thereby enabling partners to continue meeting the basic human needs of the Afghan population, in addition to the ongoing humanitarian response.

In accordance with its commitment to staying and delivering for the people of Afghanistan, and to provide a longer-term planning horizon while adapting to evolving needs, the UN, across its humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding mandates, has embarked on the development of a new multi-year strategic planning framework.

In addition to the requirement under the UN development system reform that CCAs are to be updated on an annual basis, the fundamental transformation in the country context has necessitated a more comprehensive revision to reflect the new reality in Afghanistan and to inform ongoing UN planning. However, it should be noted that the updating of the CCA has been challenged by the abrupt change in the situation in the country meaning that up-to-date analysis and data across many thematic areas is not yet available, with much of the current information originating from prior to August 2021.

Using the original 2021 CCA text as a baseline, the process utilized the multi-stakeholder Afghanistan Coordination Group (ACG) and its subsidiary Strategic Thematic Working Groups (STWGs) to update, where available, data and analysis across the document.² Partners from across the humanitarian, development, and peace mandates of the UN system were engaged to ensure the analysis reflects a triple nexus approach. Various external stakeholders were consulted as part of the update process, including the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR) — a consortium covering 182 national and international NGOs — as well as the ACG, which brings together the UN, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and key donor partners. Sub-national consultations were undertaken with various communities and stakeholders across multiple provinces.

It is envisaged that the analysis and data contained in this updated CCA will underpin the development of a new UN system-wide strategic planning framework to enhance the UN's collective coherence in progressing towards the 2030 Agenda and in addressing the underlying causes of fragility and the increasing humanitarian needs in Afghanistan.

² The Afghanistan Coordination Group replaced the previous government-led aid architecture following August 2021 and comprises various bilateral and multilateral donor partners, as well as the UN, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank. Strategic Thematic Working Groups undertake sectoral-level coordination under the Afghanistan Coordination Group structure.

Population Overview

Afghanistan's rich ethnic and culturally diverse population was estimated to stand at around 40 million people in 2020.³ The country has one of the youngest populations in the world with 67 per cent below the age of 25 and 47 per cent under the age of 15 years.⁴ Though most of the population still live in rural areas, the urban population grew at a rate of 4.5 per cent between 2000 and 2010 — one of the fastest recorded in the South Asia region.⁵ Afghanistan has an estimated total fertility rate of 5.3 children per woman,⁶ resulting in an annual population growth rate of nearly 3.3 per cent.⁷ Despite continuing reductions in the fertility rate, the population is expected to reach 55 million by 2030 based on current trends. There are approximately 5.8 million migrants from Afghanistan and diaspora living abroad.⁸

³ 2020 Afghanistan Population Projection and its impact on development by UNFPA & NSIA, based on Flowminder modelling method and constant fertility scenario of 5.3.

⁴ Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization, 2014.

⁵ World Bank, *Leveraging Urbanization in Afghanistan*, 2021.

⁶ Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health, *Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015*, 2015.

⁷ Afghanistan Statistics and Information Authority, *Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016–2017*, May 2017.

⁸ Migration Data Portal, *Remittances to Afghanistan are lifelines: They are needed more than ever in a time of crisis*, 15 August 2022.

3. Progress Towards 2030 Agenda and SDGs

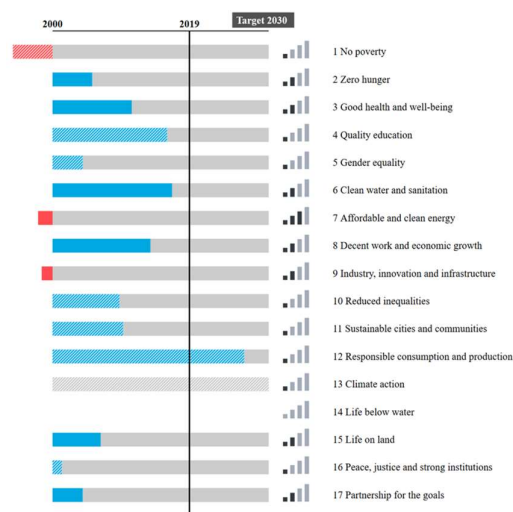
Following the global adoption of the SDGs in 2015, the then-Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan assessed which goals were most appropriate for the country and adapted them as Afghanistan SDGs (A-SDGs). However, measuring progress towards the SDGs had proved very challenging. As of 2021, Afghanistan did not have data for 54 per cent (91) of the 169 SDG targets and had insufficient information for measuring progress in 15 per cent of related SDG indicators. Furthermore, data is also lacking for 35 per cent of the global SDG indicators while there is insufficient data for 13.4 per cent.⁹

Based on an analysis of this limited data, it is clear that even prior to August 2021, Afghanistan had made very limited progress towards the 2030 Agenda. In 2020, the country was assessed to have achieved only 38 per cent of the progress required towards all the SDGs, placing it 139 out of 162 countries for which estimates are available. Afghanistan ranked 180 out of 191 countries in the Human Development Index in 2021, falling five places since 2015.¹⁰

Even prior to August 2021, it was projected that Afghanistan would likely only meet 15 of the 169 global SDG targets by 2030. However, the significant change in the country’s political context is likely to constrain progress even further, given the ensuing economic crisis and the regression in particular of the rights of women, children, minorities, and persons living with disabilities.

The following sections of this chapter provide an overview of Afghanistan’s progress towards the thematic areas of the SDGs structured against four of the “5 Ps” of Sustainable Development: 1) People, 2) Prosperity, 3) Planet, and 4) Peace. The fifth “P” of sustainable development — *Partnership* — is covered under Chapter 10 titled “*Stakeholder/Partnership Analysis*”.

Figure 1: Progress Towards the SDGs



Source: Statistical Data Management Unit, ESCAP (2020)

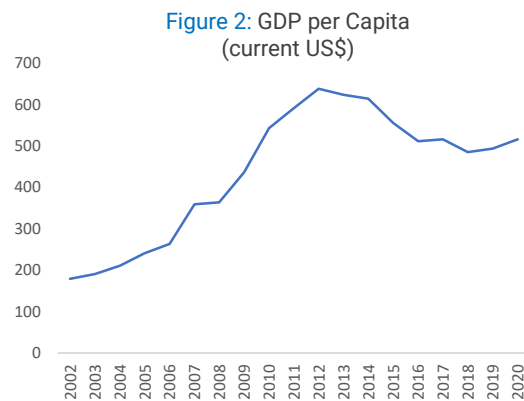
⁹ UNESCAP, *SDG Data Availability*, 2021.

¹⁰ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2021/2022*, September 2022.

3.1 Social Development Analysis (People)

No Poverty

Per capita income in Afghanistan stood at US\$ 517 in 2020 (current US\$), making Afghanistan one of the poorest countries in the world.¹¹ However, the World Bank predicted in May 2022 that Afghanistan's GDP per capita (at constant 2015 US\$) could decline by around 34 per cent between the end of 2020 and the end of 2022, reversing all progress made since 2007.¹²



While multidimensional poverty declined from 52 per cent in 2016 to 49 per cent in 2020 at

the national level, more than 50 per cent of the population in late 2020 was living below the poverty line, set as low as US\$ 1 per person per day, while around 93 per cent were living on less than US\$ 2 per person per day.¹³ The Kuchi population continued to face the highest multidimensional poverty rates at 87.4 per cent, while the rates for children stood at 54 per cent. Like urban monetary poverty, urban multidimensional poverty increased from 18 per cent in 2016 to 21.8 per cent in 2020

In 2020, 19 provinces had a prevalence of multidimensional poverty above the national average, with levels being highest in Urozgan, Helmand and Kandahar.¹⁴ Traditionally, poverty in Afghanistan has been concentrated in rural areas, with the highest levels of poverty concentrated in the country's Eastern, North-Eastern, and West-Central regions. The most recent crises are likely to widen these spatial inequalities, which in turn could both increase resource-based conflicts at the local level and become root causes of new conflicts in the long-term.

However, this situation has likely further deteriorated as a result of the current economic crisis following the events of August 2021. Surveys found that the average monthly household income in March 2022 stood at just AFN 6,495 (around US\$ 73), an 18 per cent decline from September 2021, with levels being considerably lower in rural areas (AFN 6,231) compared to urban areas (AFN 7,458).¹⁵

The combined effects of the economic crisis, drought, unemployment, and high food prices are forcing Afghan families to resort to emergency livelihood coping strategies. Over 70 per cent of households are resorting to emergency or crisis strategies, with this figure increasing to 85 per cent for female headed households.¹⁶ Recent assessments suggest that the most prevalent stress or crisis coping strategies include borrowing food or money for food; child labour; depleting savings; selling household assets and/or livestock; and reducing expenditures on health and education, with the most commonplace emergency coping strategy being reliance on charity and/or begging.¹⁷

¹¹ World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files.

¹² Reuters, *Outlook for Afghan economy 'dire' as household incomes shrink - World Bank*, 13 April 2022.

¹³ OCHA, *Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2021*, January 2021.

¹⁴ Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority, *Income and Labor Force Survey 2020*, April 2021.

¹⁵ REACH, *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022*, 2022.

¹⁶ WFP, *Pre-Lean Seasonal Assessment*, 2022.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Indebtedness is also a major factor in decision making for households, both for internal displacement and cross-border movements. The average amount of accumulated debt among households in communities affected by displacement is US\$ 471.¹⁸ Alarming, extreme coping strategies, albeit not widespread, were reported in certain areas, including child labour, child marriage, and the sale of children and body organs.¹⁹

Even prior to August 2021, Afghanistan had some of the lowest social protection coverage and spending globally.²⁰ The Government spent less than 1.5 per cent of GDP on contributory and non-contributory safety nets.²¹ While the overall coverage of contributory and non-contributory social protection reached around 12.5 per cent of the population,²² only 5.8 per cent of the bottom two quintiles were covered by some type of social safety net.²³ Moreover, the lack of childcare and eldercare has direct implications on the capacities of women to engage in productive activities.

The Public Sector Pensions Programme, established during the Republic, was the only social insurance programme in the country, with around 150,000 recipients, pensioners, and their survivors.²⁴ The pensions programme is yet to resume after August 2021. The Martyrs and Disabled Pension Programme, a non-contributory safety net reaching about 121,000 recipients (as of September 2022), targets persons with disabilities, primarily focused on physical disabilities and all families of martyrs. Registration of beneficiaries is ongoing in Kabul and 10 other provinces where payments have resumed and is planned to be rolled out to all 34 provinces.

Formal national identity documentation is the foundation from which the population relates with its administrators and services and forms the basis for access to services and social protection benefits, including for women, children, and minorities. However, 56 per cent of households in Afghanistan have members that are missing civil documentation, thereby putting them at a disadvantage in benefitting from support services.²⁵

UN-supported efforts towards the development of a comprehensive national social protection policy stalled in July 2021, although international partners, including the UN and the World Bank, continue to provide cash-for-work, cash transfers, and in-kind support across the country, forming a safety net for the most vulnerable. While such initiatives can temporarily prevent those most in need from falling deeper into crisis, sustainably tackling the various systemic drivers of multidimensional poverty will require longer-term time horizons, significant investments, and considerable changes in the political, governance, rule of law, as well as the social and economic landscape in the country — an unlikely prospect under current circumstances. As such, achieving *SDG 1: No Poverty* targets by 2030 would appear highly doubtful, with current international efforts focusing on mitigating a further deterioration in the lives of the Afghan population.

¹⁸ IOM, *CBNA R14 — Afghanistan — Community-Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results (November—December 2021)*, March 2022.

¹⁹ WFP, *Pre-Lean Seasonal Assessment*, 2022.

²⁰ ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2017-2019: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*, 2017.

²¹ World Bank staff calculations based on FY1399 budget.

²² World Bank, *Afghanistan Development Update*, 2021.

²³ World Bank staff calculations based on the Income Expenditure and Labor Force Survey 2019-2020.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ REACH, *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022*, 2022.

Zero Hunger

With the country facing one of the world's worst food insecurity and malnutrition crises, Afghanistan's progress towards achieving SDG 2 on *Zero Hunger* remains elusive. The impacts of the economic crisis, exacerbated by the Taliban takeover, have been compounded by recurring droughts, livestock and human disease outbreaks, and lingering effects of decades of conflict, as well as the ongoing Ukraine crisis on already high food prices.

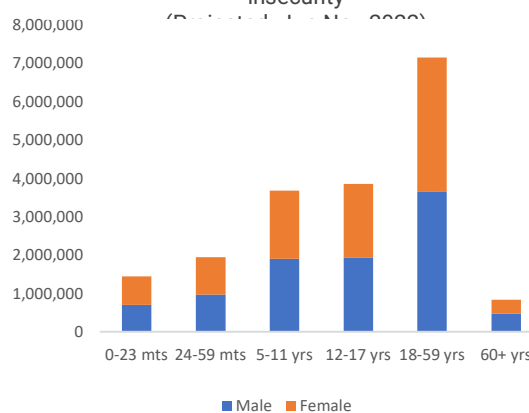
In 2022, Afghanistan has been impacted by a second consecutive year of drought conditions due to a multi-year *La Niña* phenomenon, as well as earthquakes and flash floods, while natural hazard-affected households have lost traditional sources of food and income.²⁶ In addition, pockets of conflict continue to disrupt livelihoods and drive displacement. Despite the significant scale-up in humanitarian food assistance provided since August 2021, Afghanistan remains one of the countries at greatest risk of famine conditions globally in 2022.²⁷

Nearly 17 million people were estimated to be facing life-threatening Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of acute food insecurity in September–October 2022.²⁸ Alarmingly, some 20,000 people were facing famine conditions in Ghor province as of March 2022, near the end of the typical lean season. This was the first time that famine conditions have been recorded in the country since the introduction of IPC in Afghanistan in 2014.²⁹ While affected areas of Ghor were effectively assisted after the identification of famine conditions, a heightened risk of extreme food insecurity endures nationally, at least through the 2022–2023 winter and lean season.

From November 2022 through March 2023, an estimated 46 per cent of the national population are projected to experience Crisis (nearly 14 million people) and Emergency (6 million people) levels of food insecurity, similar to the levels reported near the end of the 2021 lean season in the March 2022 IPC analysis.³⁰

A decline in the overall number of people experiencing acute food insecurity nationally — from 22.8 million³¹ (11.6 million male, 11.2 million female) between November 2021 and March 2022 to 18.9 million projected between June and November 2022 (9.6 million male, 9.2 million female) — was driven by humanitarian food assistance covering approximately 40 per cent of the

Figure 3: People experiencing acute food insecurity



²⁶ FEWS NET, July 2022 Update.

²⁷ FAO and WFP, *Hunger Hotspots FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity - June to September 2022 Outlook*, 6 June 2022; FAO and WFP, *Hunger Hotspots FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity - October 2022 to January 2023 Outlook*, 21 September 2022.

²⁸ The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a tool for improving food security analysis and decision making. It is a standardized scale that integrates food security, nutrition, and livelihood information into a statement about the nature and severity of a crisis and implications for strategic response. IPC ratings are: 1) Minimal; 2) Stressed; 3) Crisis; 4) Emergency; and 5) Catastrophe/Famine. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), Afghanistan, IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, September–October 2022, November 2022.

²⁹ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), Afghanistan, IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, March – November 2022, May 2022. *Afghanistan IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, September 2021 – March 2022*, 25 October 2021.

³⁰ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), Afghanistan, IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, September–October 2022, November 2022.

³¹ IPC, *Afghanistan IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, September 2021 – March 2022*, 25 October 2021.

population between March and May 2022.³² Without such a massive surge in humanitarian food assistance, the magnitude and severity of food security needs would likely have been dramatically higher. Notwithstanding this, all 34 provinces in Afghanistan continue to face crisis or emergency levels of acute food insecurity.³³

Wheat is the most important crop in Afghanistan, with the cereal and its related products providing an estimated 61 per cent per cent of available kilocalories per capita nationwide as of 2019.³⁴ The estimated national wheat deficit was approximately 40 per cent for 2022. Although this may be significantly higher when requirements are considered against the Flowminder 2022 population estimate.³⁵ Forecasts of a rare triple-dip *La Niña* make below-average precipitation across Afghanistan in late 2022 and early 2023 likely.³⁶ This would lead to the continuation of drought conditions for the third consecutive year nationally, negatively impacting the 2022–2023 agricultural season.³⁷

According to the 2022 REACH Whole of Afghanistan Assessment, 90 per cent of households indicated food as their primary need followed by livelihoods, employment, and healthcare. In addition, the 2022 Pre-Lean Seasonal Assessment indicates that 53 per cent of households experience poor food consumption and 21 per cent severe and very severe hunger.³⁸

Food insecurity in Afghanistan — as in other crises globally — continues to be heavily gendered, with half of female headed households having a poor food consumption score compared to 39 per cent of male headed households.³⁹ Other assessments indicate that 69 per cent of households in communities affected by displacement cannot afford their basic food needs.⁴⁰

Ninety-six per cent of female-headed households are facing insufficient food consumption.⁴¹ To mitigate some of these food gaps, households are forced to resort to negative coping strategies, including consuming less preferred and less expensive food, limiting portion sizes and frequency of meals, and borrowing or begging for food.⁴² In addition, when food is short, children are prioritized over adults, and then male family members have preference over female family members, leaving women to eat last.⁴³

Ripple effects from the crisis in Ukraine threaten to deepen food insecurity in Afghanistan as the price of basic food commodities, fuel, and agricultural inputs surge. As of July 2022, the price of wheat flour has increased by nearly 50 per cent compared to the same time last year, with an increase of 15 per cent since February alone.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the price of rice and vegetable oil have both increased by 36 per cent compared to the same time last year. Diesel and fertilizer costs in some instances have more

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), Afghanistan, IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, September–October 2022, November 2022.

³⁴ FAO, *FAOStat*, 15 July 2022 (Accessed 15/10/2022).

³⁵ FAO and MAIL, *Agriculture Prospects Report – Afghanistan (Preliminary)*, September 2022. (Made available to the IPC TWG in September 2022)

³⁶ Climate Prediction Center, National Weather Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) Diagnostic Discussion*, 13 October 2022.

³⁷ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), Afghanistan, IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, September–October 2022, November 2022.

³⁸ WFP, *Pre-Lean Seasonal Assessment*, 2022.

³⁹ REACH, *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022*, 2022.

⁴⁰ IOM, *CBNA R14 — Community-Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results (November–December 2021)*, March 2022.

⁴¹ WFP, *Afghanistan Situation Report*, 17 February 2022.

⁴² WFP, *Pre-Lean Seasonal Assessment*, 2022.

⁴³ World Bank, *Situation of Rural Afghan Women: A Gender Monitoring Survey*, April 2022.

⁴⁴ WFP, *Afghanistan Countrywide Monthly Market Price Bulletin: Issue 113*, 26 July 2022.

than doubled in the last year.⁴⁵ Between August 2021 and August 2022, the average cost of the food basket increased by 38 per cent.⁴⁶ As a result, 73 per cent of families across the country reported significant increases in the prices of food commodities as one of the main shocks affecting their households.⁴⁷

The nutrition situation continues to be particularly dire, with economic access being one of the primary barriers to adequately nutritious diets, particularly for women and persons living with disabilities. Approximately 4.7 million children and pregnant and lactating women are at risk of acute malnutrition in 2022, while 3.9 million children are acutely malnourished.⁴⁸ Malnutrition is the primary risk factor driving morbidity, mortality, and potential disability in children and overall human capital development losses in Afghanistan. In addition, access to healthcare for treatment of malnutrition was limited, particularly in rural areas due to remoteness and highly restrictive cultural norms that jeopardize the health and wellbeing of women and girls, as well as in underserved urban environments.

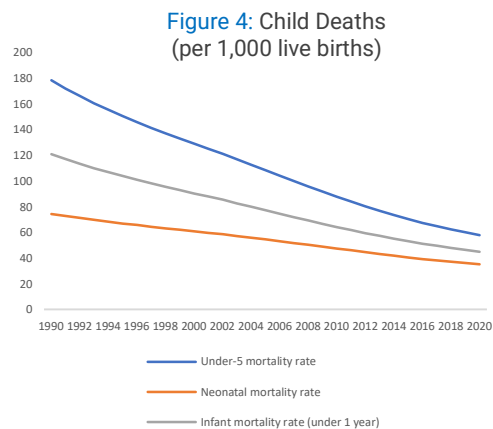
Given the severity and scope of the food crisis in Afghanistan, immediate assistance at scale is critical to reduce morbidity and mortality, as well as to provide the necessary conditions to enable recovery.

Good Health and Wellbeing

The last two decades had seen increasing healthcare coverage across the country, with public health services having expanded substantially, especially primary healthcare, although health expenditures remained a heavy burden on households. In 2019, government finances constituted only 3.4 per cent of total healthcare expenditures in the country, with 19.6 per cent coming from donor contributions and 77 per cent from household out-of-pocket spending.⁴⁹

Improvements in health service delivery over the past two decades resulted in improved health outcomes across a number of areas. Life expectancy at birth increased from 56 years in 2000 to 65 in 2020.⁵⁰ There have been significant decreases in neonatal, infant, and child mortality rates over the same period.⁵¹

While still amongst the highest in the world, the maternal mortality rate significantly decreased from 1,450 per 100,000 live births to 638 per 100,000 live births between 2000–2017, representing a 56 per cent decline.⁵² This is primarily attributed to improved access to reproductive



⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ REACH, *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022*, 2022.

⁴⁸ WFP, *Afghanistan Situation Report*, 15 September 2022.

⁴⁹ *De Facto Ministry of Public Health, National Health Accounts Report 2019*, December 2021.

⁵⁰ (1) UN Population Division. *World Population Prospects: 2019 Revision* or derived from male and female life expectancy at birth from sources such as: (2) Census reports and other statistical publications from national statistical offices, (3) Eurostat: Demographic Statistics, (4) UN Statistical Division. *Population and Vital Statistics Report* (various years), (5) U.S. Census Bureau: International Database, and (6) Secretariat of the Pacific Community: Statistics and Demography Programme.

⁵¹ UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, 2020.

⁵² *Trend in Maternal Mortality 2000 to 2017*. Estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and the UN Population Division. Range of MMR uncertainty between 427 -1010 lower/upper

healthcare services that include pre- and post-natal care and deliveries attended by skilled birth attendants.

The share of births attended by trained medical personnel rose from 12 per cent in 2000 to 62 per cent in 2020.⁵³ Fifty-six per cent of deliveries now take place in public hospitals or clinics and private health facilities, ranging from 85 per cent in urban areas to 47 per cent in rural areas.⁵⁴ The proportion of pregnant women who had at least one ante-natal examination increased from 16 per cent in the early 2000s to 69 per cent by 2020, although only 28 per cent had four or more visits by a skilled healthcare provider in 2020.⁵⁵

An additional positive development was the increased number of women workers in the medical professions, especially the midwifery, as an important factor for increasing women’s access to health services and facilities where cultural norms dictate that contact with men be avoided.⁵⁶

However, improvements outlined above are currently at-risk with increased mobility restrictions for women as users and providers of health services, which threatens future progress and increases the likelihood of a regression of previous gains. In addition, girls’ education is a critical factor in the health and wellbeing of women and girls and for improving maternal and child mortality rates.

Much of the development funding, including for the health sector, was paused following the events of August 2021, threatening fundamental and life-saving healthcare services. In addition, the *de facto authorities* stopped funding tertiary and hospital care. A full collapse of the health system was averted thanks to donors and international organizations off-budget funding redirected through UN agencies and international NGOs. The resilience of the model of care — whereby services are delivered by a third party — has proven to be resilient, with services rebounding in 2022, following a modest decline in the second half of 2021, once funding was provided. Furthermore, service delivery volume in the past year has generally exceeded that of 2019, when the former government was in place and before the COVID-19 pandemic (*see Table 1 below*), highlighting the issue of sustainability of service delivery and prioritization in domestic and external resource allocation.⁵⁷

Table 1: Changes in Health Service Delivery Volume

Timeframes	Antenatal care visits		Caesarean sections		Institutional deliveries		Growth monitoring & Infant & young child feeding		Major surgeries		Pentavalent 3 vaccinations	
	No.	Change	No.	Change	No.	Change	No.	Change	No.	Change	No.	Change
Jan-Jun 2019	1,333,260	Baseline	10,571	Baseline	328,016	Baseline	2,111,461	Baseline	30,797	Baseline	557,120	Baseline
Jul-Dec 2019	1,447,824	8.6%	11,244	6.4%	335,356	2.2%	2,854,063	35.2%	34,260	11.2%	574,940	3.2%
Jan-Jun 2020	1,422,071	6.7%	12,416	17.5%	372,000	13.4%	2,968,305	40.6%	29,001	-5.8%	554,906	-0.4%
Jul-Dec 2020	1,614,230	21.1%	14,759	39.6%	372,970	13.7%	3,421,699	62.1%	37,852	22.9%	616,406	10.6%
Jan-Jun 2021	1,670,465	25.3%	17,848	68.8%	421,207	28.4%	3,761,252	78.1%	40,020	29.9%	613,476	10.1%
Jul-Dec 2021	1,547,596	16.1%	13,173	24.6%	366,178	11.6%	3,093,946	46.5%	33,669	9.3%	520,681	-6.5%
Jan-Jun 2022	1,728,409	29.6%	14,596	38.1%	393,096	19.8%	3,205,929	51.8%	35,084	13.9%	563,432	1.1%

* Note: All percentage changes are relative to the baseline timeframe (Jan-Jun 2019)

⁵³ Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority, *Income and Labour Force Survey 2020*, April 2021.

⁵⁴ KIT Royal Tropical Institute, *Afghanistan Health Survey 2018*, April 2019.

⁵⁵ Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority, *Income and Labour Force Survey 2020*, April 2021, (p. 135).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* (Table 8.3).

⁵⁷ Health Management Information System data verified by third-party monitor.

Fifty-seven per cent of the population has access to a health facility within 30 minutes, while cumulatively over 90 per cent could reach a facility within two hours.⁵⁸ However, four in five communities do not have a health clinic in their locations. When healthcare is available, one in five households does not visit a healthcare provider when they are ill due to poor quality or lack of medicine, services, and staff.⁵⁹ The proportion of households reporting barriers to accessing healthcare services increased from 66 per cent to 80 per cent between August/September 2021 and the same period in 2022. Financial barriers were more prominent among urban households while unavailability of healthcare facilities was cited in rural areas.⁶⁰

Despite increased access to, and utilization of routine immunization services, vaccine preventable diseases remain a major public health concern in Afghanistan. The overall immunization coverage remained low in 2021,⁶¹ with disparities throughout the country, particularly between rural and urban areas and secure and insecure zones. According to UN estimates, between 400,000–600,000 eligible children lost all their vaccinations in 2021. The continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic and poor access and utilization of routine immunization services have further impacted immunization programmes.

Afghanistan remains only one of the two remaining countries in the world where polio is endemic. While tremendous progress has been made towards eradicating the disease, with only four recorded cases in 2021, and two in 2022 compared to 56 in 2020, immunity gaps in most vulnerable areas of the country remain.

Tuberculosis remains a major public health issue with estimates of 75,000 cases and about 11,000 deaths caused by the disease in 2020, mostly women.⁶² Afghanistan remains a high malaria burden country, with 77 per cent of the population living in at-risk areas while 27 per cent live in the six high-risk provinces.⁶³ There were an estimated 11,000 cases of HIV in the country in 2021,⁶⁴ mostly concentrated among injecting drug users and sex workers. Afghanistan has also a substantial hepatitis prevalence, particularly among injecting drug users, men and women with high-risk behaviours, and refugees from Iran and Pakistan.

As of 4 November 2022, there have been 203,311 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 7,823 deaths (cumulative case fatality rate of 3.9 per cent) since the beginning of the pandemic,⁶⁵ however, these numbers are likely underreported. Just over 10 million people in the country, around 26 per cent of the population, are fully vaccinated against the virus.⁶⁶

The burden of non-communicable diseases is escalating in Afghanistan. While there is no recent information, in 2010 about 46 per cent of mortality in Afghanistan was mainly due to cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, respiratory diseases, and injuries.⁶⁷

⁵⁸ KIT Royal Tropical Institute, *Afghanistan Health Survey 2018*, April 2019.

⁵⁹ IOM, *CBNA R14 — Community-Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results (November—December 2021)*, March 2022.

⁶⁰ REACH, *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022*, 2022.

⁶¹ Penta3 coverage was 66 per cent and measles-containing-vaccine first-dose at 63 per cent (UN estimates).

⁶² WHO, *Tuberculosis profile: Afghanistan*, 2020.

⁶³ WHO, *World Malaria Report, 2019*.

⁶⁴ UNAIDS, *Afghanistan Country Profile*, 2021.

⁶⁵ WHO, *Afghanistan COVID-19 Country Dashboard*.

⁶⁶ WHO, COVID-19 Epidemiological Bulletin Afghanistan: Epidemiological Week 38 (18 – 24 Sep 2022).

⁶⁷ Afghan Public Health Institute, Ministry of Public Health, Central Statistics Organization, *National Mortality Survey 2010, 2011*.

A 2021 survey found more than half of households had members suffering psychological or mental health problems.⁶⁸ Many Afghans, particularly adolescents, have sustained serious psychological trauma and have resorted to substance use as a result of the prolonged conflict.⁶⁹ Between 2.5 and 2.9 million Afghans use some form of narcotic drug, with between 1.9 and 2.3 million using opiates.⁷⁰ With the lack of access to adequate health care services, especially in rural areas, some drug use also occurs in the context of self-medication to treat physical pain and psychological distress. Evidence suggests that the production and use of narcotic drugs has increased since the Taliban takeover.

The 2021 CCA suggested that if past trends and policy support were to continue, it would be possible to achieve maternal mortality and sexual and reproductive health targets, although the situation was less optimistic concerning child mortality, communicable diseases, health financing, and more effective management of health risks. The likelihood of achieving *SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing* by 2030 was deemed to be out of reach. However, developments over the past year mean that any previous projections must be reassessed to account for the significant deterioration in the country context in general and the health sector in particular.

Quality Education

Despite significant gains made in access to education over the last 20 years,⁷¹ structural challenges around the school environment, the quality of teaching and learning, and support systems remain and have affected equitable access and learning outcomes. Despite a tenfold growth in enrolment, nearly one-third of the total school-age population are out of school, 60 per cent of whom are girls.⁷² In the past three years, children's learning has been interrupted by elections, natural disasters, COVID-19, military offensives and occupation of schools, terrorist attacks, economic crisis, and the more recent ban on girls' secondary education.⁷³ At the same time, the demand for education, for both girls and boys, at community level is high and increased access provides opportunities to reach children not reached before.

Schools reopened in September 2021 after closure due to the third wave of COVID-19, with 5.8 million children returning to primary school children (including 2.3 million girls) and 1.8 million boys to secondary education.⁷⁴ The Taliban requested secondary school girls to stay at home until further notice. Contrary to prior commitments, on 23 March 2022, the Taliban announced that secondary schools would remain closed to girls, excluding an estimated 1.1 million girls from secondary education.⁷⁵ Combined with the COVID-related school closures, this means that secondary-level girls are now missing a second year of education (compared to boys).

⁶⁸ Save the Children, *Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment*, 2022.

⁶⁹ Mohd Saleem, et al., (2022) 'The children of Afghanistan need urgent mental health support', *the Lancet (online)*, 18 February 2022.

⁷⁰ U.S. Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2015.

⁷¹ Participation in education increased from less than one million in school in 2000 (with less than 10 per cent girls) to around 9.9 million students (39 per cent girls) in 2019. Progress has been made in terms of gender equitable participation as well. While there were fewer than 100,000 girls in school in 2001, in 2019, an estimated 3.5 million girls were enrolled. Resultantly, the female literacy rate rapidly doubled between 2011 and 2018. In 2018, an estimated 400,000 students enrolled in higher education (both public and private) of which 24.6 per cent were women.

⁷² 'Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey' in *Afghanistan Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) Key Statistical Indicators* (2020).

⁷³ Schools were closed since March 2020 due to COVID-19 and were disrupted by conflict escalation in 2021.

⁷⁴ Based on 2019 Education Management Information System data.

⁷⁵ Since September 2021, a number of provinces and districts continued to provide secondary education for girls – while the situation is fluid and some have been closed again, sometimes after months of having been functioning, the number of schools open is slowly increasing thanks to the persistence of local communities.

No meaningful steps to reopen all secondary schools to girls have been taken to date,⁷⁶ although girls continue to attend secondary school in some provinces and districts (albeit not consistently within regions).⁷⁷ The absence of universal access to education is a symptom of the broader architecture that curtails women’s rights, impacts meaningful engagement in public life, and further undermines future economic development. Increased poverty levels, attitudes towards girls’ education (particularly after August 2021), child marriage, violence and harassment, and a reduction of female teachers further disproportionately affect girls’ access to school. Furthermore, 15 per cent of households reporting having experienced an economic shock, highlighted the loss of access to education for their children as a consequence.⁷⁸

There has been a 25 per cent increase in attacks on schools, from 50 in the first nine months of 2021 to 67 over the corresponding period in 2022.⁷⁹ These incidents include both attacks deliberately targeting schools and attacks causing incidental harm to premises and personnel. More than 11,300 children (including 4,320 girls) were indirectly affected by these attacks, including the killing and maiming of 54 children during this period.⁸⁰ The *de facto* authorities remain the party with the highest number of verified cases where schools were occupied by their forces resulting in destruction or damages.

Moreover, Afghan children are not learning. For the children enrolled in primary school, 93 per cent in the late primary grades are living in ‘learning poverty’ — unable to read and understand a simple text by the age of 10 years.⁸¹ After spending four years in primary school, around 65 per cent of Afghan students have only mastered the grade one language curriculum and less than half have mastered the grade one mathematics curriculum.^{82, 83, 84} Only half of Afghan youth (15–24 years old) are literate.⁸⁵ The reasons behind the low performance are complex, relating to an education system lacking in all key school-level determinants of learning. In addition, unprecedented food insecurity and malnutrition levels make retention and cognitive development even more difficult for Afghan children.

Following the Taliban’s takeover on 15 August 2021, the education system faces unprecedented challenges. Pre-August, the education system was fragile and aid dependent with over half of core public expenditure in 2019 financed through donor funding (including towards payment of teacher salaries). Donor commitments to on-budget and development financing have been put on hold, though *de facto* authorities have been able to finance teacher salaries since August 2022,⁸⁶ albeit with delay and in batches of two months at the time. However, due to a lack of budget transparency, it is unclear to what extent the *de facto* authorities will be able to sustain these expenditures.

UNICEF/UNESCO/Afghanistan Education Cluster, 2022. [Back to School Situation Update: April 2022/August 2022](#); UNGA. [The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security](#).

⁷⁶ UNICEF (2021), *Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Afghanistan* (forthcoming).

⁷⁷ Certain provinces have been able to reopen secondary schools for girls, though without the support of the central authorities.

⁷⁸ REACH, *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022*, 2022.

⁷⁹ In line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005) on Children and Armed Conflict — which established the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations committed against children in times of armed conflict — attacks on schools are defined as “targeted or indiscriminate attacks resulting in the partial or complete destruction of educational infrastructures considered as civilian objects. This includes, but is not limited to, destructions resulting from targeted attacks, indiscriminate fire, shelling, looting or pillaging”.

⁸⁰ Information from the Country Task Force of Monitoring and Reporting of Grave Violations against children (CTFMRM)

⁸¹ UNESCO, [The right to education: What is at stake in Afghanistan? A 20-year review](#), 2021.

⁸² World Bank, [Afghanistan Learning Poverty Brief](#), October 2019.

⁸³ By grade three, only 22 per cent of Afghan students obtain minimum proficiency in reading, and only 25 per cent in mathematics. From [UIS data](#), ‘2016 Monitoring Trends in Educational Growth assessment’ retrieved Oct 2021).

⁸⁴ Using the Learning-adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS) metric, boys receive 5.3 years whereas girls receive 3.8 years

⁸⁵ World Bank (2018), [Afghanistan: Promoting Education During Times of Increased Fragility](#), 2018.

⁸⁶ This includes the emergency support through UNICEF for the months of January and February 2022.

As development funding has now been largely paused or redirected towards specific interventions — such as the scale-up of community-based education and provision of teaching and learning materials to public schools — the already under-funded public education system has become even more stretched, with limited funding available to provide technical support to teachers⁸⁷ or invest in neglected infrastructure. Continued lack of investment in public education puts the education of both the more than seven million children in school at risk, as well as the 600,000 children supported through an expanded community-based education programme, as public schools have no capacity to absorb new students. In addition, community-based education expansion is undertaken with emergency humanitarian funding in areas where there are no schools and without a clear prospect of longer-term financing.

Higher education and the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system also face unique challenges as financial and social barriers restrict access, especially for women. Public and private TVET institutes and high schools generally reopened in March 2022. However, a small number of TVET institutes remain closed and are being used as military bases, with others converted into Madrasas.⁸⁸ Women remain unable to access or teach in TVET institutions.

In August 2021, most public universities halted operations, while many private universities remained open, conducting separate classes for female and male students. However, overall attendance in private universities has markedly dropped, impacting the financial sustainability of these institutions. Most families and students have difficulty paying the tuition fees of private universities or even to afford the cost of public higher education. Universities and other higher education institutions have also suffered from the departure of their teaching staff, with consequences for the quality of education being provided. Public and private universities resumed operations in February 2022, with both female and male students in attendance but separated by shifts, partitions/curtains in classrooms, entering the campuses through different entrances, and with strict dress codes imposed on women. In addition, women are now only allowed to choose from a limited number of areas of study.⁸⁹

As public schools continue to lack the support received under the previous government, there may be a risk of the demand for education generated over the last two decades reducing, which could lead to an increased number of children permanently out of school and the continued 'learning poverty' of children. There is a need to strengthen the support to education beyond humanitarian response through enhancing a nexus approach that ensures continuity of participation and improves low levels of learning outcomes. This requires medium-term flexible funding to safeguard the public education system in a manner that facilitates the return of girls and inclusion of out-of-school children.

Without financial and technical support to the public education system, all 8.9 million children in public education are affected in the continuity of their learning and are at-risk of dropping out of education. In addition, if the ban on girls' secondary education is not reversed, the future of half of the population is at risk, with severe implications for the longer-term development and growth of the country.

⁸⁷ Support in this context refers to in-service teacher training and lack of (academic) supervision.

⁸⁸ UNICEF, UNESCO, Education Cluster, *Afghanistan Education Situation Report*, 15 August 2022.

⁸⁹ BBC News, *Afghanistan: Taliban ban women from many university subjects*, 15 October 2022.

Gender Equality

Since 15 August 2021 there has been a clear backslide on inroads made in gender equality in the last 20 years, with development defined by increasingly unequal social, political, and economic power dynamics between women and men, significantly limiting opportunities for progressing on SDG 5 on *Gender Equality*.⁹⁰ Afghanistan ranked 167 out of 191 countries in the 2021 Gender Inequality Index⁹¹ — although much of the data underpinning this predates the Taliban takeover — and ranked last against the 146 countries assessed in the World Economic Forum’s 2022 Global Gender Gap Index.⁹²

Women’s lives and prospects are largely confined to the home, increasing their vulnerability in a context marked by a restrictive interpretation of Islamic laws that undermines the fulfillment of women’s rights and limits availability of services and personnel addressing the specific needs of women and girls. The latter also limits women’s access to justice to effectively redress and deter violations of their rights.

A decree on 7 May 2022 advised women to remain confined to the home, except in cases of necessity during which they are required to cover themselves with a *hijab*, including the entire face except the eyes.⁹³ Earlier decrees related to freedom of movement, escalating in severity, included requiring a *mahram* (escort, usually a male relative) to travel with women further than 45 miles from home⁹⁴ or on domestic and international air travel,⁹⁵ vague *hijab* requirements,⁹⁶ and various decrees requiring gender segregation in public spaces.⁹⁷ The enforcement of these decrees by authorities is highly varied at the sub-national level, contributing to an environment of confusion and fear. Male relatives have been made responsible for the enforcement of the *hijab* decree, which reinforces male dominance and control over women’s lives, while also placing these relatives at risk of unclear and varied punishments.

Widows and female headed households face challenges complying with *mahram* requirements, which risk eliminating possibilities of employment for female headed households, and who already face disproportionate economic hardship, food insecurity and are more likely to have a child working outside the home.⁹⁸

Nearly nine out of ten women have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime.⁹⁹ According to the 2015 Afghanistan Demographic Health Survey, 52 per cent of ever-married women have suffered from spousal violence, whether physical (46 per cent); sexual (6 per cent); or emotional (34 per cent). Fifty-three per cent of women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15 years, and 16 per cent of women between aged 15 to 49 years reported that they experienced violence during pregnancy. Eighty per cent of ever-married women and 72 per cent of ever-married men believed that a husband is justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances.

⁹⁰ See 2021 CCA for analysis of progress and women’s rights issues prior to the Taliban takeover.

⁹¹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2021/2022*, September 2022.

⁹² World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2022*, July 2022.

⁹³ Clarke, K., Rahimi, S. ‘We need to breathe too’: Women across Afghanistan navigate the Taliban’s hijab ruling’, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 1 June 2022.

⁹⁴ France24, *No trips for Afghan women unless escorted by male relative: Taliban*, 26 December 2021.

⁹⁵ France24, *Taliban ban Afghan women flying alone in latest setback on rights*, 26 March 2022.

⁹⁶ The Khaama Press, *Taliban stuck banners across Kabul to recommend hijab for women*, 10 January 2022.

⁹⁷ Al Jazeera, *Afghan public universities reopen with gender segregated classes*, 26 February 2022; and Hindustan Times, *Taliban’s segregation rules for Afghanistan’s amusement parks: men on 4 days, women on 3*, 28 March 2022.

⁹⁸ REACH, *Mid-Year Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022*, 2022.

⁹⁹ Global Rights, *Living with Violence: A National Report on Domestic Abuse in Afghanistan, 2008*; and ; UNAMA and OHCHR, *Silence is Violence: end the abuse against Afghan women, 2009*.

Since August 2021, gender-based violence risk factors have worsened, including confinement of women to the home, *mahram* requirements, economic pressure, erosion of women's rights. Consequently, many healthcare providers have reported increases in cases of gender-based violence. Child and forced marriages have increased despite a decree issued by the *de facto* authorities in December 2021 on women's rights forbidding forced marriage.¹⁰⁰ However, the UN has recorded instances where *de facto* authorities — including judges, provincial governors, and others — have been involved in upholding forced marriages. Drivers include economic pressure and a lack of educational and professional prospects for girls.

Thirty-six per cent of girls enter into marriage by the age of 18 and experience early motherhood, resulting in high maternal and infant mortality rates. Pregnancy complications and unsafe abortions were responsible for 64.2 per cent of female deaths among 15 to 19-year-olds and 69.9 per cent among 20 to 24-year-olds. Access to sexual and reproductive health services is also becoming increasingly difficult due to movement restrictions on women outside their homes, compounding risks to their health and wellbeing.

The costs of increasing gender inequality are tremendous. Suicide rates among women have reportedly increased;¹⁰¹ mortality rates, including maternal mortality, are expected to rise; overall economic losses due to loss of female employment are estimated up to US\$ 1 billion (five per cent of GDP).¹⁰² The combined effect of gender-specific restrictions will be far-reaching, shutting women out of access to services, knowledge, and dignity.

Since the Taliban takeover, women have been largely erased from politics and public life. The current governance structure is exclusively male and serves to create an environment where women are absent and consolidates norms around male leadership. All members of the "care-taker cabinet" announced on 7 September 2021, as well as all 34 provincial governors, are men.¹⁰³ The Ministry for Women's Affairs was abolished in September 2021 and the *de facto* Ministry for Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice reinstated, tasked with enforcing the instructions issued towards promoting high morality and religious values in compliance with the Taliban's restrictive interpretation of Islamic law.

Many women-led civil society organizations (CSOs) have closed in the past year and 77 per cent are no longer running any projects in 2022.¹⁰⁴ Organizations that continue to operate face intimidation and threats, significant cash and banking issues, bureaucratic constraints around registration, and challenges around movement.¹⁰⁵ On 21 May 2022, a nationwide order targeted women journalists, requiring them to cover their faces while on air.¹⁰⁶ Estimates in December 2021 put the number of women journalists at 410 (compared with 3,950 men), from a total of 2,490 (compared with 8,290 men) six months earlier.

¹⁰⁰ Afghanistan Ministry of Information and Culture, *Special decree issued By Amir Al-Momenin on women's rights*, 3 December 2021.

¹⁰¹ UN News, *In Afghanistan, women take their lives out of desperation, Human Rights Council hears*, 1 July 2022.

¹⁰² UNDP, *Afghanistan: Socio-Economic Outlook 2021-2022*, 1 December 2021.

¹⁰³ Before 15 August 2021, the lower house contained 249 parliamentary seats, of which 68 (27 per cent) were reserved for women through a gender quota enshrined in the 2004 Constitution. In July 2020, more opportunities were opened by a presidential decree reserving the position of Deputy Provincial Governor for Social Affairs in all 34 provinces for women.

¹⁰⁴ IRC and UN Women, *Research on Challenges, Barriers and Opportunities for Women-led CSOs in the Afghanistan's Humanitarian Crisis*, 15 June 2022.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ United Nations, *Afghanistan: Taliban orders women to stay home; cover up in public*, 7 May 2022.

Over 5.5 million women and 6.3 million girls were estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance at the beginning of 2022.¹⁰⁷ Women’s access to aid is limited due to gender segregation at and en route to distribution points and *mahram* requirements, lack of civil documentation, and unmet sanitation and healthcare needs. Compounding these barriers are the impact of gender-specific mobility restrictions facing women humanitarian workers who are vital — both in the planning and distribution — to ensure humanitarian assistance reaches the most vulnerable groups.

Consequently, Afghan women and girls live in a new and very grim reality where they are disproportionately affected by the humanitarian and economic crisis and the emerging environment of repression.

Clean Water and Sanitation

Water availability in Afghanistan has already been drastically reduced, both in terms of surface and groundwater, due to changes in precipitation patterns along with unsustainable use of water and wetlands. This is posing a serious threat to ecosystems productivity, food production, and domestic use. The cumulative effects of more frequent and intense droughts on reservoirs and groundwater are threatening the water supply to entire communities specifically in the arid regions of Afghanistan, leading to a range of humanitarian crises, including disease, population displacement, and conflict, with implications for the country’s ability to make adequate progress towards *SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation*.

Notwithstanding the above, access to improved water services increased from about 27 per cent in 2000 to 67 per cent in 2019.¹⁰⁸ Survey findings from 2022 indicate that access to an adequate source of drinking water is nearly universal for urban households (99 per cent) compared to rural ones (74 per cent). However, the proportion of households accessing to safely managed services¹⁰⁹ is much lower, standing at 36.4 per cent in urban areas compared to 24.5 per cent in rural areas.¹¹⁰ Additionally, average household monthly water expenditure is much higher in urban settings (AFN 259) compared to rural areas (AFN 40).¹¹¹ More than 55 per cent of all households affected by displacement reported a shortage of clean drinking water in late 2021.¹¹²

Despite improved access to basic water drinking water sources, water quality remains a challenge. About 67 per cent of drinking water sources had faecal contamination in Afghanistan in 2020 while 64 per cent of the improved water sources were contaminated. The quality of the water further deteriorates between point of collection to the point of consumption leaving 82 per cent of the population drinking faecal contaminated water. About 73 per cent of the households obtaining water from piped systems consume faecal contaminated water. Only 33 per cent of the water sources are free from contamination leaving only 17 per cent (about 30 per cent in urban areas and 13 per cent in rural areas) of the population with access to safely managed drinking water.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ OCHA, *Humanitarian Response Plan 2022*, January 2022.

¹⁰⁸ WHO/UNICEF, *Joint Monitoring Programme*, 2019.

¹⁰⁹ Water from improved source and available on premises and available when needed and free from fecal and chemical contamination

¹¹⁰ WHO and UNICEF, *Joint Monitoring Programme*, 2020.

¹¹¹ REACH, *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022*, 2022.

¹¹² IOM, *CBNA R14 — Community-Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results (November—December 2021)*, March 2022.. Other less prominent barriers to accessing clean water are unequal access (4%), high influx of populations (3%), and security threats (2%).

¹¹³ Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority, *Income and Labor Force Survey 2020*, April 2021.

Around 25 per cent of households have access to basic sanitation. Sixty-seven per cent of those surveyed in 2020 reported access to improved sanitation facilities.¹¹⁴ However, 53 per cent of rural households reported using unimproved latrines compared to 26 per cent for urban households, while 31 per cent reported not having access to soap compared to 13 per cent for urban households.¹¹⁵ About 12 per cent of households still practice open defecation, with rates as high as 71 per cent amongst the Kuchi community.¹¹⁶ Additionally, 76 per cent of persons in communities affected by displacement lack access to safe latrine facilities.¹¹⁷ Access to improved sanitation in urban areas is also low, at 29 per cent. No Afghan city has a comprehensive sewerage system, with only 29 per cent of urban households having access to improved sanitation facilities.¹¹⁸

In urban areas, the worsening economic situation has left poor households unable to pay for their water services and service providers unable to sustain water treatment and delivery due to reduced revenues and budgets.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ REACH, *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022*, 2022.

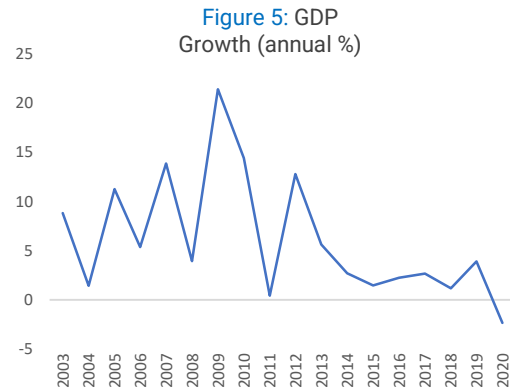
¹¹⁶ Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority, *Income and Labor Force Survey 2020*, April 2021.

¹¹⁷ IOM, *CBNA R14 — Community-Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results (November—December 2021)*, March 2022.

¹¹⁸ Habitat III, *Afghanistan Country Report for Habitat III*, 2015.

3.2 Economic Transformation Analysis (*Prosperity*)

Economic growth in Afghanistan before the Taliban takeover was predicated on large inflows of foreign aid, accounting for around 40 per cent of GDP in 2020.¹¹⁹ While inflows of aid benefitted the services sector, they had detrimental effects on other sectors, namely agriculture and manufacturing. The highly uncompetitive exchange rate, maintained by the massive inflows of aid, meant that domestic agriculture lost out to cheap imports, while manufacturing was never able to take off except in limited food processing. High aid dependency skewed economic incentives and provided little impetus for generating sustainable economic growth. Consequently, economic growth stagnated even before the Taliban takeover, with the economy contracting by 2.4 per cent in 2020.¹²⁰



Since the Taliban takeover, aid flows have declined drastically (*see chapter on ‘Financial Landscape Analysis’ for further information*). The reduction in aid means that the economy has fewer revenue streams with which to pay the import bills that were over 40 per cent of GDP in 2020. Aggregate demand has declined due to the reduction of foreign presence and the lack of revenue to pay the salaries of public sector employees. Economic activity is projected to contract between 30–40 per cent between 2021 and 2022. Meanwhile, inflation is likely to remain high due to the rise in global commodity prices, reducing the real value of household incomes. In addition, the breakdown in international correspondent banking channels effectively cut off the country from the formal international payment system and limited access to bank accounts and formal banking, forcing firms to resort to informal money transfer systems for domestic payments, even more than had previously been the case.

Round 2 of the World Bank’s Private Sector Rapid Survey conducted in June 2022 found that Afghan firms were adjusting to the new business environment but most still faced daunting challenges.¹²¹ Consumer demand appears to have slightly improved compared to the findings from Round 1 of the survey (conducted in October–November 2021) but remained considerably lower than before August 2021. The survey findings also indicated that the entrepreneurs in the agribusiness and retail sectors were considering expansion by investing in their businesses as the demand in these sectors had picked up.

However, looking forward, there are few obvious sources of financing economic growth. International aid is strictly earmarked for humanitarian purposes and basic human needs and thus contributes little to economic development. Much of the domestic banking system is paralyzed and riddled with bad debt, which can quickly translate to a stability crisis. As such, they are unlikely to perform the role of

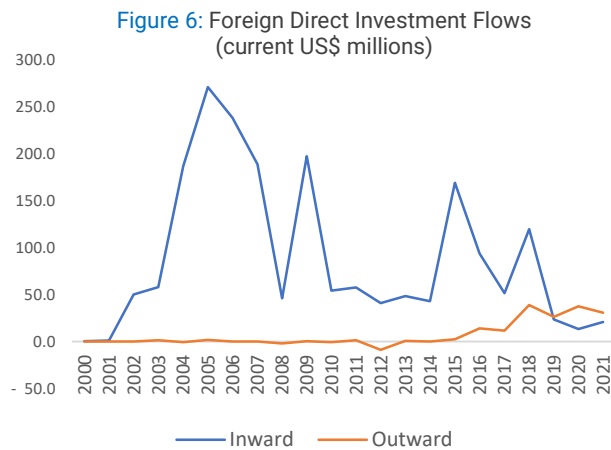
¹¹⁹ UNDP, *Afghanistan: Socio-Economic Outlook 2021-2022*, 1 December 2021.

¹²⁰ World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data.

¹²¹ World Bank, *The Afghanistan Private Sector Rapid Survey Round 2*, September 2022.

providing funds for investment.¹²² Businesses and farms must depend on their own revenues for financing investment and are increasingly using informal channels for both international and domestic payments, which is likely to be a challenge under the current economic conditions.

Afghanistan received little foreign direct investment before August 2021, primarily due to the uncertainty the lack of security creates.¹²³ While the large-scale armed conflict has subsided, the prospect for attracting outside investments and loans is unlikely to improve, perhaps with the exception of extractive industries (*see section on mining below*), due to the uncertainties following the Taliban takeover and subsequent constraints on financial mobility.



Much hope is pinned on investment from China. However, given the recent attacks by various local terrorist organizations on Chinese interests in neighbouring Pakistan, Chinese investors are likely to be cautious in committing to projects on the ground. In addition, UN assessments suggest that the East Turkestan Islamic Movement/Turkistan Islamic Party, which China blames for attacks in Xinjiang province, has re-established a (small) presence in some areas in Afghanistan.¹²⁴

The *de facto* authorities have held talks with neighbouring countries in the hope of reviving cross-border infrastructure projects, most notably the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Natural Gas Pipeline (TAPI) project. The project was launched in 2016, although little construction has taken place in Afghanistan due to security concerns. However, if the project were implemented as originally envisioned, it could draw billions of dollars of investment to Afghanistan and create jobs in the construction of over 800 kilometres of pipeline in the country. It would also provide supplies of gas and generate transit fees upon completion. While the security situation has improved, it remains doubtful whether the project can attract enough financing from private investors under the country’s current banking constraints, as well as its lack of political recognition.

Economic recovery will also be stymied by the loss of human capital, as thousands of highly skilled Afghans have fled the country and new restrictions have been imposed on women’s participation in the labour force.

Cumulatively, the multitude and systemic nature of the challenges outlined above imply that the economy is likely to be mired in crisis for some years to come, with many of the targets under SDG8 on *Decent Work and Economic Growth* and other ‘Prosperity’ related SDGs being aspirational at best and largely unattainable.

¹²² Domestic banks have always played a minimal role in meaningful financial intermediation (private sector credit to GDP stood at three per cent even before August 2021). However, they historically have played an important role in promoting transparent and efficient international and domestic payments – unfortunately this functionality is almost stalled post August 2021.

¹²³ International Monetary Fund, *Balance of Payments database, supplemented by data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and official national sources.*

¹²⁴ UN Security Council, *UN Security Council Resolution S/2022/547*, 15 July 2022.

Afghan economy by sector

Agriculture

Before the Taliban takeover, agriculture accounted for over 40 per cent of employment. Though gradually declining, 60–70 per cent of female employment was in the agricultural sector in the last decade.¹²⁵ Women constitute almost 20 per cent of workers in the agricultural sector.¹²⁶ While the sector is the most important source of income for 28 per cent of households, it contributes to the livelihoods of 80 per cent. The sector's share in GDP declined from just under 40 per cent in 2002 to about a quarter in recent years (prior to 2021), although the share fluctuated substantially depending on the harvest. However, it remained the mainstay of Afghan exports. In 2020, for example, agricultural produce accounted for 80 per cent of all goods exported, with fresh and dried fruits alone accounting for almost half of all goods exported.¹²⁷

Agriculture is based mainly on subsistence activities. Small farms undertake most agricultural production; those below four *jeribs* (0.8 hectares) accounting for two-thirds of all farms.¹²⁸ About 60 per cent of agricultural land (3.7 million hectares) is dependent on seasonal rainfall and highly sensitive to changes in climate and annual variations in precipitation.¹²⁹ Consequently, the sector has always suffered cycles of growth with peaks and troughs based on the significance of agricultural periods of drought. Even irrigated arable land, which accounts for just five per cent of the total land,¹³⁰ suffers from underinvestment in the required infrastructure.¹³¹

Lack of infrastructure has been identified as the major impediment. Establishing cold chains and storage facilities for fresh produce could improve shelf-life and prevent losses as would an improvement in road infrastructure, which would also improve farmers' access to markets.

Both on-farm agricultural sector and agribusiness value chains are major providers of employment for women. With the provision of working capital to farmers, micro and small enterprises, training to women, and financing of markets infrastructure including, for example, women only markets, it will be possible to create more employment opportunities for women. Supporting these efforts is crucial in order to impart resilience to the firms, strengthen farm to market linkages, and enhance their productive capacity.

To increase exports, standardization and certification are important for improving the quality of products and acceptability in destination markets. Logistics and bilateral agreements are also important for cross-border trade, especially to avoid lengthy hold-ups of the shipment of goods at border crossings.

Manufacturing

Manufacturing is confined mainly to food processing by micro, small, and some medium-sized enterprises. Flour milling is the largest agro-industry, where small mills (known as *asiabs* or *zirandas*)

¹²⁵ ILO, *ILOSTAT database*. Data as of January 2021.

¹²⁶ Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority, *Income and Labor Force Survey 2020*, April 2021.

¹²⁷ Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority, *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2020*, April 2021.

¹²⁸ Policy Effectiveness Analysis (PEA-2019) draft report, Afghanistan, FIRST / FAO-EU.

¹²⁹ Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering in Science, *Colorado State University, Erosion mapping and sediment yield of the Kabul river basin, Afghanistan*, 2013.

¹³⁰ UNEP, NEPA, and GEF, *National Adaptation Programme of Action*, 2009.

¹³¹ Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization, *Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016-17*, 2018.

Survey estimates that 21% of irrigated land and 36% of rainfed land cannot be cultivated despite relatively good farming conditions.

process 90 per cent of domestic wheat production. Inadequate infrastructure and unreliable energy supply increase costs. Investments in new technologies, from processing to management, have been low or largely absent.¹³² As a result, much domestic production of food items ends up with semi-finished goods having low value added.

Other manufacturing sectors have been slow to grow while some of the most important sectors have experienced significant declines. In the second half of the 2010s, the production of carpets, textiles, clothing apparel, leather products, and wood products, including furniture, reduced by much as 30 per cent.¹³³ The *de facto* authorities have opted to maintain the Afghani exchange rate at a relatively high level, which renders Afghan manufacturing uncompetitive. There are few sources for financing investment that would raise the sector's productivity, meaning manufacturing is likely to struggle to grow in the coming years.

Despite being mostly small scale and low-tech, productivity (GDP per labour employed) in the industrial sector (mining, manufacturing, and utilities) is nearly three times higher than that in agriculture. Over 40 per cent of the population is engaged in agriculture where productivity is so low, which explains, in part, the high incidence of poverty. In the long run, it will be necessary to raise agricultural productivity while creating sufficient employment in other sectors to absorb labour from rural areas.

Mining

Afghanistan is rich in mineral deposits, estimated to be valued up to US\$ 1 trillion, that have been barely (or only illicitly) exploited, with the sector contributing only one per cent to the official GDP. Some deposits, such as copper, are thought to be among the largest known in the world. While requirements differ depending on the mineral and the location, exploitation requires technical expertise as well as substantial capital investment in extraction, processing, and transportation facilities currently not available in Afghanistan.

Consequently, mining in Afghanistan has been limited to those minerals that can be relatively easily exploited with low-tech means, most notably coal. Sales from coal have increased since the Taliban takeover, although this is thought to be driven by higher global prices rather than an increase in output - for example exports to Pakistan were up 16 per cent for November 2021 to April 2022 compared to the same period in the previous year. Production and exports of coal are likely to expand further, providing the county with much-needed external revenues. However, such mining operations are unlikely to be regulated in terms of safety or prevention of exploitation and abuse of children.

The improved security environment has resulted in renewed interest from investors from multiple countries, including Iran, Russia, and Turkey, who are in talks with the *de facto* authorities on exploiting Afghanistan's mineral resources.

Financial Sector

Afghanistan's financial sector is underdeveloped and has played only a small role in economic development and poverty alleviation. Financial inclusion has been very limited. Roughly 85 per cent of the population does not have a bank account, with only a small percentage of firms relying on banks

¹³² The World Bank 'Opportunity for Mobilising Agriculture Investment and Development' project commenced in 2020 with funding from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund.

¹³³ ICMPD, *Afghanistan Migration Country Report*, 2020.

for financing their needs.¹³⁴ Rural communities rely predominantly on informal credit, which are often conditionalized by local elites, increase long-term indebtedness, and disincentivize productivity gains. Limited access to finance is routinely cited as a key constraint by micro-small-medium-sized enterprises.

The current crisis in Afghanistan's financial sector is a culmination of issues that were triggered by the events in August 2021. These include i.) major macroeconomic imbalances; ii.) the freezing of Da Afghanistan Bank's offshore assets; iii.) the breakdown of international correspondent banking channels which has greatly hindered inflow and outflow of funds (due to a lack of confidence in the anti-money laundering/combating the financing of terrorism regime and its enforcement); iv.) deterioration in the functionality of the domestic payment system; v.) a mandatory transition to Islamic banking; and vi.) a loss of public confidence in the banking system. The current financial sector crisis is having major impacts on the private sector (particularly larger formal firms) and the economy at large, and also constraining effective humanitarian response.

Firms and households have little confidence in the banking system as a custodian of assets or as a means of transaction. Liquidity remains a major issue and domestic withdrawals remain restricted. The liquidity crisis stems from the inability of the Afghan Central Bank to access banknotes printed abroad, with the majority of current notes degraded and unusable.¹³⁵ The Government of Afghanistan had contracted firms in Europe to print Afghani banknotes before the Taliban takeover, but those have not been delivered primarily due to the issues in transacting the fees.

Before 15 August 2021, the banking system was highly dollarized, with an estimated 60 per cent of deposits being in US dollars. The bulk of loans from commercial banks were also in US dollars. As of September 2022, banks still do not allow any withdrawals in the currency. International transfers are currently only allowed for corporate clients for selected purposes (e.g., food, medicines, etc.).

At present, Afghanistan International Bank has a relationship with Crown Agents/Citi Bank for correspondent banking functions, using it for pre-approved transfers in US dollars. Ghazanfar Bank has also recently begun to open limited correspondent banking channels. However, in addition to the other various challenges, some international correspondent banks have cited the lack of a business case for engaging with Afghan banks giving the relatively small amounts of money involved. Despite this, given the recently issued US General License 20, which expands authorizations for commercial and financial transactions in Afghanistan, including with its governing institutions,¹³⁶ efforts must be made to diversify Afghan banks that have access to correspondent banking channels.

Nearly 10 per cent of bank branches have closed. The lack of confidence in the banking system is aggravated by uncertainty about changes in the regulatory framework while the mandatory transition to Islamic Banking for all financial institutions is creating operational difficulties. Banks' balance sheets have deteriorated as non-performing loans have risen sharply due to the sharp economic contraction. Since the Taliban takeover of the country, institutions providing microfinance have not been able to collect interest on outstanding loans and has only collected around 60 per cent of the principal

¹³⁴ Da Afghanistan Bank, *National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2020–2024*, 2019.

¹³⁵ Los Angeles Times, *Afghanistan's money is crumbling to pieces like its economy*, 27 September 2022.

¹³⁶ U.S. Dept. of the Treasury, *Press Release: U.S. Treasury Issues General License to Facilitate Economic Activity in Afghanistan*, 25 February 2022.

amount. Importantly, the number of woman clients has also dropped. Stability risks are fast escalating in the Afghan banking sector which can further impact international confidence.

The crisis also constrains effective response to the mounting humanitarian crisis, although the UN has successfully shipped banknotes into the country to fund humanitarian activities and the *hawala* (informal money transfer) system has proved resilient and continues to facilitate international transfers. The hawala system creates anti-money laundering/combating the financing of terrorism risks and there are concerns that many of those facilitating payments outside the formal system may be linked to Afghanistan's illicit economy.

The long-running underdevelopment of the Afghan financial system and the current banking crisis are likely to constrain the country's long-term growth and poverty alleviation efforts. A full banking crisis could inflict additional burdens in the already difficult circumstances. Plans need to be devised to prevent such a collapse. Of immediate concern is the preservation of a part of the banking system to facilitate humanitarian assistance, followed by efforts to establish better funding for private sector development.

Illicit Economy

The production of opiates (opium, morphine, and heroin) is arguably Afghanistan's largest illegal economic activity, providing a sizable share of income to many farmers and rural communities which depend on opium poppy to sustain their livelihoods.

Since the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021, Opium poppy cultivation increased by 32 per cent over the previous year, making the 2022 crop the third largest area under cultivation since monitoring began in 1994. Opium prices have soared following the announcement of the cultivation ban in April 2022. Farmers' incomes from opium sales tripled from US\$ 425 million in 2021 to US\$ 1.4 billion in 2022 — the equivalent of 29 per cent of the total 2021 value of the agricultural sector. However, increased incomes did not necessarily translate into purchasing power due to soaring levels of inflation. In addition, following a drought at the start of 2022, opium yields declined from an average of 38.5 kilogrammes per hectare in 2021 to an estimated 26.7 in 2022, resulting in a harvest of 6,200 tons — 10 per cent less than in 2021.¹³⁷

The challenges faced by the Afghan population impede the ability to lessen its dependence on income generated from opium, which remains its main export product with well-established markets and trafficking networks. The current contraction of licit economic opportunities renders households even more vulnerable to engaging in illicit activities such as opium and cannabis cultivation, and heroin and methamphetamine manufacture and trafficking.

An assessment of the likelihood of the Taliban's drug ban being effectively enforced will likely be a major deciding factor for farmers on cultivating opium versus legal crops, although the current high opium prices provide an additional incentive for farmers to risk cultivating opium poppy. While an effectively enforced opium ban, such as in 2001, can lead to a substantial reduction in production, it would likely drastically decrease the already limited economic opportunities in rural areas and increase humanitarian needs. Those losing their income from opium production may turn towards

¹³⁷ UNODC, *Opium Production in Afghanistan: Latest Findings and Emerging Threats*, November 2022.

other illicit activities, such as methamphetamine manufacture, unless they are equally effectively banned.¹³⁸

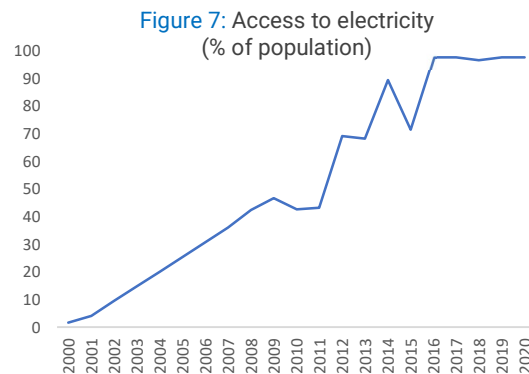
Consequently, with limited drivers of sustained economic recovery in the legal sphere, a sustainable reduction of opiate production can only be achieved through the promotion of alternative licit livelihood opportunities and broader economic stabilization of the country.

Energy, Infrastructure, and Connectivity

Access to sustainable and reliable energy resources is critical for economic and social development in Afghanistan. Significant progress was achieved in providing access to electricity prior to the Taliban takeover with increased electricity consumption coming primarily from imports, accounting for approximately 80 per cent of electricity and almost all fuel resources.

A recent study of energy sector assessments undertaken post-August 2021 by the Asian Development Bank and UNDP, found that electricity imports from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to date is estimated at US\$ 147 million (55 per cent of total costs). Uzbekistan restricted supply by 50 per cent due to delays in payments, one of the consequences of the abrupt suspension of foreign assistance.

While just four per cent of the population had access to electricity in 2001, 98 per cent had some access to electricity (mainly for lighting) on-grid and off-grid through small solar panels by 2020.¹³⁹ Despite this progress, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest counties in terms of multidimensional energy poverty¹⁴⁰ and remains lowest among the countries in the region.¹⁴¹



However, only about 40 per cent of the population are connected to the power grid, with the remaining 60 per cent only having limited amounts of electricity, mainly light for some hours in the evening.¹⁴² Three-quarters of the population still rely on solid fuels for cooking and 96 per cent for heating. As a result, Afghanistan is among the ten countries worst affected by indoor pollution, which results in increased premature deaths and pollution-related diseases.¹⁴³ The average access to clean fuels is 33 per cent. Women and children are particularly impacted by energy poverty which affects their health, employment, and availability of many basic services, as they are increasingly restricted to the home and spend significant amounts of time on unpaid care and household work.

Similarly, transport infrastructure is critical to economic as well as social development, by linking producers to markets, facilitating exports, and improving physical access to services. However, more than half of the population lacks access to all-weather roads.¹⁴⁴ Though the previous Government

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ World Bank Global Electrification Database from "*Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report*" led jointly by the custodian agencies: IEA, IRENA, the UN Statistics Division (UNSD), the World Bank and WHO.

¹⁴⁰ A household is identified as multidimensionally energy-poor if: (1) deprivation occurs in three of the four dimensions of indoor air pollution, education/entertainment, household appliances, and telecommunications; (2) there is also deprivation in cooking and lighting; and if (3) it is deprived in one of the two dimensions of lighting and cooking, in addition to one of any other dimensions.

¹⁴¹ Abbas et al. 2020, 'Do socioeconomic factors determine household multidimensional energy, poverty, Empirical evidence from South Asia?', *Energy Policy*, Vol. 146.

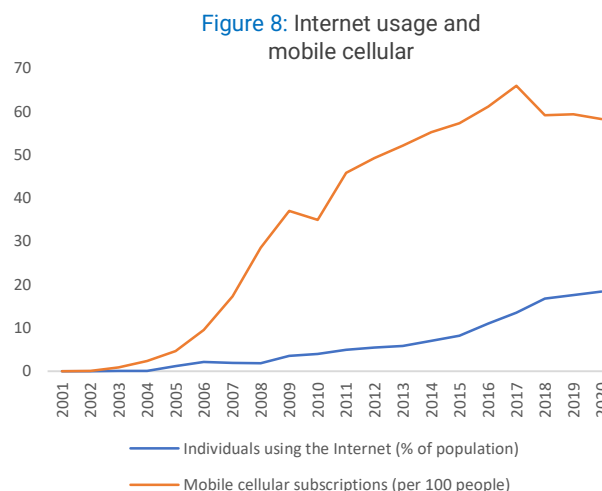
¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ 2012, WHO

¹⁴⁴ World Bank, Afghanistan Country Overview, 2021.

spent, on average, around US\$ 500 million annually on infrastructure-related projects through the national budget between 2009 and 2018, this amount has not produced commensurable results due to poor planning and governance. Afghanistan’s Logistics Performance Index score — a measure of logistics professionals’ perceptions of a country’s quality of trade and transport related infrastructure — was low, standing at 1.95 out of 5 in 2018.¹⁴⁵ It is estimated that US\$ 26 billion in transport infrastructure investment is required by 2035 to support sustainable development in Afghanistan.¹⁴⁶

Making digital services accessible and affordable can have cumulative economic and social benefits.¹⁴⁷ Almost 60 per cent of the population is registered as mobile phone users,¹⁴⁸ while 82 per cent is offline and cannot participate meaningfully in the digital economy.¹⁴⁹ Access is concentrated in urban areas, with rural regions benefitting little from digital technologies. In addition, women and men enjoy differential access to mobile phones, and thus to information. Where a device is shared within a household, the owner is generally a man, which has implications for women’s privacy, including the ability to seek assistance.



While mobile money is technically feasible, its implementation is marginal and without prospects of significant organic growth.¹⁵⁰ Most humanitarian and non-humanitarian assistance is still provided in physical cash rather than through electronic transfers, e-wallets, or mobile money. However, mobile money services have the potential to enhance access to cash, savings, and financial privacy for the most vulnerable, and to limit possible diversion to illicit activities, fraud, and corruption.

The Labour Market and Employment

Afghanistan’s total labour force comprises seven million workers of whom 5.7 million are employed. Prior to August 2021, total labour force participation rate was only 42 per cent amongst the working-age population, standing at 68 per cent for men and 17 per cent for women.¹⁵¹

Table 2: Size and Rate of Labour Force Participation by Sex and Residence, 2020/2021

Residence	Thousands			Percentage		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Urban	1,576.6	1,344.2	2,32.4	35	60.2	10.2

¹⁴⁵ World Bank and Turku School of Economics, *Logistic Performance Index Surveys*.

¹⁴⁶ Asian Development Bank *Afghanistan Transport Sector Master Plan Update (2017-2036)*, 2017.

¹⁴⁷ ICTs include the Internet, mobile phones, and other tools designed to collect, store, analyse and share information digitally, such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, cryptocurrency, virtual reality, and the Internet of things.

¹⁴⁸ International Telecommunication Union (ITU) *World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database*.

¹⁴⁹ International Telecommunication Union (ITU) *World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database*.

¹⁵⁰ International Rescue Committee, *Afghanistan Banking Sector Assessment December 2021*, 9 February 2022.

¹⁵¹ Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority, *Income and Labor Force Survey 2020*, April 2021.

Rural	5,072.3	3,997.6	1,074.8	43.9	71	18.2
Kuchi	3,71.9	271.9	98.5	53.6	78.2	28.6
National	7,020.8	5,615.2	1,405.6	41.9	68.4	16.5

Just 1.8 per cent of men and 0.7 of women owned and ran their own businesses.¹⁵² Three out of four were employees or own-account workers (83 per cent of men and 40 per cent of women). Agriculture accounts for over 40 per cent of total employment with women constituting between 70–80 per cent of the agricultural labour force. Women also represented a high proportion of those employment in craft and related trades (33 per cent) and professional workers (22 per cent), with men taking up jobs in the armed forces, elementary occupations, technicians, and managerial positions.¹⁵³ Women’s employment in manufacturing also outnumbered men by nearly ten per cent (54 per cent to 46 per cent), partly due to most manufacturing involving food processing and handicrafts that resemble women’s traditional tasks at home.¹⁵⁴

NGOs and international organizations, including the UN, are also major employers in the formal employment sector, and specifically the major employer of women, which has become critically important since the Taliban takeover. While post-August 2021 data is not available, it was reported that in 2018, 85,353 people were employed by the NGO/CSO sector — 17.3 per cent of the total formal workforce — with women comprising some 28 per cent of all NGO employees.¹⁵⁵

The unemployment rate was estimated at 18.6 per cent in 2020, with higher rates for females at 32 per cent compared to males at 15.2 per cent. Youth (aged 15–24 years) unemployment rate was 23.7 per cent and the share of youth not in education, employment, or training was 34.4 per cent (14 per cent for males and 53 per cent for females).¹⁵⁶

However, the current economic crisis is likely to have resulted in the loss of up to one million jobs. Round 2 of the World Bank’s Private Sector Rapid Survey from June 2022 found that employment in the formal economy remained around 50 per cent lower, on average, than before August 2021, compared to 61 per cent lower in Round 1 of the survey.¹⁵⁷

Women’s labour force participation had decreased by 16 per cent by the end of October 2021 compared with a six per cent decrease for men following the takeover by the Taliban.¹⁵⁸ Women’s employment was projected to decrease by as much as 28 per cent by July 2022.¹⁵⁹ Employment restrictions have targeted women in the public service (except for roles which cannot be filled by men in health, education, and policing) and, to a lesser degree, in the private sector. Women-owned businesses were also significantly affected by mobility restrictions, resulting in disproportionate revenue and job losses. Women employees in surveyed businesses faced more severe job losses than men, with three-quarters of women workers being laid off from surveyed firms since August 2021.¹⁶⁰

Assessments from late 2021 indicate that communities affected by displacement face heightened average unemployment rates of 74 per cent for men and 92 per cent for women. Sixty-four per cent

¹⁵² Latest official figures available from Afghanistan Women’s Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

¹⁵³ Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority, *Income and Labor Force Survey 2020*, April 2021., (Table 3.8).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* (Table 3.6).

¹⁵⁵ ODI, *NGOs and civil society in Afghanistan*, November 2020.

¹⁵⁶ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan Voluntary National Review*, 2021.

¹⁵⁷ World Bank, *The Afghanistan Private Sector Rapid Survey Round 2*, September 2022.

¹⁵⁸ ILO, *Employment Prospects in Afghanistan: A Rapid Impact Assessment*, January 2022.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ World Bank, *World Bank Survey: Afghanistan’s Private Sector Hit Hard by Political Crisis*, 7 April 2022.

of those who do have work rely on daily labour and 32 per cent on informal employment (32 per cent).¹⁶¹ In addition, areas outside of the capital have suffered from human capital flight as the few professionals working at the sub-national level leave in search of better opportunities in Kabul and outside the country.

¹⁶¹ IOM, *CBNA R14 — Community-Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results (November—December 2021)*, March 2022.

3.1 Environment and Climate Change Analysis (*Planet*)

The 2021 Global Climate Risk Index ranked Afghanistan as the sixth most affected country globally to climate-related threats,¹⁶² and one of the least prepared against climate shocks, ranked 175 out of 182 countries in the 2020 Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Index.¹⁶³ In addition, Afghanistan is also considered to have the highest exposure to ecological threats globally.¹⁶⁴

Since 1950, Afghanistan's mean annual temperature has increased significantly by 1.8°C.¹⁶⁵ In terms of future projections, under an optimistic scenario, Afghanistan shows a trend of warming by approximately a further 1.5°C until 2050, followed by a period of stabilization and then additional warming up to approximately 2.5°C above current temperatures by 2100. In addition, precipitation is forecast to decline by 26 per cent by the 2050s.¹⁶⁶

Consequently, droughts in many parts of the country are likely to become the norm, affecting the entire population, with severe consequences for food insecurity (*see section 'Zero Hunger' for more information on food insecurity*). Furthermore, episodic heavy precipitation can result in flash floods and landslides, increasing morbidity and mortality in already vulnerable communities. In the past 20 years, there has been a severe drought every 5 to 8 years.¹⁶⁷ However, this frequency is likely to increase to every three to four years.¹⁶⁸

Almost all years since 1997 have seen drought in some parts of the country, with increasing drought frequency and intensity, causing significant impacts for agricultural and pastoralist communities, exacerbating humanitarian needs, and driving internal displacement. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable given their disproportionate reliance on rural livelihoods and associated impacts of negative coping strategies.

A drought of average severity causes an estimated US\$ 280 million in economic damage, mainly in agriculture. A 'once in a decade' drought can cause agricultural losses of US\$ 2.5 billion.¹⁶⁹ The losses from an extreme drought can reach US\$ 3.5 billion, with catastrophic impacts on agricultural livelihoods.¹⁷⁰ The ongoing *La Niña* event is likely to result in below-average precipitation in late 2022 and early 2023, coinciding with the wheat sowing and mid-growing period.¹⁷¹

Climate change, environmental degradation, over-exploitation, and other human-induced factors also impact on the sustainability of Afghanistan's natural resources. Afghanistan has few lakes, water bodies, and wetlands relative to neighbouring countries and many of those that do exist are increasingly at threat from a combination of water diversion and drought. Diversion of water and increasingly frequent drought is drying wetlands and rivers with unknown effects on aquatic

¹⁶² Germanwatch, *Global Climate Risk Index 2021*, 2021.

¹⁶³ University of Notre Dame, *Global Adaptation Initiative Country Index*, 2020.

¹⁶⁴ Institute for Economics and Peace, *Ecological Threat Register*, 2020.

¹⁶⁵ National Environmental Protection Agency and UNEP, *Afghanistan: Climate Change Science Perspectives*, 2016.

¹⁶⁶ FAO, *Climate Change scenarios: vulnerability, impact and adaptation in Afghanistan*, 2019.

¹⁶⁷ Université Côte d'Azur, *Assessment of climate change impacts on water resources and agriculture in data-scarce Kabul basin, Afghanistan*, 2017.

¹⁶⁸ Weedon, G. P., et. al. (2011), 'Creation of the WATCH Forcing Data and Its Use to Assess Global and Regional Reference Crop Evaporation over Land during the Twentieth Century'. *The Journal of Hydrometeorology*. 823–848

¹⁶⁹ World Bank, Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery, *Disaster Risk Profile of Afghanistan*, 2017.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ FEWS NET, *Poor production outcome during current year will worsen food security situation in 2022-23*, 24 June 2022.

biodiversity. Loss of vegetation and the potential impacts of climate change could have severe effects on the water cycle with severe impacts on the communities living downstream. Consequently, the total annual amount of renewable water per capita dropped by nearly 40 per cent between 2002 and 2017.¹⁷² In addition, at the current rate of deforestation, Afghanistan may lose all of its already severely depleted land area covered by forests (standing at just 2.8 per cent in 2016) by 2050. Eighty-eight districts of the country show either low or medium negative land cover changes, while 141 districts indicate high or medium positive land cover changes (30 districts high and 111 medium).¹⁷³

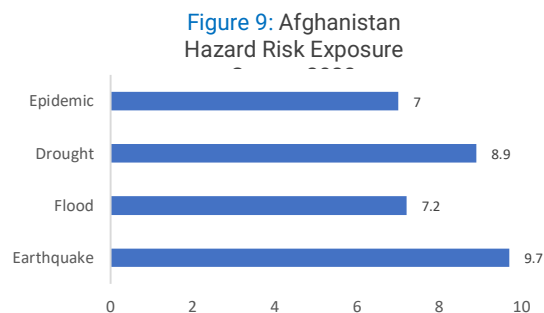
The lack of enforcement or absence of legal and regulatory frameworks on natural resources and the environment, coupled with the increased demand for coal mines and the need to attract investors in the mining sectors, has heightened the pressure on natural resources exacerbating degradation and over-exploitation. The effects of the degradation will have decades-long knock-on negative effects on ecosystem services which are critical to maintaining critical landscapes and supporting agricultural productivity in many areas.

In addition, climate change and environmental degradation will likely result in further depletion of natural resources, leading to increased competition, with a likelihood of increased conflict and violence between communities.

While Afghanistan remains a predominately rural society with only an estimated 24 per cent of the population living in cities, the population of Afghan cities is growing at around four per cent per year, one of the highest rates of urbanization in the world.¹⁷⁴ The speed and scale of urbanization in recent years have brought several challenges for the environment and human well-being in Afghanistan which are likely to be exacerbated with expanding urban populations. Additional pressure will be put on already inadequate urban waste management, while urban air quality will likely deteriorate, and urban water supplies will be further depleted, increasing pressure on limited water resources. Furthermore, increased urban populations will increase the potential for surface and groundwater contamination due to deteriorating hygiene conditions in towns and cities.

While not environmental or climate-related, earthquakes regularly hit the country, causing loss of life and infrastructure damage costing US\$ 80 million per year. Since 1954, more than 500,000 people have been affected by earthquakes while less than five per cent of the buildings are seismically engineered. The mountainous areas (more than 60 per cent of the country) are prone to landslides and avalanches, exposing over three million people and US\$ 6 billion worth of assets and affecting 10,000 kilometres of roads, particularly in the northern and central regions. Snowmelt, soil erosion, land degradation, deforestation, changes in land use, over-grazing of native pasture and climate change aggravate these effects.

Despite the significant risks posed by climate change and other natural disasters — ranked fourth most at-risk country in the world in the



¹⁷² FAO AQUASTAT, [Country Dashboard](#).

¹⁷³ WFP, *Integrated Context Analysis 2022*, September 2022.

¹⁷⁴ Within the next 35 years the country's urban population is projected to triple to 24 million. It is estimated that half of the country's population will live in urban areas by 2060.

UN-Habitat, *Afghanistan the Impact Stories*.

INFORM 2023 Index for Risk Management for Afghanistan — (see Figure 9),¹⁷⁵ Afghanistan lacks risk information and advanced warning systems. The National Adaptation Programme of Action of the previous government identified and prioritized those sectors of the country most vulnerable to climate hazards.¹⁷⁶ However, the intentions of the *de facto* authorities with regard to the Programme remain unclear. The lack of clarity and suspension of climate change adaptation programs will further erode the adaptive capacity of most vulnerable groups and communities to the effects of climate-related risks and impacts. In addition, significant financial requirements also pose challenges for the implementation of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation interventions. For instance, the Drought Risk Management Strategy 2019 estimated a resource requirement of US\$ 5 billion from 2019 to 2030 for multi-sectoral drought risk reduction.¹⁷⁷ The severity of Afghanistan's financial, technological, and capacity gaps, in addition to the current political conditions, means that advancing climate mitigation and adaptation goals will prove challenging.

¹⁷⁵ European Commission, *INFORM Risk Index*, 2023.

¹⁷⁶ National Environmental Protection Agency, *Afghanistan's first national report intended for United Nation's framework of climate change convention*, 2012.

¹⁷⁷ Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, *Afghanistan Drought Risk Management Strategy: 2020-2030*, 2020.

3.2 Governance and Political Analysis (*Peace*)

Political Dynamics

Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021 and the disintegration of the Islamic Republic, the Taliban *de facto* authorities focused on the transition from insurgency to a government, struggling to formulate a cohesive vision and political agenda.

On 7 September 2021, the Taliban announced an all-male, predominantly Pashtun, caretaker cabinet and other key positions at the national and provincial levels. Appointees are Taliban affiliates, many of whom are on the UN Security Council (1988) and individual member states' sanctions lists. Although the Taliban have repeatedly claimed that their administration is inclusive, it lacks gender, ethnic, religious, political, and geographical diversity.¹⁷⁸

The *de facto* authorities initially largely retained the Republic's governance structures, the existing civil service, the existing legal framework, yet have not made progress towards a revised constitution. Independent oversight mechanisms and institutions were dissolved, including the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, both houses of Parliament, the Electoral Commission, and the Ministries of Women's Affairs, Parliamentary Affairs, and Peace.

Initially, the (acting) *de facto* cabinet in Kabul appeared to be the main vehicle for decision-making. However, since the Kandahar leadership gathering at the end of March 2022, these dynamics changed with decision-making increasingly influenced by the more conservative Kandahar-based members surrounding Taliban leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada. This has left little political space for consultations — neither within the Taliban nor with other political actors and civil society.

The decision to keep girls' secondary schools closed — despite most senior Taliban figures being in favor of their opening under the right conditions — demonstrates the Kandahar-based conservative elements asserting themselves over the Kabul-based Taliban. This has caused additional tension within the Taliban movement, further adding to existing fragmentation around issues of access to economic resources, previous insurgency structures, as well as geographic divisions.

Haibatullah and some of his close allies have also used Islamic rhetoric to underscore the supremacy of the Taliban leader and the unimpeachable nature of his decisions. Without a revised constitution or larger frameworks for most sectors, the *de facto* authorities continued to depend on decrees and orders by the Taliban leader, thus making nearly each decision or decree a highly politicized, personalized, and often authoritarian act, which was already challenging to then implement through the nascent *de facto* bureaucracy.

The Kandahar-based leadership also appears to deliberately bypass the Kabul-based *de facto* cabinet, instead interacting directly with *de facto* provincial governors and provincial *ulema* councils. This is seemingly due to a perception that the Kabul bureaucracy is inefficient in implementing these orders.

With the stated aim of fostering national unity, the Taliban organized a three-day gathering in Kabul at the end of June 2022 attended by some 4,500 *ulema* (Muslim scholars) and tribal elders, excluding women, members of civil society and the media. On 18 August 2022, a second assembly took place, in Kandahar, which was attended predominantly by Taliban members from the south, *de facto* ministers and representatives of business, academia, and young people affiliated with or close to the

¹⁷⁸ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan (A/HRC/51/6)*, 6 September 2022.

Taliban. Discussions at the meeting focused on societal and economic aspects, including national unity, respect for the *ulema* and the pursuit of international acceptance.

While such initiatives, as well as the *de facto* Commission for Return and Communication with Former Afghan Officials and Political Figures, have provided some indication that the *de facto* authorities are looking for mechanisms to increase inputs from non-Taliban stakeholders, most of those participating in these initiatives however are already sympathetic to the Taliban.

These approaches have revealed the extent to which the *de facto* authorities try to, prioritize internal unity, closely manage political consultations, deliberately exclude certain constituencies, and suppress messaging inconvenient for the Taliban leadership. This approach has allowed the Taliban to maintain its own unity and therefore its authority but could push a now war-weary population towards greater contestation in the future.

Governance

In taking Kabul, the Taliban quickly found themselves in control of a population and country in crisis. While accurate figures are not available, there is evidence that the *de facto* authorities are working with most remaining civil servants and have attempted to selectively retain those with technical expertise (such as at customs posts and in the ministry of public health). Inexperienced and unqualified Taliban commanders and religious actors have been appointed to all key leadership positions, both centrally and in provincial departments. Women have been removed from most public service positions except where they cannot be filled by men in education, health, and certain elements of policing. Where they have been removed, in some cases they have been asked to send male relatives to replace them.¹⁷⁹ The *de facto* authorities' pursuit of an exclusive administration dominated by Taliban cadres who have little governing experience while marginalizing competent women is difficult to reconcile with the requirements of a modern, functioning state.

The *de facto* authorities have yet to establish a formal constitutional and legal framework. The division and distribution of power at the centre and at the subnational level remains opaque, as do the Taliban's approaches to decision making, dispute resolution, and service delivery. This inconsistency has resulted in some policies and decrees to be ignored at the subnational level. This has allowed some provincial governors to show greater flexibility to respond to concerns of local population — the non-application of the ban on girls' secondary education in a number of provinces being a notable example — but has also meant that other governors have been able to take harsh positions regarding UN implementing partners. This has created various challenges locally, including a lack of consistent approach to providing essential services, particularly to vulnerable groups. The appointment of non-Taliban local power brokers (such as *maliks* and *wakils*) varies according to context. While key Taliban individuals dominate senior positions at the national level, *de facto* ministers and other key Taliban actors do not have control over the subnational dynamics. Haibatullah's efforts to directly engage with *de facto* provincial governors and *ulema shuras*, and to control sub-national appointments, undermines the establishment of an institutionalized relationship between Kabul and the subnational level. In the medium to longer-term, weakly-rooted central structures that have increasingly become more side-lined combined with unclear and weak local *de facto* actors could exacerbate local power tensions and challenges to the *de facto* authorities' administration.

¹⁷⁹ Ahad, Z. "Send us a man to do your job so we can sack you, Taliban tell female officials", 18 July 2022, The Guardian.

The July 2022 Assembly of Islamic Clerics and Tribal Elders conference in Kabul, attended by 4,500 clerics and elders, resulted in an 11-point resolution for the *de facto* authorities to pay “special attention and to ensure justice, religious and modern education, health, agriculture, industry, the rights of minorities, children, women, and the entire nation, according to Islamic law”. No women were allowed to participate in this Assembly.

Local governance in Afghanistan focuses on a constellation of three key customary institutions in rural Afghanistan: *shuras* (village councils), *maliks* (village executives and associated technicians), and *mullahs* (religious legal advisors). These institutions emerged in all ethnic groups inhabiting Afghanistan long before any central state was consolidated. They have continued to exist in parallel to various regimes throughout frequent periods of war and chaos and been named differently by donors and partners for the purpose of service delivery.

Anecdotal reports suggest the *de facto* authorities are co-opting or capturing existing village councils, replacing council members with elders and religious scholars close to the Taliban. In areas of the south and east, reports indicate that the *de facto* authorities have emphasised the primacy of local *ulema shuras* as a means of generating support from communities, although information regarding their impact have been mixed. The decreeing of the establishment of a Provincial Ulema Council in each province in October 2022 may limit the power of existing local councils once the Taliban Ulema Councils are established. Separately, the *de facto* authorities have been setting up conflict resolution mechanisms to address *ad-hoc* needs in various provinces, with some successes. The co-opting of local structures is also likely an attempt to control donor resources, for example through Community Development Councils (CDCs) — until recently a conduit for significant donor resources. *De facto* officials have however in many districts already dissolved these councils, first, because these were mostly used for development funds which have significantly declined and secondly, the Taliban has often labelled these councils as corrupt and ineffective. In many settings, elders close to the Taliban have taken over functions of liaison with humanitarian actors to support distributions, instead of CDCs.

All platforms involving women have ceased to function since the Taliban takeover, with nearly all key women leaders having fled the country. Within the business community, including the Women’s Chamber of Commerce, women have been establishing some more involvement in public life, although this remains quite limited.

Civic Space

Prior to August 2021, civil society and NGOs developed strong partnerships with the former Afghan government and the international community, notably in areas such as basic service delivery, intra-Afghan peace process, women’s rights and gender equality, priority governance and justice reforms, and measures designed to improve transparency and accountability in governance and development, albeit with limited success in reaching consensus on the latter.

However, since the takeover, the *de facto* authorities have often moved to restrict the work of civil society and NGOs. This has included office closures and asset seizures, restrictions of freedom of expression and of assembly, the requirement to provide separate working spaces for female staff and not permitting them to undertake field visits without *mahram*, and the curtailment of work relating to protection and empowerment of women and minority groups.¹⁸⁰ Despite this, women’s civil society continues to mobilize across the country through protests, online campaigns, and demands to hold

¹⁸⁰ UN Women, *After August: Insights from Afghan women on the Women, Peace and Security agenda*, October 2022.

direct negotiations with the Taliban, although the scope and scale of protests have been limited, largely confined to urban areas.

Furthermore, despite assurances by the *de facto* authorities of a general amnesty, there is clear evidence of killings, enforced disappearances, and torture and other human rights violations against civil society activists, including women, former national defence force officials, journalists and former judges, and prosecutors and lawyers.

The *de facto* authorities communicated to NGOs and the international community a detailed plan to monitor and to control the activities of domestic and international NGOs in the distribution of humanitarian assistance. Such measures include the establishment of inter-ministerial technical committees at national and provincial levels mandated to monitor the operations of NGOs, and a requirement to regularly report to the *de facto* authorities on project design and implementation. NGOs have expressed concerns that such restrictions have exacerbated operational challenges and further constrained an already shrinking civic space, thereby impacting their ability to deliver humanitarian assistance across the country.

Civil society has repeatedly called on the international community to advocate for enhanced civic space and protection of human rights defenders, especially for women leaders and organizations. Many women's rights and women led CSOs have closed since August 2021 and most high-profile women's rights leaders fled the country following the fall of Kabul, creating a leadership vacuum.

The *de facto* authorities have also sought to limit fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of opinion, and freedom of expression, by clamping down on protests, issuing restrictions on media outlets, and arbitrarily arresting and detaining media workers, human rights defenders, women's rights advocates, and civil society activists.

The UN recorded human rights violations between 15 August 2021 and 15 June 2022 affecting 173 journalists and media workers, 163 of which were attributed to the *de facto* authorities. Among these were 122 instances of arbitrary arrest and detention, 58 of ill-treatment, 33 of threats and intimidation, and 12 of incommunicado detention.¹⁸¹ Six journalists were killed (five by ISIL-KP, one was unattributable).

According to Reporters without Borders, Afghanistan lost 40 per cent of its media outlets and 60 per cent of its journalists in the year following 15 August 2021. Women journalists have been impacted most, with 76 per cent having lost their jobs. In some provinces, the requirement to replace music or news programmes with religious content has led some media outlets to stop broadcasting. In addition, new economic constraints, such as the termination of international or national funding and the fall in advertising revenue as a result of the economic crisis, have also led some media to cease operating.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Since one individual may have suffered more than one violation (e.g., one person may have been arbitrarily arrested, held incommunicado, tortured and/or threatened), the number of violations is higher than the number of individuals affected.

¹⁸² Reporters Without Borders, *Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul*, August 2022.

Consequently, Afghanistan’s World Press Freedom Index score plummeted between 2021 and 2022, with its global ranking falling 34 places from 122 to 156 out of 180 countries assessed.¹⁸³

In addition, the UN recorded human rights violations affecting 65 human rights defenders, 64 of which were attributed to the *de facto* authorities. Among these were 47 arbitrary arrests, 17 cases of incommunicado detention, 10 cases of ill-treatment, and 17 cases of threats and intimidation.

The UN continues to urge the *de facto* authorities to free up civic space and to allow freedom of assembly and expression, as well as unrestricted access to civic space for civil society and NGOs, including women’s organizations, as well as journalists and the media.

Openness, Transparency, and Accountability

Under the Republic, corruption was judged as one of the biggest impediments to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and impacts every aspect of the social and economic performance of Afghanistan. Among other things, corruption hinders development, aggravates income inequality, reduces investment, both domestic and foreign, leads to the inefficient allocation or misappropriation of public funds, significantly lowers the quality of public sector services, or deprives people of access to basic public services altogether. Corruption and the lack of transparency and accountability also undermines the rule of law, people’s trust in governance, ultimately undermining peace, security, and stability. From humanitarian perspective, corruption not only jeopardizes future financial support from donors but also reduces its impact.

While poverty, insecurity, and high unemployment were usually portrayed as some of the biggest challenges in the country, Afghans consistently cited corruption as one of the biggest frustrations of their daily lives, particularly low-level bribery.¹⁸⁴ Afghanistan scored low on Transparency International’s 2021 global Corruption Perception Index, ranking it 174 out of 180 countries.¹⁸⁵ The value of bribes was estimated to be almost nine per cent of GDP in 2020.¹⁸⁶

While corrupt practices have reportedly declined significantly in certain sectors since the Taliban takeover, they risk undermining security and economic development if the *de facto* authorities do not put in place effective mechanisms to increase

Figure 10: World Press Freedom Score

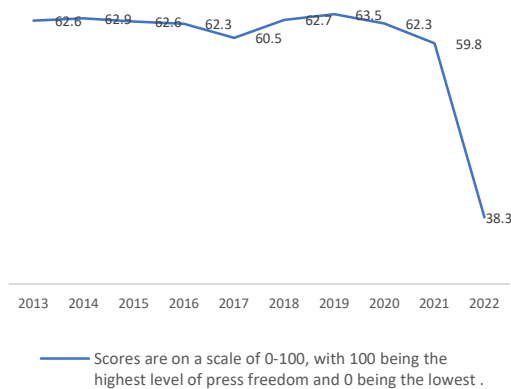
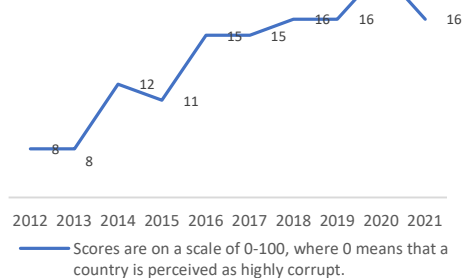


Figure 11: Corruption Perceptions Index Score



¹⁸³ Reporters Without Borders, *World Press Freedom Index*, 2022.

¹⁸⁴ Demonstrated consistently in the annual Survey of the Afghan People, carried out by The Asia Foundation from 2006 to 2020.

¹⁸⁵ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index*, 2021.

¹⁸⁶ Integrity Watch Afghanistan, *National Corruption Survey*, 2020.

transparency, including in the allocation of public funds, access to information, integrity, and accountability.

The *de facto* authorities have shared with UNAMA their strong commitment to maintain a zero-tolerance anti-corruption policy as corruption is categorically prohibited under Sharia Law. Corruption has decreased through border management and in the customs service, which has considerably increased national revenues. However, bribery, conflicts of interest, and other corrupted practices continue being reported since Taliban takeover. UNAMA has engaged with the Taliban to raise awareness on the UN Convention Against Corruption and related technical and legal implementation guidelines.

Justice and the Rule of Law

The progress made over the last twenty years in bringing Afghanistan's legal and judicial systems in line with international norms and standards, notwithstanding the lack of effective implementation and widespread corruption, has largely collapsed after the Taliban takeover. The Taliban suspended the 2004 Constitution and all laws in force at the time of the takeover. They are reviewing the suspended laws for compliance with Sharia, the Hanafi jurisprudence, and the Taliban's principles which will guide the administration of justice. Meanwhile, the courts continue to apply the suspended laws if they are perceived to meet the said criteria of the ongoing law review process.

The justice system after the takeover is administered by only male religious appointees and lacks capacity. Former justice personnel are largely excluded from the justice sector. There have been allegations of violence and intimidation by criminals released from detention targeting former judges, prosecutors, and lawyers. Female judges are the most affected, with many having left the country. Opportunities for women to seek and/or provide services in the justice sector are almost non-existent.

The local populations in the provinces and districts are turning to CSOs and lawyers for legal advice services. While donors and international partners are reluctant to support the provision of legal aid services due to the *de facto* authorities' disregard for human rights, particularly affecting women and girls, *inter alia*, international partners, including the UN, the International Legal Foundation, and the International Development Law Organization, support access to legal advice, services and justice for vulnerable people through CSOs and lawyers in some regions.¹⁸⁷ The *de facto* Ministry of Justice took over the functions of the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association, including licensing defence lawyers, which risks jeopardizing the independence of the legal profession as well as poor and vulnerable Afghans' access to justice. Female defence lawyers are excluded from renewing their licences.. Advocating for and supporting the independent involvement of women and male lawyers in the justice sector, remains critical.

The *de facto* authorities decided to exclude investigators and prosecutors from the Attorney General's Office from criminal investigations. According to the *de facto* authorities, this is a temporary measure to speed up court proceedings and address corruption at the Office. However, the independence and impartiality of Taliban courts risks being further undermined by this decision, which will also increase courts' workloads.

¹⁸⁷ Including Bamiyan and Herat.

The judicial system continues to be characterized by legal uncertainty, *ad hoc* court practices with frequent referrals to informal justice mechanisms lacking independent oversight and appeal mechanisms, as well as widespread impunity for conflict-related crimes.

A group particularly vulnerable to and affected by the lack of fair, transparent, and impartial justice process are those held in detention without being sentenced for a crime. The latest data from 2018 indicate there were 30,748 people held in prisons, including 814 females, of which almost a third were detained without fair trial within reasonably short period of time.¹⁸⁸ However, almost all prisoners in the country were freed during the Taliban takeover. Currently, there are an estimated 8,500 prisoners across the country (including 480 women and 120 children over 12 years old) according to the *de facto* Office for Prison Administration. Data on the proportion of those who are awaiting trial are not available.

Other key issues regarding places of detention include a lack of food and hygiene supplies, no vocational education and training opportunities, and, in some instances, children being detained with adults. Many of these issues were exacerbated by the cessation of international donor funding that previously supported certain functions within prisons.

With the new *de facto* Taliban administration, the associated political and humanitarian situation in the country and worsening socio-economic conditions, the prison population can be reasonably expected to increase due to the possible increase in crime, which may again result in overcrowding in prisons. Efforts to ensure human rights, timely access to legal representation/justice, and the humane treatment of prisoners will be necessary to mitigate the risk of violence and possible radicalization in prison settings.

In a positive step, in January 2022 the Taliban leader issued a “Code of Conduct on system reform relating to prisoners” which outlines key standards and obligations relating to the treatment of detainees.

Human Rights

In its report on Human Rights in Afghanistan covering the period 15 August 2021 and 15 June 2022, the UN documented 2,106 civilian casualties (700 killed, 1,406 wounded), more than half of which were caused by improvised explosive device attacks attributed to ISIL-KP. Among the casualties were 88 women (37 killed, 51 wounded) and 441 children (159 killed, 282 wounded).¹⁸⁹ This is a significant decrease compared with the previous year, when in the last eight months of conflict (1 January – 14 August 2021) 7,400 civilian casualties were recorded (2,091 killed, 5,309 wounded). Women and children made up almost 40 per cent of this figure (247 women and 548 children killed, 621 women and 1,525 children wounded). Despite the improved security situation, Afghans continue to be killed and wounded as a result of attacks with improvised explosive devices, most often targeting ethnic and religious minority communities such as the Hazara Shias, Sufis, and Sikhs.

On 17 August, the *de facto* authorities announced a general amnesty for all former government and security officials, although it appears to not have been consistently upheld. The UN has documented 160 extrajudicial killings, 178 arbitrary arrests and detentions, 23 instances of incommunicado

¹⁸⁸ UNODC, *Prisons & Prisoners dashboard*.

¹⁸⁹ UNAMA, *Human Rights in Afghanistan: 15 August 2021 – 15 June 2022*, July 2022.

detention, and 56 instances of torture and ill-treatment of former Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and government officials carried out by the *de facto* authorities.

Human rights violations against individuals accused or suspected of affiliation with armed groups have also been documented, with 59 extrajudicial killings, 22 arbitrary arrests and detentions, and 7 incidents of torture and ill-treatment by the *de facto* authorities of individuals accused of affiliation with self-identified ISIL-KP being reported. Most incidents occurred in the eastern part of the country, namely Nangarhar, where ISIL-KP are known to be the most active.

In addition, the UN recorded 18 extrajudicial killings, 54 instances of torture and ill-treatment, 113 instances of arbitrary arrest and detention and 23 cases of incommunicado detention of individuals accused of affiliation with self-identified “National Resistance Front”, mostly in Baghlan and Panjshir provinces.

There were 217 documented instances of cruel, inhuman, and degrading punishments carried out by the *de facto* authorities, often associated with accusations of “moral” and religious crimes, such as failure to pray at the mosque, incorrect *hijab* or beard length, and being without *mahram*. Cases of extrajudicial killing of individuals accused of *zina* (extramarital relationship) by the *de facto* authorities have also been recorded. The UN also recorded 118 instances of excessive use of force by the *de facto* authorities, mostly shootings at checkpoints due to people reportedly failing to stop when signalled, in many instances causing deaths.

The presence of explosive ordnance poses a threat in 4,295 hazardous areas in the country, affecting at least 1,528 communities, and continue to claim lives and maim local populations. Following the cessation of hostilities in most parts of the country, there is an increased risk to local populations venturing into previously inaccessible areas, including returnees, without knowledge of the presence of explosive hazards or how to act safely around them. While most explosive ordnance casualties are men and boys, women and girls often bear significant burden in dealing with the consequences of the injuries and deaths of family members.

(See above section on “Civic Space” on freedom of expression and sections on SDG 5 in Chapter 3 and “Women and Girls” under chapter 4)

4. Population Groups (at risk of being) Left Behind

The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are underpinned the principle of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first, without which the Goals cannot be truly attained. Ensuring that those who are left behind or at risk of being left behind are put at the centre of all humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding interventions will be imperative if progress towards the SDGs is to be sustained or advanced in Afghanistan. Reducing inequalities (SDG 10) will also require tackling the often-deep-rooted underlying causes of vulnerability, marginalization, and exclusion.

Those at risk of being left behind in Afghanistan face multiple forms of exclusion. They face various deprivations, disadvantages, and discrimination arising from circumstances or characteristics over which an individual or group has little or no direct control.

This section identifies those population groups that are most vulnerable and assesses the causes and impacts of their marginalization and vulnerability. However, it is important to note that these vulnerabilities and characteristics are often intersectional and overlapping and usually apply to multiple groups or individuals simultaneously.

Women and Girls

No other demographic has been more impacted by the Taliban takeover in August 2021 than women and girls. Most of the significant and hard-won gains of the past two decades with regards to the rights of women and girls have been curtailed or eliminated affecting every aspect of their lives. Repressive decrees have limited their movement, dictated their appearance, curtailed access to economic opportunities and services (particularly secondary education), and severely stifled their participation in civic space and social and political life with catastrophic consequences for their future development.

Gender-based violence, forced marriages, and early motherhood continue to pose enormous risks to their physical and psychological health and wellbeing. Women and girls are also most affected by ever more frequent humanitarian crises.

As such, without a significant change in policy from the *de facto* authorities, the outlook for women and girls in Afghanistan appears bleak and unlikely to change for the foreseeable future.

** A more detailed analysis of the situation of women and girls can be found in the “Gender Equality” section in Chapter 3 and throughout other relevant sections of this document.*

Youth

Afghanistan has one of the youngest and fastest-growing populations in the world. Youth (aged 15–24 years) comprise 63 per cent of the population. However, they face significant challenges related to their health, education, employment, and gender equity.

Those affected by humanitarian crises and those on the move become vulnerable to trafficking, forced marriages, and sexual abuse. Afghanistan has high rates of child marriage and early pregnancy, which increases the risk of maternal mortality, illness, and disability. Sexual and reproductive health services and programming are often underfunded or lack the necessary specialities to meet the specific needs of young people while information on sexual and reproductive health remains inaccessible, increasing the likelihood of contraction of sexually transmitted infections, adolescent pregnancies, and birth complications. Adolescents, girls, and young women also suffer high levels of gender-based violence, which risks going unpunished due to women’s limited access to fair and independent justice, further

driving women's rights violations. Constraints on access to education for adolescents and young women severely curtail their development and restrict their already highly limited access to economic opportunities.

Long-running conflict, poor socio-economic conditions, and recurring crises have resulted in high levels of psychological and mental health issues among young Afghans with a lack of available treatment services or facilities.

While youth account for a significant majority of the population, they are largely unrepresented in political and governance structures, both prior to and following August 2021, meaning that their specific voices, needs, and aspirations have been largely underrepresented in decision making that impacts their futures. However, youth offer significant untapped potential that should be leveraged through their active and positive engagement in all aspects of economic, social, cultural, and political life in Afghanistan.

Adolescents and youth are a vital positive force in emergency preparedness and response. They have wide-ranging capacities and unique needs, but they often get lost between programming for children and that of adults. As such, it is essential to prioritize regular, systematic, and meaningful participation of young people as an essential condition for the sustainability, inclusiveness, and success of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts.

Children

The situation of children does not provide much promise for the future of Afghanistan, especially for girls who are now currently not authorised to be in school beyond sixth grade. Currently, 9.7 million of the 18 million Afghans needing humanitarian assistance in 2021 are children. The incidence of poverty is higher among children compared to the rest of the population. Violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation remain serious concerns. These threats often arise from poverty, harmful socio-cultural norms, natural disasters, and ongoing conflict.¹⁹⁰

Only one-third of infants aged 6 to 8 months are given complimentary food while only half of children between one and two years old are fully immunized. Malnutrition contributes to child mortality of 60 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to the regional average of 40 deaths.¹⁹¹ More than 300,000 children are facing illness and death due to winter conditions.¹⁹²

Only 42 per cent of children under the age of five have a birth certificate. Even though these are required by law, decades of conflict and limited government resources have left Afghanistan with a poorly functioning birth registration system that puts unregistered children at increased risk of child labour, trafficking, and child marriage.¹⁹³

Over 15 per cent (1.8 million) of children below 18 are working,¹⁹⁴ rising to 30 per cent for those aged between 15 to 17 years.¹⁹⁵ However, it is assumed that this number has increased since August 2021.

¹⁹⁰ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary General to the United Nations Security Council, Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan*, 10 September 2019.

¹⁹¹ UNICEF, *Levels and trends in child mortality 2020*, 2020.

¹⁹² East Oregonian, *Billions in Aid Needed to Help Afghan Kids*, 2021.

¹⁹³ UNICEF, *Birth registration: A passport to the future*, 25 May 2017.

¹⁹⁴ 7 per cent in urban areas, 14 per cent in rural areas, and 28 per cent among the Kuchis.

¹⁹⁵ Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority, *Income and Labor Force Survey 2020*, April 2021 (Table 3.17).

In 2022, 29 per cent of female-headed households reported at least one child working versus 21 per cent of male-headed households, compared to 19 per cent and 13 per cent respectively in 2021.¹⁹⁶

Three-quarters of working children are thought to be engaged in hazardous work, with boys being more exposed to it than girls, especially in urban areas (80 per cent versus 50 per cent).

The conflict in Afghanistan was considered the world's deadliest for children.¹⁹⁷ Although the total number of child casualties in the first nine months of 2022 shows a decrease of 64 per cent overall for killing and maiming in comparison to the same reporting period in 2021, a total of 726 child casualties were verified from January–September 2022, representing 32 per cent of all civilian casualties. The leading cause of child casualties is improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war, followed by ground engagements. Eighty-two per cent of all casualties documented from explosive remnants of war were children in the first nine months of the year,¹⁹⁸ however, thousands have been maimed since 2005.¹⁹⁹ Afghanistan is one of the few countries with rates of orphaning reaching 10 per cent.²⁰⁰

There has been a marked increase in the number of children recruited and used by armed groups, including by the Taliban and National Resistance Front, between January–September 2022, with 534 verified cases (of which 40 occurred during 2022 and the rest being late verifications of incidents occurring during previous reporting periods). The boys were used in mixed combat and non-combatant roles, including involvement in ground engagements.²⁰¹

In several communities, sexual violence, also against boys (*bacha bazi*: child sexual abuse perpetrated by adult men on boys), and child trafficking are not uncommon. Six cases of rape (one boy and five girls) were verified in the first nine months of 2022. However, it is important to note that cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence, including *bacha bazi*, are particularly sensitive and difficult to verify and should be considered just indicative of the prevailing challenges.²⁰² The giving away of a woman or a girl to settle a dispute (*ba'ad*) also occurs, although it has been outlawed by the Taliban. These incidences are not always considered a crime in some communities and tend to go under-reported. Those who do report them may be subject to intimidation.²⁰³ Furthermore, analysts estimate that 74 per cent of children between 2 to 14 years of age experience violent discipline, including psychological violence.²⁰⁴

Previously, children between the ages of 12 to 18 years could bear criminal responsibility. However, children younger than 8 years can now be found in detention due to the misinterpretation of the criminal responsibility of children in Sharia. Many Afghan children deprived of their liberty in juvenile rehabilitation centres are victims of child abuse and exploitation rather than offenders.²⁰⁵ They are arrested and detained instead of being provided the necessary support. The staff-to-child ratio in

¹⁹⁶ REACH, *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022*, 2022.

¹⁹⁷ OCHA, *Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview*, 2020.

¹⁹⁸ Information from the Country Task Force of Monitoring and Reporting of Grave Violations against Children (CTFMRM).

¹⁹⁹ Save the Children, *the Children, Killed and Maimed: A generation of violations against children in conflict Save*, 2020.

²⁰⁰ World Bank, *For Protection and Promotion: The Design and Implementation of Effective Safety Nets*, 2008.

²⁰¹ Information from the Country Task Force of Monitoring and Reporting of Grave Violations against Children (CTFMRM).

²⁰² Information from the Country Task Force of Monitoring and Reporting of Grave Violations against Children (CTFMRM).

²⁰³ Al Jazeera, *Amnesty urges release of Afghan men who exposed paedophile ring*, 2019.

²⁰⁴ Central Statistics Organization and UNICEF, *Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2010-2011*, 2013.

²⁰⁵ UNICEF, *Access to Justice for Children*, 2013.

Some of the children were held in detention for offences such as homosexuality, debauchery and running away from home.

detention centres does not allow for consistent oversight, monitoring, and supervision of children and juveniles, particularly at night, exposing these children to substantial risks.

Similarly, child victims of human trafficking and boys exploited for *bacha bazi* are routinely prosecuted and convicted. Such outcomes also apply to children involved in the cultivation or smuggling of illicit narcotics. According to reports by NGOs, child trafficking victims are kept in juvenile detention centres, sometimes for several years. They are considered criminals even after being transferred to rehabilitation centres.²⁰⁶ Children detained on security-related charges are often deprived of legal assistance, and many experience torture or ill-treatment.²⁰⁷

One of the major risks for children following the Taliban takeover is the proposed change in the age of what is considered a child, from the current internationally accepted definition of anyone under the age of 18 years, to being determined by the onset of signs of puberty, which can be as early as 9 or 10 years old in girls. Such a revision could potentially facilitate the legalization of child marriage, child labour, and recruitment of children, in addition to children in conflict with the law being treated as adults and facing serious punishment within the justice system.

Mobile Populations and Forced Displacement

As of 30 June 2022, approximately 3.4 million people (21 per cent adult female, 22 per cent adult male) in Afghanistan remain in internal displacement due to conflict and are in need of durable solutions, of whom 58 per cent are children.²⁰⁸ Two-thirds of IDPs are displaced within their home province with most residing in just six provinces.²⁰⁹

More than 30,000 people were displaced due to conflict between January and October 2022, a significant decline from 866,872 during all of 2021. While conflict and insecurity were previously the primary driver of internal displacement, disasters and environmental risks are exacerbating underlying needs and vulnerabilities. For instance, the 21 June 2022 earthquake rendered an additional 9,000 families homeless.

Deteriorating economic conditions have become a primary driver of movement with 81 per cent of households reporting economic reasons for their movement.²¹⁰ Given the risk of a further deterioration in the socio-economic situation, internal population displacement and movement, and cross-border migration, are likely to continue. Consequently, an estimated 500,000 more people may become internally displaced over the course of 2022.²¹¹ Furthermore, people residing in informal settlements — particularly those in urban, state-owned, and largely IDP dominated areas — are at risk of eviction by the authorities.

Over one million IDPs have returned to their places of origin to date in 2021 and 2022, primarily due to improved security conditions, indicating opportunities for solutions. Local integration continued to be the preferred choice of 43 per cent of IDPs surveyed in the third quarter of 2022, while the proportion of those reporting their intent to return to their areas of origin more than doubled from 4.9 per cent in the second quarter to 11.4 per cent in the third.²¹² Reported needs to enable IDP returns

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ UNHCR, [External Update: Afghanistan Situation #21](#), November 2022.

²⁰⁹ Herat, Hilmand, Kunduz, Takar, Nangahar, and Faryab.

²¹⁰ REACH, *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022*, 2022.

²¹¹ OCHA, [Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2022](#), January 2022.

²¹² Afghanistan Protection Cluster

have also shifted from increased security to livelihoods and financial considerations, transport costs, and reconstruction/rehabilitation of shelters.²¹³

As many as 6.9 million Afghans remain in neighbouring countries, of whom around two million are registered refugees in Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Over 4,000 Afghan refugees (21 per cent adult female, 22 per cent adult male, and 58 per cent children under 18 years) returned to Afghanistan to date in 2022, mostly from Pakistan, an increase over those returning in 2020 and 2021. In addition, Afghanistan hosts almost 60,000 refugees, mainly from Pakistan, with most having no access to essential services and employment.

From January to end of July 2022, more than 534,000 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran and Pakistan, with the large majority from the Iranian side. Combined with 2021 returns of over 1.2 million persons (61 per cent forced returns and 39 per cent voluntary returns), almost 1.7 million undocumented Afghans have crossed back into Afghanistan in the last 18 months. Additional surges in returns are linked to the large number of Afghans leaving the country through irregular migration routes, most of whom are undocumented and therefore at risk of being detained and forcibly returned. There has also been an increase in forced returns from Turkey in 2022.

A significant number of Afghans have been observed converging in Nimroz province on the border with Iran. The border crossing has long been a hub for smuggling operations, with price of bus tickets from Kabul to the area almost tripling in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover. These precarious journeys occur, through various unofficial crossing points, in an area characterized by extreme temperatures and harsh environmental conditions, placing vulnerable migrants and returnees at risk. In addition, the *de facto* authorities have imposed more restrictions on those intending to leave Afghanistan irregularly through unofficial borders, including by instructing hotels in border provinces not to host those leaving.

Protecting migrant rights and migrant safety throughout the migration process by promoting safe, orderly regular and responsible migration is key, including by encouraging migration mainstreaming and ensuring migration and development linkages are institutionalized in local and national strategies. Furthermore, the international community must leverage the changing dynamics and opportunities that have emerged in Afghanistan to advance a holistic and integrated approach for durable solutions for IDPs.

Ethnic and Religious Minorities²¹⁴

Afghanistan is home to a number of ethnic and religious minorities, with diverse cultural, linguistic and traditional values. While Islam remains the country's main religion, with Muslims composing over 95 per cent of the population, other religious groups like Sikhs, Hindus, Jews, and Christians have lived in Afghanistan for centuries. Due to repressive policies, religious persecution, conflict and intolerance, most non-Muslim Afghans began to flee in the 1990s.

In his September 2022 report to the UN Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan expressed serious concern about the situation of minorities in the country since August 2021, noting that their places of worships, educational and medical centres

²¹³ REACH, *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022*, 2022.

²¹⁴ This section draws directly from the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the '*Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan*' to the UN Human Rights Council from 6 September 2022.

have been systematically attacked, and their members have been arbitrary arrested, tortured, summarily executed, evicted, marginalised, and in some cases forced to flee the country.

Hazaras, who are overwhelmingly Shia, are historically one of the most severely persecuted groups in Afghanistan and face multiple forms of discrimination. The Taliban have appointed Pashtuns to senior positions in government structures in Hazara dominated provinces, forcibly evicted Hazaras from their homes without adequate prior notice and imposed religious taxation contrary to Shia principles. There are reports of arbitrary arrests, torture, and other ill-treatment, summary executions and enforced disappearances. In addition, an increase in inflammatory speech is being reported, both online and in some mosques during Friday prayers, including calling for Hazaras to be killed.

The Special Rapporteur noted that attacks on minority populations, frequently claimed by ISIL-KP, and the historical persecution of Hazaras and other groups, appear to be systematic in nature and reflect elements of an organizational policy, thus bearing hallmarks of international crimes including crimes against humanity.

In September 2021, the last member of Afghanistan's Jewish community left the country.²¹⁵ The Hindu and Sikh populations have also declined dramatically, reportedly from 7,000 in 2016 to under 50 in 2022.²¹⁶ While successive Afghan authorities are responsible for this forced migration, the Special Rapporteur highlighted the Taliban and ISIL-KP as bearing the brunt of responsibility for their historical intolerance, rejection of religions other than Islam, restriction on their religious practices, and failure to protect them.

During the previous administration, Hazaras were represented in senior positions across all three branches of the Government, including at Vice-Presidential level. Sikhs and Hindus had representatives in the legislative bodies, enabling them to participate in political and decision-making processes. However, except for a few senior posts granted to ethnic Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks, which appear mostly symbolic in nature, religious and ethnic minorities are now largely absent from the national administration and decision-making processes.

The Kuchi Community

With an estimated population of 1.5 million, the traditionally nomadic Kuchi population constitutes an important part of Afghanistan's cultural heritage. Kuchis have been greatly affected by conflict, drought, erosion of seasonal migration routes, and demographic shifts, leaving only a small number who still follow their traditional livelihood of nomadic herding. Those retaining a purely nomadic existence have no fixed abode and are dependent on animals for their livelihood, with their movements largely determined by the weather and availability of pastures. Consequently, the Kuchi have limited access to education, health, clean water, and alternative livelihoods.

Compared to the national adult literacy rate of 36 per cent, the rate among the Kuchis averages 6.5 per cent. That figure goes as low as 0.9 per cent among women.²¹⁷ Few have a bank account (0.2 per cent), and less than 2 per cent have access to the Internet. Few are reached by international donor assistance. Their water supply comes mainly from springs, wells, and surface water, which is often

²¹⁵ Associated Press, *Last member of Afghanistan's Jewish community leaves country*, 8 September 2021.

²¹⁶ Al Jazeera, *The decline of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh communities*, 1 January 2017, and the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the *'Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan'* to the UN Human Rights Council from 6 September 2022.

²¹⁷ All statistics on the Kuchi population from: Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority, *Income and Labor Force Survey 2020*, April 2021.

contaminated. Sewage facilities are minimal. Their access to essential health services and information is limited. On average, Kuchi women receive only one of four recommended ante-natal check-ups. Around 70 per cent of children are born at home compared to 41 per cent in other rural areas. Only 10 per cent of them are registered at birth.

The vast majority are classified as poor (88 per cent). Seventy-one per cent suffer from food insecurity (compared to the national average at 59 per cent), including 19 per cent who suffer from severe food insecurity (the national average at 14 per cent). The prevalence of undernourishment is 15 per cent.

Among the Kuchi population, there are 12 per cent more males — a difference of 85,000 people. Most of them are below the age of 15 (70,000). Only five per cent of Kuchi boys and one per cent of Kuchi girls attend education, compared to the national gross attendance rates of 63 per cent for boys and 44 per cent for girls. The youth literacy rate is low — 10 per cent for boys and 1 per cent for girls — compared with 66 per cent and 32 per cent respectively in non-Kuchi rural areas.

Twenty-four per cent of Kuchi children carry out some economic activity compared to 10 per cent of rural children and 3 per cent of urban children. The share of Kuchi children engaged in hazardous activities is 10 per cent higher than the national average.

The labour force participation rate among the Kuchis is 68 per cent compared to 47 per cent in other rural areas. While only 16 per cent of urban women and 22 per cent of rural women are in the labour force, that share reaches 46 per cent among Kuchi women. Ninety per cent of Kuchi men work compared to the national average of 72 per cent. However, there are no employers and employees among the Kuchis; three-quarters are family workers, and the remainder are own-account workers. The unemployment rate at five per cent is half the national average and one-third of the rate in urban areas.

Persons Living with Disabilities

It is estimated that almost 80 per cent of adults aged 18 and over in Afghanistan have some form of physical, functional, sensory, or other impairment.²¹⁸ Severe disability is more prevalent among females (14.9 per cent) than males (12.6 per cent). Among children aged 2–17 years, 17.3 per cent have a mild, moderate, or severe disability. The incidence of severe disabilities among adults and children, which stood at 2.7 per cent in 2005, has risen steeply to 13.9 per cent.²¹⁹ Despite an increased awareness within the aid community about the issues facing people with disability, there is growing evidence that measures for addressing the specific needs of those with disabilities in responses, and their inclusion within their organizational composition, are still inconsistently applied, requiring additional work.

A 2019 study by The Asia Foundation found that only 18.3 per cent of respondents with a disability reported having someone to help them with their day-to-day activities, and that use of assistive devices is extremely low. Among adults who had assistive products, over 70 per cent believed that additional products would make their lives easier. Of those who did not have assistive products, over 65 per cent said they need them.²²⁰

²¹⁸ 24.6 per cent mild, 40.4 per cent moderate, and 13.9 per cent severe.

²¹⁹ The Asia Foundation, *A survey of the Afghan People – Afghanistan in 2019*, December 2019.

²²⁰ The Asia Foundation, *Model Disability Survey of Afghanistan*, 2019.

It is estimated that 33 per cent per cent of the population are living with multiple disabilities.²²¹ The most common cause of disability is reduced physical mobility followed by impaired eyesight. The share of people with multiple disabilities is 74.4 per cent in urban areas, 25.6 per cent in rural areas.²²² This percentage increases at older ages, though it is higher among young children than adults. Generally, there are few differences between both sexes.²²³

In 2022, self-reported disability prevalence among recent displaced and returnee households was higher than national averages at 11 per cent.²²⁴ This figure refers to physical disability and does not account for the impact of decades of conflict, natural disasters, and poverty on mental health.

Persons with disabilities are vulnerable and often marginalized. An estimated 80 per cent of girls with disabilities are out of school.²²⁵ Only 17 per cent of youth with disabilities participate in education and training.²²⁶ A 2019 study conducted by Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission found that 72 per cent of people with a disability were unemployed, only 53 per cent were receiving social security support, 80 per cent had not received a formal education, and half faced physical barriers in accessing health services.²²⁷ The cause of disability attracts public stigma.²²⁸ While disability resulting from an accident or violence does not generally invoke negative public attitudes and can even attract social assistance, those born with an impairment are sometimes considered cursed. Families tend to hide such persons from the outside world to protect the individual and preserve the family reputation.²²⁹

People Who Use Drugs

In 2015, 11 per cent of the country's population, or approximately 3 million people, tested positive for narcotic drugs.²³⁰ The majority of people who use drugs are men, with 1.3 million users, however, around 700,000 women and 1 to 1.2 million children also tested positive for narcotic drugs.

Biological samples from two-thirds of children in rural areas involved in the 2015 survey were found to contain opium (metabolites), suggesting they had either been administered the drug or had been exposed to it. A 2020 survey showed considerable drug use among secondary school students (aged 13–18 years).²³¹ Some 12 per cent (14 per cent of boys and 8.5 per cent of girls) reported using any substance (including alcohol) at least once in the past 12 months. Overall, 1.3 per cent of the students self-reported using heroin, the same percentage reporting using methamphetamines. However, recent evidence suggests that drug use has since significantly increased, including amongst children, youth, and women.

Existing research suggests that difficult socio-economic conditions in the country with a wide availability of substances have left even more people vulnerable to drug use disorders.²³²

²²¹ Afghanistan Statistics and Information Authority, *Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016–2017*, May 2017.

²²² The Asia Foundation, *Model Disability Survey of Afghanistan 2019*, 14 May 2020.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ REACH, *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022*, 2022.

²²⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Discrimination and barriers facing women and girls with disabilities in Afghanistan*, 2020.

²²⁶ Afghanistan Statistics and Information Authority, *Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016–2017*, May 2017.

²²⁷ OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, December 2020.

²²⁸ , Trani JF, Bakhshi P, Nandipati A. (2012), 'Delivering' education; maintaining inequality. The case of children with disabilities in Afghanistan', *Cambridge Journal of Education*.

²²⁹ Handicap International, *Conducting surveys on disability: A comprehensive toolkit*, 2006.

²³⁰ SGI Global, *Afghanistan National Drug Use Survey*, 2015. f

²³¹ UNODC, UNICEF, and Government of Afghanistan, *Youth study on substance use and health in Afghanistan 2018*, 2021.

²³² UNODC, *Drug Situation in Afghanistan 2021: Latest findings and emerging threats*, November 2021.

Drug use is associated with negative socio-economic and health consequences for people who use drugs and the population at large. Drug use increases the likelihood of mental and physical disorders, foremost of which are HIV infection, hepatitis, other infectious diseases, overdose, and premature death.²³³ People who use drugs also face significant socio-economic challenges such as high rates of unemployment, poverty, stigmatization, and discrimination. Due to their disadvantaged socio-economic position in society, they may also be particularly vulnerable to becoming victims to exploitation, imprisonment, violence, human trafficking, and other human rights violations.

²³³ UNODC, *World Drug Report, 2022*.

5. Commitments Under International Norms and Standards

Afghanistan is a party to seven of the nine core international human rights treaties, representing minimum obligations it is obliged to uphold, promote, and protect.²³⁴ There is no provision for withdrawal from international human rights treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.²³⁵ As such, these obligations remain binding on any governing authorities in place in Afghanistan, irrespective of the ideological perspectives of those in power.

Post-August 2021, despite being the *de facto* authorities and bound by various international legal instruments and customary international law, the Taliban appear to have drawn very little on international obligations, norms, and standards to inform how the country is governed.

In meetings with the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, the *de facto* authorities acknowledged that, from their perspective, the great majority of international human rights norms are compatible with their understanding of Sharia and are committed to Afghanistan's international obligations.²³⁶ However, Taliban rule is based on a highly strict interpretation of Sharia law, with significant consequences for human rights across the country, particularly regarding non-discrimination and equality, with previous progress towards compliance with international norms and standards being rapidly undone.

While the *de facto* authorities have taken some steps seemingly aimed at protecting and promoting human rights, these have not been fully upheld given the broad range of human rights violations that have been documented by the UN which occurred between 15 August 2021 and 15 June 2022, including against women and girls, for which they bear responsibility. Members of the *de facto* authorities appear to have carried out these violations with impunity. Investigation and accountability for rights violations and abuses, while beginning to transpire, are opaque in process due to a still unclear 'rule of law' situation and varied practices at sub-national level given the Taliban's implementation of some of the laws of the former Republic (such as the Penal Code, 2017 and the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law, 2009) and/or Sharia law. Thus, in some provinces, most civil and criminal cases are initially mediated, failing which they are referred to the *de facto* courts or police for further investigation/adjudication under Sharia law. In other provinces, only Sharia law is used, with most cases referred for mediation and other informal dispute resolution mechanisms.

UN engagement with the *de facto* authorities regarding Afghanistan's obligation to comply with international human rights principles, norms and standards on civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights remain ongoing.

²³⁴ OHCHR, *The Core International Human Rights Instruments and their monitoring bodies*, 2021.

²³⁵ An overview of the core international treaties, conventions, and protocols to which Afghanistan is a party can be found in Annex 1 of the [2021 CCA](#).

²³⁶ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan (A/HRC/51/6)*, 6 September 2022.

6. Multidimensional SDG Risk Analysis

The 2021 CCA provided a comprehensive overview of the main risks facing Afghanistan’s progress towards achieving the SDGs.²³⁷ However, many of the risks described in the 2021 document across all SDG risks areas transpired because of the political upheaval in the country following its publication. Consequently, the greatest risk is not only a slowing of progress towards the SDGs, but a widescale deterioration and rapid reversal of the limited but hard-won gains achieved over the past two decades. Such a transformative change therefore necessitated a complete review and revision of the SDG risk framework contained in the 2021 CCA to better reflect the current reality in the country.

Like its predecessor, the below SDG risk framework identifies various risks factors against the 12 prescribed risk definitions, namely: **1.)** Political stability, **2.)** Democratic space; **3.)** Internal security; **4.)** Justice and rule of law; **5.)** Economic and financial stability; **6.)** Regional and global influences; and **7.)** Environment and climate change.

These risks factors are then assessed against their likelihood of occurrence, their impact on progress towards the SDGs should they materialize, as well as potential measures that can be undertaken to mitigate the likelihood of their realization.

Legend

Likelihood Impact

• High	• High
• Medium	• Medium
• Low	• Low

²³⁷ See section Annex 2 of the [2021 CCA](#) for Multidimensional SDG Risk Analysis Matrix.

Table 3: SDG Risk Matrix

Risk Areas	Risk Factors	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
<p><u>1. Political Stability</u></p> <p><i>Description: Increased probability of a deterioration in political situation and increasingly fractious political dynamics and tensions, contributing to further instability and threats to peace.</i></p> <p><i>SDGs impacted: Particularly 5, 16, 17</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued international isolation and weak legitimacy of <i>de facto</i> authorities. Lack of political, gender, ethnic, and religious diversity within governing authorities. No active constitutional framework codifying governance and institutional arrangements. Limited coherence and unity across government and governance institutions. Legal and institutional reform in contravention of international norms and standards. Increased fissures within the Taliban over divergent opinions on governance and policy issues. Replacement of former government personnel with unqualified Taliban affiliates. Deteriorating economic situation and inability of <i>de facto</i> authorities to meet the basic needs of the population. 	●	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy for representative and broad-based governance and institutional framework at all levels which includes different political affiliations, ethnic groups, gender, etc. Mediation and good offices support for enhanced political stability. Engagement with UN member states with influence with the <i>de facto</i> authorities. Common and coherent deconfliction and engagement with <i>de facto</i> authorities and local communities. Advocacy for the leveraging public sector human and institutional capacities built over the past two decades, particularly of women. Equitable allocation of national financial resources across the country based on needs.
<p><u>2. Democratic and Civic Space</u></p> <p><i>Description: Further constraints imposed on democratic and civic engagement and threats and human rights violations perpetrated against civil society actors.</i></p> <p><i>SDGs impacted: 16, 17</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authoritarian, non-representative, and extremist authorities. Exclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups, particularly women, from decision making processes and platforms at all levels of formal and informal governance. Increased restrictions imposed on CSOs and NGOs. Shrinking civic space and threats and human rights violations against civil society activists, journalists, etc. Increased restrictions on women's participation in the public domain and in civil society. 	●	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meaningful inclusive and active engagement with, and strengthening of, community-based and civil society organizations and institutions (incl. youth, women, and other marginalized groups) as agents of change. Advocacy for the removal of restrictions on the effective functioning NGOs and CSOs and their staff, particularly women. Advocacy for greater freedom of opinion, expression, and peaceful assembly. Support for the inclusion the Human Rights Commission and Gender Units in the structure of the <i>de facto</i> authorities.
<p><u>3. Internal Security</u></p> <p><i>Description: Increase in violent conflict and insecurity after initial period of improved</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued activity by ISIL-KP and other violent extremist groups, and increased propagation of extremist ideologies and radical interpretations of Islam. Ongoing conflict between the Taliban and National Resistance Front. 	●	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Also see mitigation measures for Risk Area 1: <u>Political Stability</u>, particularly on mediation and good offices support.</i> Continued advocacy and support for inclusive community reconciliation / transitional justice / peacebuilding processes.

Risk Areas	Risk Factors	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
<p><i>security following the Taliban takeover.</i></p> <p><i>SDGs impacted: All</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued threat of explosive ordnance contamination and explosive remnants of war. Worsening disputes between ethnic groups over subnational predominance and resources, likely to be exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. Increase in sectarian violence and persecution of minorities. Increase in crime-related security incidents resulting from the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formulation and roll out of strategies for outreach and mediation to address local conflicts, in collaboration with neighbouring countries as required. Support for comprehensive prevention and countering of violent extremism interventions, and advocacy for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration and security sector reform. Increase awareness and response capacity to reduce the threat of explosive remnants of war.
<p><u>4. Justice and Rule of Law</u></p> <p><i>Description: Legal uncertainty, arbitrary court practices and the overall lack of accountability under international norms and standards.</i></p> <p><i>SDGs impacted: 16, 17</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued lack of an agreed constitutional framework and ambiguity on applicable laws. Regression of progress in bringing Afghanistan’s legal and judicial systems in line with international norms and standards, contributing to unclear and variegated ‘rule of law’ situation. Lack of clarity on legal process to deal with gender-related issues (e.g., elimination of violence against women, child marriage, etc.). Specialized institutional and legal arrangements for gender and child-related justice are non-functional. Justice system includes only male religious appointees and lacks capacity. Barriers to work imposed on women defence lawyers. Impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations, particularly those under the authority of the <i>de facto</i> authorities. 	<p>•</p>	<p>•</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with <i>de facto</i> authorities to promote compliance with international human rights norms and standards, particularly in relation to women’s access to justice and the promotion of the rights of vulnerable people, including women and children. Support the engagement of non-state actors, including CSOs and lawyers, to provide access to legal services and justice. Promote the establishment of effective mechanisms to prevent and address corruption under international norms and standards. Continue to monitor the human rights situation and advocate for the protection of human rights with the <i>de facto</i> authorities. Support and strengthen community-based and national human rights organizations, human rights defenders, and activists. Advocacy for implementing strategies to address harmful sociocultural norms that undermine the fulfilment of rights and limit access to fair and independent judicial and non-judicial remedies.
<p><u>5. Economic and Financial Stability</u></p> <p><i>Description: Continued economic deterioration following Taliban takeover resulting in increased</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing lack of liquidity, and disconnection from the international payment system. Rapid inflation of basic commodities. Exclusion of women from labour force (with few exceptions). Vulnerability of productive sectors to shocks (e.g., those arising from the climate, external geopolitical factors, etc.). 	<p>•</p>	<p>•</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with the international community to facilitate international payments for humanitarian purposes and the eventual restoration of the country to the international payment system. Advocacy for aid beyond humanitarian assistance through the restoration of essential services, safety nets, livelihoods, and community systems. Continued advocacy for the full participation of women in the labour force.

Risk Areas	Risk Factors	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
<p><i>unemployment, poverty, and humanitarian needs.</i></p> <p><i>SDGs impacted: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International community's dwindling financial commitment to Afghanistan. • Further decline in human capital through emigration and lack of educational opportunities, especially for women and girls. • Continued systemic corruption. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy for strengthen human capital formation to meet emerging labour market needs.
<p><u>6. Regional and Global Influences</u></p> <p><i>Description: Global and regional actors threaten domestic political, security, economic, and social stability.</i></p> <p><i>SDGs impacted: 1, 2, 8, 10, 16, 17</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External and regional actors exacerbate internal political tensions and support various armed factions to advance geostrategic interests. • Increased presence of armed groups, mercenaries, and foreign fighters, as well as regional radical Islamist militant groups. • Prolonged economic downturns in the host countries of Afghan migrant workers, resulting in reduced remittances flows and larger number of returnees. • Deterioration of the relationship with Pakistan and Iran resulting in increased border tensions and potential for violence. • Spikes or sustained rises in global commodity prices, including grain and oil. 	●	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensified diplomatic and economic engagement with regional organizations and countries on issues of mutual concern, including migration flows, water resources, illicit drug trade, etc. • Enhancing regional cooperation on issues such as trade, transit, and the extension of bilateral political and economic relations.
<p><u>7. Environment and climate change</u></p> <p><i>Description: Increased frequency, intensity, and duration of disasters, exacerbated by climate change, resulting in increased displacement and/or humanitarian needs.</i></p> <p><i>SDGs impacted: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak community resilience to shocks and lack of scalable and shock-responsive social safety nets. • Reliance on vulnerable productive sector (agriculture and pastoralism). • Increased frequency and severity of extreme climactic events and persistent drought. • Regular earthquakes, avalanches, and other drivers of humanitarian emergencies. • Weak national and local-level disaster mitigation and response capacities. • Lack of holistic natural resource management strategies/plans. • Unplanned and unsustainable urbanization. 	●	●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of the development and implementation of disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, including in the productive sectors, with a focus on sustainable natural resource management and nature-based solutions. • Advocacy for adoption, ratification, and compliance with relevant outstanding global environmental agreements. • Increase focus by the aid community on building resilience to environmental and climactic shocks through mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in programmatic interventions. • Build community-level awareness and capacities on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

7. Prevention and Humanitarian-Development-Peace Linkages

The security situation has remained fragile since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. While there has since been a considerable decline in the number of conflict-related security incidents and civilian casualties, the situation continues to be impacted by the activities of ISIL-KP, the emergence of new anti-Taliban resistance forces, intra-Taliban tensions, continued retaliation against former government officials by the Taliban, as well as enduring threats, including terrorism and crime.

Support for the Taliban varies across communities, with some elites and communities expressing clear support for the Taliban while others are critical, in some cases openly. A dissonance among the Taliban members, particularly between Pashtun and non-Pashtun Taliban figures, continues to be witnessed, which, coupled with the prominence given to religious scholars by the *de facto* authorities could contribute to radicalization and violent extremism, as well as increase internal tensions between Taliban factions and between the Taliban and other national political stakeholders (*see section on 'Political Dynamics' in section 3.2*).

Related causes of conflicts and instability include the exclusive arrangements of power, an authoritarian government that lacks widespread legitimacy, and longstanding impunity for conflict related crimes and abuses, some of which go back decades.

Land issues, linked to the absence of property registers, effective regulatory and dispute resolution mechanisms, as well as arbitrary allocations of land throughout Afghan history and regime changes, also have the potential to further exacerbate grievances and drive conflict. Worsening disputes between ethnic, religious, and tribal groups over subnational predominance and resources are likely to be compounded by the impacts of climate change, while increased sectarian violence and persecution of ethnic and religious minorities, including by the *de facto* authorities, will further drive alienation and resentment.

For displaced and returnee communities, the economic crisis exacerbates pre-existing vulnerabilities relating to loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, and disrupted access to services, as well as feeds into the stigmatization and hostilities directed towards them from host communities. Access to land will be one of key determinants for durable solutions for IDPs. The deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation is also likely to increase the use of illicit drugs and crime-related security incidents.

Restrictions imposed on women and the rise of conservative norms contribute to creating a fertile environment for violence against women, which, along with assessing political and security developments, can be a key barometer in assessing the overall stability in the country. While women were largely absent from formal peace structures in Afghanistan, they served in different representative capacities at different junctures, with women's organizations being actively mobilized around peace advocacy and peacebuilding. However, it is feared that this momentum will be lost due to the considerably restricted space for women in civil society and governance.

Meanwhile, humanitarian needs continued to rise owing to the sharp economic decline and the devastating combination of decades of conflict, protracted vulnerability, economic collapse, recent earthquakes, and recurring natural hazards, affecting some 24.4 million people, or 59 per cent of the estimated population.

The 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan seeks US\$ 4.44 billion to provide multi-sector assistance to 22.1 million of the 24.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance across Afghanistan, of which 5.9 million are in displacement. Economic shocks have now overtaken conflict and natural disasters as the primary drivers of humanitarian needs.

In addition to increasing humanitarian needs, climate change also threatens long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan, and could worsen poverty, weaken governance, and contribute to instability.²³⁸ More frequent droughts could boost the drug economy. Scarcer water and arable land could increase community-level and inter-ethnic conflict while international tensions over transboundary water resources could undermine attempts to stabilize the country.

While humanitarian aid is essential for sustaining lives and livelihoods during crises, it is not a long-term solution. Poverty reduction as well as the delivery of basic goods and services must ultimately rely on stability, sustained economic growth, and building resilience against economic and climate shocks, particularly for the most vulnerable and marginalized, without which poverty and aid dependency will persist.

Constraints on the delivery of humanitarian assistance

While there has been a significant decrease in military operations since September 2021, other forms of access impediments remain at levels comparable to 2021. By mid-June 2022, some 196 incidents of interferences were reported (compared to 188 during the same period in 2021). Additionally, there have been 139 incidents of violence and threats against humanitarian personnel/assets/facilities recorded since the start of the year. This is comparable to the same period last year when 157 incidents were recorded.

The highest number of access incidents (36 per cent) were attributed to interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities by the *de facto* authorities and armed criminal groups. The *de facto* authorities have recently introduced a Code of Conduct for NGOs which sets out a series of demands that directly violate independent humanitarian space.

Amid growing restrictions curtailing their basic rights and freedoms, female humanitarian workers face harassment, intimidation, and mistreatment in the conduct of their work. A 2022 study by [OCHA](#) showed that from 171 districts across Afghanistan, the ability of women to participate in humanitarian action was found to be low and lower in 88 districts (51 per cent) and high and higher in only 68 (40 per cent). The *mahram* decree was seen as the biggest obstacle hindering women's full participation in humanitarian response, both as providers and recipients of assistance.

Addressing the underlying causes of fragility and vulnerability will require a concerted and coordinated approach from all partners operating across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in Afghanistan to effectively tackle chronic humanitarian needs and the drivers of conflict.

In addition, underlying causes of conflicts, and the grievances driving them as outlined above, must continue to be brought to the attention of the *de facto* authorities and advised on how to address them in line with international obligations, including through guidance provided by UN conventions and treaties to promote the fulfillment of social, economic, cultural, civil, and political rights; independently and fairly redress their violations; and prevent and fight corruption. Evidence from other contexts demonstrates that durable peace and reconciliation requires inclusive processes and institutions, with representation from all political, religious, and ethnic groups. For example, a

²³⁸ The Climate Security Expert Network, *Climate-Fragility Risk Brief: Afghanistan*, 2019.

correlation exists between women's participation in all phases of peacebuilding and transitions and more concrete and sustainable implementation of peace agreements. However, it is important to remain realistic about what can be achieved in this regard given the *de facto* authorities' rigid positions to date around normative and rights-based issues.

It is envisaged that the forthcoming multi-year UN strategic planning framework for Afghanistan will provide a key mechanism through which a triple nexus approach will be operationalized. The new Framework will build on the analysis and interventions undertaken through the Humanitarian Response Plan to design interventions that strengthen the resilience of those most vulnerable to shocks. The new Framework will also serve as an Integrated Strategic Framework, thereby integrating the peacebuilding, rule of law, and human rights mandate of UNAMA, the UN Special Political Mission in the country. UNAMA will also leverage its coordination and convening mandate and aid coordination role to advance collaboration across the nexus amongst a wide array of partners through established or revised coordination platforms.

8. National Vision for Sustainable Development

Prior to August 2021, the then Government's national vision was outlined in its Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2021–2025 (ANPDF II). Aligned with Afghanistan's commitments to international norms and standards, including the SDGs, the ANPDF II placed a heavy emphasis on peacebuilding, state-building, and market-building — to make progress on economic growth, with an overarching goal of reducing poverty and improving welfare. Women's rights were core to the ANPDF II. The Framework was to be implemented through a new set of expanded National Priority Programs adapted in line with the SDGs. These included broader clusters of security, governance, infrastructure development, private sector development, human resources, as well as agriculture and rural development.

However, the Taliban takeover of the country in August 2021 has rendered the ANPDF II effectively defunct. There is currently no national development planning framework in place for Afghanistan and no documented commitment by the *de facto* authorities towards the localization of SDGs for Afghanistan. Indeed, policies and actions currently being followed by the *de facto* authorities will likely result in loss of development gains and a significant roll-back in the already limited progress achieved towards the Goals over the last two decades. The UN and its humanitarian partners have however continued efforts to remain engaged with the *de facto* administration of Afghanistan for better coordination of delivery of humanitarian assistance and consensus on joint operating principles.

In the ensuing vacuum of governance and national policy planning, the UN in Afghanistan developed the Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF) in January 2022 to steer a well-coordinated response to the climatic, humanitarian, and economic crises. The TEF aligned all aid with the relevant UN Security Council Resolution 2615 (authorizing humanitarian and basic-human-needs assistance on 22 December 2021) and Resolution 2626 (providing the new UNAMA mandate on 17 March 2022). Subsequently, all humanitarian, basic-human-needs, and related emergency-development assistance is being delivered in Afghanistan through this Framework.

Going forward, the TEF will be replaced by a new UN strategic framework being produced for exceptional circumstances of Afghanistan for the period 2023 to 2025. In the absence of a documented national vision or plan for sustainable development and no mandate on the resumption of development cooperation, the UN in Afghanistan is undertaking broad-based consultations with national and international partners for development of the new framework. A calibrated approach is also being adopted to engage with the *de facto* administration in Afghanistan to reach consensus on some form of 'Shared Human Agenda for the people of Afghanistan'. These consultations and engagements are being guided by multi-partner Strategic Thematic Working Groups for key sectoral policy planning, joint programming, and reviews.

For further information on the national development priorities and frameworks of the previous Government of Afghanistan, please see the section '*The National Vision*' of the 2021 CCA [here](#).

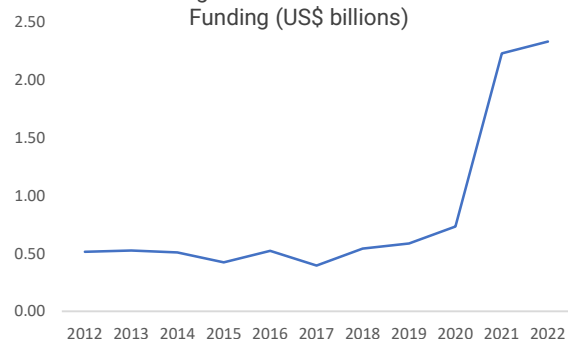
9. Financial Landscape Analysis

Before the Taliban takeover, public expenditures had two components, the budget of the Government of Afghanistan, as much as half of which was financed by foreign aid (“on budget” support), and the off-budget expenditures, financed entirely by foreign aid.

Grants to Afghanistan prior to 2021 amounted to around US\$ 8.5 billion per year, equivalent to 43 per cent of GDP, and financed 75 per cent of public expenditure, 50 per cent of the budget, and around 90 per cent of government security spending. Security sector expenditure amounted to approximately US\$ 5.6 billion per year (of which around US\$ 4.9 billion was financed through grants) accounting for just over half of total government expenditures and 30 per cent of GDP.²³⁹ Tax revenues only accounted for seven per cent of GDP in 2020.²⁴⁰

Following the takeover by the Taliban, donors have halted all financial support to the government, with critical funding for sustaining basic human needs in Afghanistan being disrupted or suspended. The deteriorating situation in the country resulted in an upsurge in humanitarian assistance from US\$ 700 million in 2020 to US\$ 2.2 billion in 2021 and US\$ 2.3 billion in 2022 (as of 29 September).²⁴¹

Figure 12: Humanitarian Funding (US\$ billions)



Assistance has also been provided to ensure the basic human needs of the population are supported through sustained provision of essential services, livelihood support, social protection, and protection services. As of August 2022, the UN has received US\$ 973 million in support of basic human needs.

Three projects totalling US\$ 793 million were approved through the World Bank Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund in June 2022 while the Asian Development Bank approved US\$ 405 million in grants in January 2022. On 14 September 2022, the US announced the establishment of “The Afghan Fund” to be based in Switzerland that would disburse US\$ 3.5 billion of the US\$ 9.5 billion in frozen Afghan Central Bank assets with the stated intent of helping address the acute effects of Afghanistan’s economic and humanitarian crises by supporting the country’s macroeconomic and financial stability. As of October 2022, the *de facto* authorities have not agreed to this proposal.

The freezing of direct financial support by donors means that the *de facto* authorities’ budget is now entirely financed by its own revenues, raised mostly through customs. As of 16 August 2022, overall revenue collection reached AFN 100 billion since 22 December 2021, compared to AFN 98.8 billion last year. Taxes at borders continue to be higher than in-land revenues, reaching AFN 57 billion (57 per cent of the total). Reflecting a compressed economy, in-land revenues were AFN 43 billion (43 per cent of the total), of which revenue from non-tax sources remains the highest. Revenue from ministries is AFN 22.7 billion, of which more than AFN 5.8 billion is from the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, primarily originating from coal mining and exports.²⁴²

²³⁹ World Bank, *Financing Peace: Fiscal Challenges and Implications for a Post-Settlement Afghanistan*, December 2019.

²⁴⁰ OECD States of Fragility, *Afghanistan Country Dashboard*.

²⁴¹ OCHA Financial Tracking Service, *Afghanistan Country Dashboard*, 2022.

²⁴² World Bank, *Afghanistan Economic Monitor*, 23 August 2022.

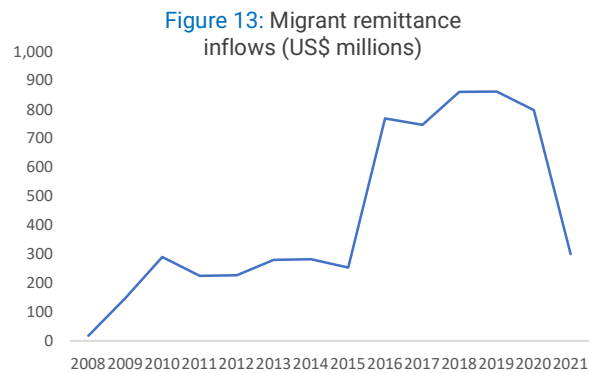
The Taliban released their first annual budget in May 2022, with spending expected to reach AFN 231.4 billion (US\$ 2.5 billion), while domestic revenues are expected to reach AFN 186.7 billion, leaving a fiscal deficit of AFN 44 billion (over US\$ 500 million). While the *de facto* authorities stated that AFN 27.9 billion (US\$ 0.33 billion) would be spent on development projects, no details have been provided on sectoral investments, including on basic services.²⁴³

Remittances have been of enormous importance to many Afghan families and to the broader economy for decades. With 5.8 million Afghan migrants and diaspora living abroad, their support to communities and families back home has been an indispensable source of income, particularly for women left to take care of their families while their husbands are working outside of the country.

In 2020, formal remittances into Afghanistan totalled US\$ 797 million — approximately four per cent of GDP. According to the Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016–2017, remittances represented an income source for almost 10 per cent of Afghan households.²⁴⁴

Remittances have become an even more important lifeline for vulnerable families with the collapse of the financial system following the Taliban takeover of the country. In 2021, remittances to Afghanistan were expected to reach US\$ 600 million. However, after the Taliban takeover and the severance of international relations, Western Union and MoneyGram suspended their services interrupting remittance flows, leaving informal channels as the only conduit for migrants to aid their distressed families in Afghanistan. Formally recorded remittance inflows to Afghanistan are assumed to be US\$ 300 million in 2021 — an approximately 62 per cent decline from the previous year — and remain flat in 2022, following news of a possible revival of some Central Bank functions in 2022.²⁴⁵

Given the importance of leveraging all sources of finance to support vulnerable communities and families, it is essential to find ways of enabling Afghans to safely and sustainably access basic financial services, including remittances.



²⁴³ Voice of America, *Taliban Announce First Annual Afghan Budget*, 14 May 2022.

²⁴⁴ IOM, *Remittances to Afghanistan are lifelines: They are needed more than ever in a time of crisis*, 9 September 2021.

²⁴⁵ KNOMAD, *Migration and Development Brief 36*, May 2022.

10. Stakeholder/Partnership Analysis

Tackling the considerable humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding challenges in Afghanistan cannot be effectively undertaken by actors acting in isolation but will necessitate the engagement of a broad constellation of stakeholders working collaboratively across the SDGs, in the spirit of *SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals*.

While in a regular development context the national government would usually be the primary partner in delivering and coordinating international support towards the achievement of the SDGs, reluctance to normalize relations with the *de facto* authorities limits the scope of activity within which the UN and its partners can operate, requiring a fundamental change in its operations and implementation modalities. As such, it has become increasingly important to engage a broad range of stakeholders in Afghanistan to ensure greater participation and inclusivity in the work of the UN and other international partners. Some of these key partners are outlined below in the sections below.

Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organizations

Most international assistance to Afghanistan has traditionally been delivered through NGOs and CSOs. There are about 40 sizable NGOs (i.e., those with annual expenditures of US\$ 1 million or more), along with numerous smaller entities. A significant amount of assistance passes through UN agencies to implementing NGOs, although the larger and more reputable NGOs (mostly international NGOs) attract substantial direct donor funding. In the absence of effectively functioning government service delivery or leadership, NGOs and CSOs is playing a critical role in service delivery, such as primary education (especially for girls), rural water supply, basic health units, and de-mining, amongst others, as well as crucial humanitarian assistance.

Additionally, CSOs and NGOs can provide both immediate relief and longer-term transformative change – by defending collective interests and increasing accountability; advocating for the rights of the most vulnerable; providing solidarity mechanisms and promoting participation; influencing decision making; and directly engaging in service delivery. Their connections to, and work with, local populations, including marginalized communities, are particularly pertinent in identifying and reaching those most in need. The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR) — a consortium comprising 182 national and international NGOs — are a key partner for broader NGO and CSO engagement for international actors.

However, the distribution of NGO activities remains particularly unbalanced and largely based on historical patterns of NGO activity and a complex security environment. Their importance in terms of service and aid delivery have also resulted in NGOs being pressured both by former government and donors to expand presence and activities into previously unserved areas, despite current funding mechanisms not allowing for NGOs to easily cover the costs of expansion.²⁴⁶ This situation is likely to be exacerbated by the increased reliance on NGOs by the international community for the delivery of assistance as a consequence of the withdrawal of direct support to the government.

NGO's and CSOs have also come under intense pressure from the *de facto* authorities since August 2021, with many ceasing to exist, particularly women's organizations, as well as severe restrictions being placed on those still operating, inhibiting their abilities to function effectively. As such, it will be

²⁴⁶ ODI, *NGOs and civil society in Afghanistan*, November 2020.

essential for the UN and the broader international community to strongly advocate for the freedom of NGOs and civil society to operate unimpeded in the execution of their work (*See section on Civic Space in section 3.4 for more information on challenges faced by CSOs and NGOs*).

Community Based Institutions

Afghanistan has an array of informal community-based institutions that play different roles in local governance and development. These include elders, *maliks/arbabs*, and mullahs. The primary role of elders is dispute resolution, although maliks and mullahs may also participate. *Maliks/arbabs*, on the other hand, tend to serve as power brokers linking communities to state structures and are responsible for registering births, deaths, and marriages. These traditional networks (e.g., *jirgas*, *jalasas*, and *shuras*) tend to be exclusively male and dominated by older men.²⁴⁷

To ensure inclusion of women, youth, and various marginalized groups, the former Government of Afghanistan created more than 36,000 Community Development Councils (CDCs) in all 34 provinces over the past 18 years, including in rural communities. CDCs have channelled more than US\$ 3 billion in grants directly to their communities since 2003 to implement critical community infrastructure and deliver emergency assistance. CDCs were designed to act as independent, community-based institutions composed of elected women and men. Between 2016 and 2021, women officially made up 50 per cent of CDC members elected under the Citizens' Charter program.

The establishment of CDCs enabled UN agencies and partners to work through community representatives to strengthen the voices and participation of communities in the development process, reach women, target assistance to the most vulnerable, and help find local solutions to local problems. CDCs have proven to be an important entry point for supporting women's voice and participation and ensured that women-headed households received assistance. For instance, a 2020 study found that CDCs were one of the most effective mechanisms to ensure women's inclusion and participation while a 2022 report found that COVID-19 relief aid delivered through CDCs effectively reached 99 per cent of female-headed households.

Provision of basic infrastructure through CDCs has helped to effectively deliver key basic services across Afghanistan, particularly in rural areas, including remote parts of the country otherwise excluded. Evidence shows that infrastructure delivery through CDCs has been cost-effective and sustainable.²⁴⁸ Moreover, they have proven to be an important entry point for fostering local ownership, negotiating access and women's participation. Prior to August 2021, CDCs were active in Taliban-controlled areas, with NGOs and other aid agencies using CDCs to negotiate access to contested locations.

Going forward, development partners should consider working through CDCs to complement and support the inclusive delivery of basic services and emergency aid. However, the capacities of existing CDCs are not uniform. Around half of CDCs have the capacity to receive aid, identify beneficiaries, and ensure equitable distribution; whilst the rest require capacity development as most have received no support for the past decade. In engaging CDCs, it will be important for programmes to integrate additional capacity building where needed and ensure strong accountability mechanisms (such as

²⁴⁷ *Jirgas* and *jalasas* are traditional dispute resolution mechanisms involving tribal leaders and elders. *Loya jirga* or 'grand assembly' is an assembly to discuss vital national issues and make collective decisions.

²⁴⁸ Atos Consulting. 2014. NSP: Phase III Financial and Economic Analysis Final Report.

social audits, public display boards, and community participatory monitoring teams) are established and active.

Since the power shift in August 2021, the status and functionality of the CDCs remains uncertain and varies across different parts of Afghanistan. Working with CDCs (or any community-based structures) under current circumstances also comes with significant risk. Low capacity among some CDCs, the possibility of changes by *de facto* authorities on the legal status of CDCs, challenges to women's participation in CDCs, and current difficulties in providing direct grants to CDCs due to banking restrictions and liquidity constraints all constitute further risks that would need to be mitigated.

Academic Institutions

Universities have significant influence on the society, economy, and environment within their campuses, communities, and regions and have the potential contribute significantly towards the SDGs. Higher education in Afghanistan has a robust and critical role in this regard, particularly through dissemination of knowledge through teaching and generation of new knowledge through research.

Academic institutions are key for strengthening human capital for economic development/growth to eradicate poverty, as well as producing competent and qualified teachers and administrators for the education sector. They also offer the opportunity empower young men and women to advance societal changes across various disciplines, including with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment. As previously noted, women's access to higher education is essential in maximizing their full potential as contributors to Afghanistan's social, economic, and cultural development, if only allowed to do so.

In view of this, it is critical to foster sectoral level of engagement with the higher education institutions to ensure their contributions towards the SDGs is sustained. However, the higher education sector has previously largely relied on partner and donor technical and financial support which has largely evaporated since the Taliban takeover.

Private Sector and Social Partners

Private sector has a critical role to play as a driver of sustainable economic development, employment generation, and poverty reduction in Afghanistan. However, an immediate outcome of the political and economic crisis was a temporary cessation of private sector activity in the country. While firms have begun to adjust to the new business environment, activities remain constrained by revenue losses in the face of declining demand, high food and fuel prices, financial sector challenges, and an unclear policy and regulatory environment.

As potential engines of economic growth and job creation, the private sector, particularly micro, small, and medium enterprises, along with trade unions, will be key partners in promoting productive employment and decent work with a focus on emergency employment services, employment-intensive investment, enterprise promotion, and skills development. Partnerships with women-owned and run enterprises and promotion of women's engagement in the private sector workforce will be imperative for equitable economic recovery and the empowerment of women and girls, although obvious challenges persist in this regard. Social partners will also be a key in the promotion of labour rights, gender equality, social dialogue, social protection, elimination of child labour, and disability inclusion.

Donor Partners and International Financial Institutions

Afghanistan has been highly reliant on international humanitarian and development assistance for decades and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future, making donors and international financial institutions key actors in Afghanistan's development landscape (*see Chapter on "Financial Landscape Analysis" for further information on aid flows in Afghanistan*).

Donor roles and sector and/or thematic areas in Afghanistan are generally well-defined since the previous government's request for donors to limit the number of sectors that they support. However, since August 2021, donors have largely frozen the provision of direct support to government authorities and institutions, choosing to channel their resources to alternative implementing partners. The top five donors since August 2021, have been the US, World Bank, Germany, the European Union, and the Asian Development Bank, focusing their support primarily towards food security, health, education, and nutrition. These were followed by the United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, Norway, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Australia, Switzerland, and Finland, mainly supporting water and sanitation, winterization programmes, reproductive health, and protection of women and girls.

In addition to the UN's Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan, there are a range of multilateral pooled funding mechanisms in operation in the country. The Asian Development Bank's Afghanistan Infrastructure Trust Fund was established in 2010 to support infrastructure development, with a focus on agriculture, natural resources, and rural development; energy; and transport sectors along with capacity building, institutional development, and sector reforms.

While prior to August 2021, the World Bank administered Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund provided financial and technical support to government institutions, this direct engagement ceased following August 2021, with funding now being delivered through UN agencies and NGOs. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Islamic Development Bank formally launched the Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund in March 2022.

Coordination of the UN, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank funds are undertaken through the ACG, comprising various bilateral and multilateral donor partners, established to replace the previous government-led aid architecture following August 2021. In the absence of a national development planning framework, the ACG is developing a set of collective priorities to guide its work over the coming years against which all partners will align their support to ensure effective coordination and coherence.

Regional Stakeholders

Regional stakeholders, representing a diversity of national interests, are trying to advance regional cooperation in their own way, sometimes creating obvious contradictions and even challenges for Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the different approaches and interests, they have many commonalities, for example peace and stability in Afghanistan, the need for inclusive government and respect for human rights, economic, trade, and transport cooperation between Central and South Asia.

The *de facto* authorities continue diplomatic and economic engagements with regional countries, whose representatives reiterate publicly that normalization of relations with the *de facto* authorities as a government is not imminent and any change in approach should be coordinated within the region and with the international community.

However, the current relative security may contribute to enhanced regional connectivity. The *de facto* authorities appear open to economic expansion with China — including through its global Belt and Road Initiative. There are also discussions with Pakistan on extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Iran and Persian Gulf countries. Pakistan and Central Asian neighbours are also interested in establishing economic and transport connections through Afghanistan, although limitations of Afghan infrastructure and ongoing political instability mean greater regional connectivity will remain a distant prospect.

Some regional countries, such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and China, have expressed interest in financing certain initiatives through their own means, such as the Mazar-Kabul-Peshawar railroad to connect Central and South Asia, providing access to international markets. Other initiatives, such as Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Natural Gas Pipeline (TAPI) project, are also slowly gaining funding interest from regional countries, although realization of the project remains some way off.

In addition, regional and border security, counterterrorism, drug trafficking, women rights, girls' education, and inclusive governance remain a consistent focus of discussion among regional stakeholders and will likely influence the level and type of engagement and support they would be willing to provide.

Diaspora

The sizable and widespread Afghan diaspora — comprising approximately 5.8 million people residing across the globe — are an essential stakeholder in addressing immediate needs and forming long-term solutions for Afghanistan. In addition to the potential role of remittances in supporting vulnerable families and communities (*see section on remittances in Chapter on “Financial Landscape Analysis” for further information*), the diaspora is an important partner in contributing to recovery in the country.

Since August 2021, networks of Afghan diaspora organizations around the world have been strongly advocating for greater attention and support for the urgent needs in Afghanistan, including with concerned authorities inside Afghanistan, the UN and other international organizations, and the broader international community. This includes calling for increased provision of international assistance, reduced constraints on the banking system to facilitate financial flows, resumption of trade and customs activities to ensure availability of essential supplies, and payment of civil servants to enable continued delivery of services to the population. Diaspora groups have also been an important voice in advocating for the protection of human rights and the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. However, there has been an increasing divergence of opinion between diaspora voices and those remaining in Afghanistan, for example on the best approach to tackle issues such as gender issues and human rights.

In addition, the events of August 2021 resulted in a significant exodus of Afghans from the country, including many educated professionals from both the private and public sectors, resulting in a decline in human capital and a gap in knowledge and skills. As such, these individuals have the potential to make a significant contribution to the recovery of the country, should conditions enable their return.

11. Conclusions

While the challenges facing Afghanistan prior to August 2021 were chronic, systemic, and severe, the situation following the Taliban takeover of the country has deteriorated significantly, reversing many of the important (albeit often limited) development gains and progress towards the SDGs made over the past two decades. Hard-won rights have been wiped away with catastrophic consequences for the most vulnerable, particularly women and girls who have seen all progress with regards to gender equality and women's empowerment evaporate almost instantaneously, rendering them excluded from almost all aspects of society and putting them at increased risk.

The change in context also has significant implications for how the international community can and should engage in the country to support the ever-increasing needs of the Afghan people, which will require the exploration of alternative partnership arrangements and implementation modalities.

However, it is imperative that international assistance to Afghanistan is sustained and even increased to prevent a further deterioration in the country, whilst recognizing the distortionary effects of aid over the past two decades, and the need to learn from previous mistakes. The primary focus of the UN and the broader international community should be to head-off a further worsening of the humanitarian situation through the provision of lifesaving assistance and ensuring people's basic human needs are met. However, this alone is not a sustainable solution. Interventions will need to be designed that stop people from falling further behind by tackling the underlying causes of their vulnerabilities, as well as the systemic causes of crisis and fragility that underpin them. Particular focus will also be required to rectify the geographically imbalanced development across the country, partly due to highly securitized aid strategies, as well as elite capture and leakage under the Republic, which have resulted in major inequalities in service provision and infrastructure, particularly in the remote parts of Afghanistan, notably in central areas of the country.

While the nature and scope of potential areas of support has become more limited, opportunities exist to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable Afghans, enhance social cohesion, minimize conflict risks, and mitigate a further erosion of human rights, particularly those of women and girls. Exploitation of these opportunities must be underpinned by the principle of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first, including those made most vulnerable and marginalized as described in Chapter 4 of this CCA.

Key in this regard will be ensuring inclusive, equitable, and sustained access to affordable **basic social services** across the country, particularly health and nutrition, education, water and sanitation, social protection, and well as protection services, in a manner that builds on humanitarian interventions through strengthened cross-nexus coordination to enhance sustainability. Ensuring unimpeded access for women and girls, as well as other vulnerable groups, must be a priority.

Given the limitations on engagement with the *de facto* authorities, sustaining essential services will require the strengthening of community-based systems which contribute to meeting basic human needs. Though there are clear risks to this approach — which will require mitigation across all sectors and implementing partners — this will likely include working with CDCs and other community-based organizations, national and international NGOs, faith-based organizations, women's groups, and the private sector, amongst others.

While direct financial support to the *de facto* authorities remains restricted under current circumstances, it will be necessary to explore opportunities on how to best leverage and strengthen front-line public sector workers and technical personnel and institutions, whose capacities have been built over the past two decades with international support, in the provision of essential basic services. In addition, further clarity on national budgetary sectoral allocations from the *de facto* authorities will be necessary to enable more effective targeting of support.

Reducing poverty and increasing resilience requires sustained and coordinated efforts in **preserving jobs, strengthening economic opportunities, and making livelihoods more resilient**. While many of Afghanistan's economic woes are systemic and originate long before August 2021, the Taliban takeover and the disconnection from the international financial system that this exacerbated, coupled with the lack of liquidity, have pushed the country further into crisis and its people deeper into poverty. Ending Afghanistan's economic isolation and the ability to tackle the macro-level factors driving the current crisis will be primarily predicated on actions of the *de facto* authorities, particularly its adherence to basic standards for the treatment of women and girls, respect for human rights, and sound economic and financial management. While the necessary changes to enable economic stabilization and recovery interventions might not occur in the foreseeable future, there are other areas in which the international community can engage to support economic opportunities and livelihoods.

Private sector development — particularly through micro, small, and medium enterprises — can significantly contribute to medium-term economic stabilization and job creation, including in sectors with substantial growth potential, such as agriculture and extractive industries. Concerted efforts will be needed to address financial sector constraints to facilitate access to financing and credit for individuals and enterprises, as well as expanding other business development services. Strengthening of the private sector will also be predicated on the of availability skilled personnel and improved development of human capital. Support to higher education institutions and TVET providers can further help deliver the necessary market-relevant knowledge and skills to help build capacity in critical areas, including for women entrepreneurs and business-owners.

Support to strengthening the resilience of **rural livelihoods** will be essential to sustaining a significant source of employment for many in Afghanistan, particularly women, but also in helping the country to recover from chronic food insecurity. Considerable and coordinated efforts will be needed to ensure catalytic, multi-sectoral, and multi-stakeholder investments to support rural livelihoods, value chains, and food systems to make them more resilient, sustainable, and profitable, particularly for small-scale farmers. Alternative livelihoods are needed for farmers to reduce their reliance on the drug trade for income. However, any interventions by the international community must be rigorously tested before implementation so as not to repeat past failures in this regard. Adoption of disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation practices, as well as environmental protection, with a focus on sustainable natural resource management and nature-based solutions, will be key to ensuring the long-term sustainability of rural livelihoods.

Construction and rehabilitation of key small-scale **infrastructure**, including for transport, electricity, communications, and water — particularly in previously underserved areas — will be required to facilitate geographically balanced economic growth and job creation, as well as to link producers to markets and communities to services.

Increased citizen engagement and participation in political and governance processes will be essential to building **social cohesion** and tackling the drivers of fragility and conflict. However, current dynamics suggest a continued consolidation and centralization of authority under the Taliban that are likely to remain unrepresentative and male dominated. Despite this, careful consideration is needed on how the international community support can contribute to making governance processes more inclusive, participatory, and responsive, including through increased diversity across all levels of the public service and engagement of customary community governance institutions. In this respect, it will be imperative to explore opportunities to strengthen women's and marginalized groups' inclusion in multi-level governance and decision-making. Empowering of community-based organizations and institutions and CSOs, as well as civil society activists and journalists, will be essential to increase inclusion, expand civic space, protect freedom of expression, and promote transparency and accountability.

Continued advocacy and support for inclusive community **reconciliation, transitional justice, and peacebuilding** processes will be key in mitigating outbreaks of violent conflict and resolve existing disputes. The combined executive, deliberative, and religious leadership institutions of Afghan villages have provided the basis for dispute resolution and violence reduction for centuries and can continue to foster community-level governance and development, including integrated political coordination and independent oversight of productive socio-economic development interventions. These can help facilitate delivery of durable peace dividends, foster equitable use of resources, reduce forced displacement, and enhance conflict prevention, mitigation, and resolution.

Fundamental to peace, security, and stability in Afghanistan is the need for the *de facto* authorities to protect and promote the rights of all people in the country without discrimination. This requires clarity on the legal framework, particularly regarding the need for a constitutional framework that is borne out of an inclusive process and upholds Afghanistan's international law and **human rights** obligations and addresses structural challenges, including through tackling of corruption. It also necessitates sustaining gains made under previously adopted laws and policies developed in line with international norms and standards, as well as formulating new ones for the effective, inclusive, and accountable governance of the country. This will contribute to better addressing inequity, inequality, impunity, and justice concerns regarding rights violations, and rebuild public confidence in the justice system.

However, the challenges are significant and should not be underestimated. It must be realized that the ability of national and international partners to exploit these opportunities will be significantly determined by factors on the ground in what is a highly fluid context, and will require agility to adapt to situational changes, be they positive or negative. As such, any new strategic framework(s) developed by international partners, including the UN, will need to be ambitious but realistic and pragmatic in approach, targeted but flexible, and effectively coordinated across stakeholders, particularly across the nexus, to ensure maximum impact and sustainability.