Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note
Afghanistan: Unaccompanied children

Version 4.0

November 2024

Contents

Executive summary

Since the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, Afghanistan has seen increased child labour, marriage, and trafficking. Child labour, in agriculture, industry and services has increased due to economic decline, particularly affecting girls. Children are also used in illegal activities such as drug production and trafficking, theft, and weapons trafficking. Child marriage is prevalent, driven by poverty, with one in three girls married before 18, and weak legal protections. Bacha bazi, a form of sexual exploitation of boys who are sold by their families or abducted by others, including police officers, persists. Cases are underreported due to stigma and fear, and victims have limited access to support and rehabilitation due to reduced international aid.

Internal trafficking is reportedly common. However, as there are no reported statistics from the Taliban or available estimates from other organisations, it is difficult to establish the number of children affected. Children are forced into labour across various sectors and compelled to migrate for work internally and abroad to support their families. The Taliban has not effectively addressed these issues, offering little protection or services for child victims, while civil society organisations struggle to assist due to restrictive Taliban policies.

Despite a decree banning the recruitment of child soldiers, and a general reduction in the use of children for this purpose, the Taliban continues to involve boys in combat and support roles. The onus is on the child to demonstrate there is a real risk of forced recruitment rather than a mere possibility of it occurring.

Simply being a child from Afghanistan does not of itself give rise to a well-founded fear of persecution for a Convention reason. Girls are subject to widespread and systematic discrimination, which in general amounts to persecution. Unaccompanied (lone) children, depending upon their individual circumstances and the location to which they are returned, may face persecution or serious harm from the Taliban (the de-facto State) and/or non-state actors. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they would be at real risk on return.

Decision makers must assess the risk of persecution or serious harm using the hypothetical scenario that the unaccompanied child will return to Afghanistan at the time of the decision, considering that return of the child would only take place where:

- family contact is established and ongoing
- adequate reception arrangements are in place
- it is in the best interests of the child, as a primary consideration, to leave the UK, return to their home country and reunite with their family members
- safe and practical return arrangements are confirmed

Protection is unlikely to be available to unaccompanied (lone) children in Afghanistan and internal relocation is unlikely to be reasonable for those without family to return to.

Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Back to Contents

Assessment

Section updated: 29 October 2024

About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is the country information, refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw – and provides an assessment of whether, **in general**:

- a child faces a real risk of persecution/serious harm by the Taliban or non-state actors due to their vulnerability as an unaccompanied child
- the state (or quasi state bodies) can provide effective protection
- internal relocation is possible to avoid persecution/serious harm
- if a claim is refused, it is likely to be certified as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

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

Sources cited in the country information may refer interchangeably to the Taliban (Taleban), Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), the Islamic Emirate, the interim government, or the de facto authorities (DfA). Within this assessment, they are referred to as 'the Taliban' and, since 15 August 2021 are considered the controlling party of the state (for the purposes of Article 1(A)(2) of the Refugee Convention).

Back to Contents

1. Material facts, credibility, and other checks/referrals

1.1 Credibility

1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status and Children's asylum claims.

1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas must be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants).

1.1.3 Decision makers must also consider making an international biometric data-sharing check (see Biometric data-sharing process (Migration 5 biometric data-sharing process)).

1.1.4 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person's claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis).

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Back to Contents

1.2 Exclusion

1.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts.

1.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).

1.2.3 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33(2) of the Refugee Convention, Humanitarian Protection and the instruction on Restricted Leave.

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Back to Contents

1.3 Family tracing and links with Afghanistan

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

1.3.2 The Court of Appeal held in EU (Afghanistan) & Ors v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2013] EWCA Civ 32 (31 January 2013), heard on 17 December 2012, that 'Unaccompanied children who arrive in this country from Afghanistan have done so as a result of someone, presumably their families, paying for their fare… The costs incurred by the family will have been considerable, relative to the wealth of the average Afghan family… [the family] are unlikely to be happy to cooperate with an agent of the Secretary of State for the return of their child to Afghanistan…' (para 10). The Court dismissed EU's appeal on the grounds that there was no link between the

Secretary of State's breach of duty to endeavour to trace his family and EU's claim to remain in this country (para 22).

1.3.3 Afghan migrants usually maintain contact with their families in their home country but the quality of the contact may depend on how long the person has been abroad, if they lived elsewhere before they left the region, for example in Iran or Pakistan, and whether their family still lives in Afghanistan (see section 10 of the archived Country Policy and Information Note Afghanistan: Unaccompanied children (Version 3.0)).

1.3.4 For further guidance on tracing the family members of unaccompanied asylum seeking children see the Asylum Instruction on Family tracing and Asylum Instruction on Children's asylum claims.

Back to Contents

2. Convention reason(s)

2.1.1 Particular social group (PSG).

2.1.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.

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

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

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

2.1.6 Unaccompanied (lone) children in Afghanistan form a PSG within the meaning of the Refugee Convention because they share an innate characteristic or a common background that cannot be changed (their age) **and** have a distinct identity in Afghanistan because they are outside of the traditional familial structure and are perceived as being different by the surrounding society.

2.1.7 Although unaccompanied (lone) children in Afghanistan form a PSG, this does not mean that establishing such membership is sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed in each case is whether the child has a well-founded fear of persecution on return on

account of their membership of such a group.

2.1.8 For guidance on other convention reasons which may be relevant to children in Afghanistan see the relevant country policy and information note.

2.1.9 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds, see the Asylum Instruction, and the Asylum Instruction on Children's asylum claims.

Back to Contents

3. Risk

3.1 Risk on the basis of being a child

3.1.1 Simply being a child in Afghanistan does not of itself give rise to a well-founded fear of persecution for a Convention reason.

3.1.2 Girls are subject to widespread and systematic discrimination, which in general amounts to persecution (see the Country Policy and Information Note Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban).

3.1.3 The Court of Appeal considered unaccompanied children in HK (Afghanistan) [2012] and held that 'The onus is on the asylum seeker to make good the asylum claim, and that applies to children as it does to adults' (paragraph 34).

3.1.4 In LQ, the Tribunal held that 'At the date when the appellant's status has to be assessed he is a child and although, assuming he survives, he will in due course cease to be a child, he is immutably a child at the time of assessment. (That is not, of course, to say that he would be entitled indefinitely to refugee status acquired while, and because of, his minority. **He would be a refugee only whilst the risk to him as a child remained**)' (paragraph 6 – emphasis added).

3.1.5 In the case of KA (Afghanistan) & Ors v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2012] EWCA Civ 1014 (25 July 2012), the UT considered 'the eighteenth birthday point':

'Although the duty to endeavour to trace does not endure beyond the date when an applicant reaches that age [18], it cannot be the case that the assessment of risk on return is subject to such a bright line rule. The relevance of this relates to the definition of a "particular social group" for asylum purposes. In DS, Lloyd LJ considered LQ (Age: immutable characteristic) Afghanistan [2008] UKAIT 00005 in which the AIT held that "for these purposes age is immutable", in the sense that, although one's age is constantly changing, one is powerless to change it oneself. Lloyd LJ said (at paragraph 54):

'"that leaves a degree of uncertainty as to the definition of a particular social group. Does membership cease on the day of the person's eighteenth birthday? It is not easy to see that risks of the relevant kind to who as a child would continue until the eve of that birthday, and cease at once the next day."

'Given that the kinds of risk in issue include the forced recruitment or the sexual exploitation of vulnerable young males, persecution is not respectful of birthdays – apparent or assumed age is more important than

chronological age. Indeed, as submissions developed there seemed to be a degree of common ground derived from the observation of Lloyd LJ.' (paragraph 18).

3.1.6 In the case of ZH (Afghanistan) v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2009] EWCA Civ 470 (07 April 2009), on eligibility for UASC Discretionary Leave, the Court of Appeal held that:

'The mere fact that a child applicant for asylum falls within the policy of the Secretary of State is not in my judgment of itself sufficient to discharge the burden on the child applicant to demonstrate that he is at real risk, or there is a serious possibility that he will be persecuted if returned. The threshold for what amounts to persecution is relatively high, the policy sidesteps that difficulty by being broader in scope. The unaccompanied child does not have to demonstrate that he would be at real risk of persecution if returned to fall within the Secretary of State's policy. All he has to demonstrate is that he is unaccompanied, that his parents cannot be traced and that adequate reception arrangements cannot be made for him. Thus the policy is plainly broader in scope for perfectly understandable policy reasons than the narrower definition of what amounts to refugee status. Thus it does not follow automatically, simply from the fact that a child falls within the Secretary of State's broader policy, that there is a real risk or a serious possibility that that particular child's basic human rights will be so severely violated that he will suffer what amounts to persecution' (paragraph 10).

3.1.7 For guidance on the UASC leave policy see the Asylum Instruction on Processing children's asylum claims.

3.1.8 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

Back to Contents

3.2 Risk on the basis of being an unaccompanied (lone) child in Afghanistan

3.2.1 Unaccompanied (lone) children, depending upon their individual circumstances and the location to which they are returned, may face persecution or serious harm from the Taliban (the de facto State) and/or non-state actors. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they would be at real risk on return.

3.2.2 For a general overview of 'at risk groups', which assesses those likely or unlikely to be at risk from the Taliban, see the Country Policy and Information Note, Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban.

3.2.3 In the country guidance case of HK and others (minors- indiscriminate violence – forced recruitment by Taliban – contact with family members) Afghanistan CG [2010] UKUT 378 (IAC), heard 15 July 2010, the UT held that 'While forcible recruitment by the Taliban cannot be discounted as a risk, particularly in areas of high militant activity or militant control, evidence is required to show that it is a real risk for the particular child concerned and not a mere possibility' (headnote 2).

3.2.4 Since August 2021, the Taliban has been implicated in the recruitment and use of children in combat and support roles in Afghanistan, despite an order by the Taliban leader banning this practice. The UN verified 342 cases of

boys recruited by the Taliban in 2023, with most released by the end of that year. Boys are more likely to be recruited than girls, often aged 14 to 17 and can be vulnerable to recruitment due to poverty, cultural norms, or familial connections to Taliban members. Reports indicate that some Taliban officials falsify ages to recruit underage boys, and some boys experience sexual abuse. Although the recruitment and use of children decreased between September 2023 and January 2024, child involvement in Taliban operations persist (see Forced recruitment).

3.2.5 The country information in this note therefore does not indicate that there are 'very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence' to depart from the findings in HK and others.

3.2.6 Rather than defining a child as every person below the age of 18, the Taliban's definition of a child is based on physical signs of puberty (see Legal framework).

3.2.7 A notable increase in child labour in agriculture, industry and services followed the Taliban takeover, worsened by the humanitarian crisis and economic decline, particularly affecting girls. According to the US Department of State, the Taliban inspected 259 factories in 2023, identifying 42 cases of child labour, but did not provide details on any law enforcement actions or available support services. Children are also used in illegal activities such as drug production and trafficking, theft, and weapons trafficking (see Child labour).

3.2.8 Despite a Taliban decree banning forced marriage for women, there are no laws to prevent child marriage, which remains prevalent. Economic hardship, worsened by the Taliban's takeover, has led to an increase in child marriages, with many families feeling compelled to marry off or sell underage girls to cope with poverty. Reports indicate that one in three girls married before age 18, with a significant rise in cases since 2021 although exact numbers are unknown. Additionally, some local Taliban officials have forcibly married underage girls. Recent reporting indicates that the Taliban are annulling divorces granted to women who were married as children (see Child marriage).

3.2.9 Boys in Afghanistan remain at risk of commercial sexual exploitation through the practice of bacha bazi. Some boys are sold into this practice by their families or abducted, including by police officers. Victims can face further violence when returning home, and the suspension of international aid since August 2021 has limited access to support and rehabilitation services. Bacha bazi cases are frequently underreported due to stigma and fear, particularly when perpetrators are police. Despite the Taliban's public stance against the practice, reports suggest it remains prevalent and largely unaddressed (see Sexual violence including bacha bazi).

3.2.10 Internal trafficking is reportedly common. However, as there are no reported statistics from the Taliban or available estimates from other organisations, it is difficult to establish the number of children affected. Although boys are more vulnerable than girls, both are forced into labour across various sectors, including carpet making, agriculture, domestic work, and sex trafficking such as bacha bazi. Children, mostly boys aged between 13 and

18, are forced to migrate for work, internally and abroad, to support their families. The Taliban has not reported any significant efforts to prevent trafficking, protect victims, or provide services, and civil society organisations face significant challenges in assisting victims due to Taliban restrictions prohibiting women working in NGO protection services (see Trafficking).

3.2.11 Not all Afghans hold birth certificates or identity documents. One estimate is that 60% hold a Tazkira which enables access to basic services, although medical services for children can be obtained without in some cases. Lone children can have difficulty in acquiring a Tazkira and therefore enrolling in school (see Documentation and, for information on access to healthcare, the Country Policy and Information Note, Afghanistan: Humanitarian situation).

3.2.12 Education for boys is compulsory between ages 7 to 15. Girls can attend school. However, access to education beyond primary level (age 12) is limited by a Taliban edict which prohibits secondary level and higher education, and some may be forced to leave primary school earlier if they show physical signs of puberty. Islamic education is open for girls beyond primary level. The quality and scope of education varies across settings and location and the ability of children to attend school is affected by poverty, lack of teachers and the increased focus on religious teaching in madrassas (see Access to education, including madrassas).

3.2.13 Corporal punishment, both verbal and physical, is used against children by families and in schools, where it has reportedly increased since the 2021 Taliban takeover. There are no specific laws explicitly banning the practice (see Corporal punishment).

3.2.14 In regard to unaccompanied children, in the Country Guidance case of AA (unattended children) Afghanistan CG [2012] UKUT 16 (IAC) (01 February 2012), heard on 28 October 2010 and 23 May 2011, the UT held '… the background evidence demonstrates that unattached children returned to Afghanistan, depending upon their individual circumstances and the location to which they are returned, may be exposed to risk of serious harm, inter alia from indiscriminate violence, forced recruitment, sexual violence, trafficking and a lack of adequate arrangements for child protection' (paragraph 93ii).

3.2.15 As held by the UT in AA (unattended children), decision makers must take into account such risks when addressing the question of whether a return is in the child's best interests, a primary consideration when determining a claim to humanitarian protection (paragraph 93ii).

3.2.16 Available country information does not indicate that there are 'very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence' to justify a departure from these findings. Evidence continues to indicate that unaccompanied children may be at risk of, among other things, violence, sexual abuse, forced recruitment, trafficking, child marriage and child labour (see Forced recruitment and Violence against children).

3.2.17 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status and the Asylum Instruction on Children's asylum claims.

Back to Contents

3.3 Return and reception arrangements

3.3.1 In HK (Afghanistan) [2012], the EWCA held that it would not, in all cases, be appropriate to draw an adverse inference that the child would be safely received merely from the failure of the child to try to make contact with his or her family (paragraph 35). Conversely, nor did it necessarily follow that a child with no family to receive them in Afghanistan could not safely be returned (paragraph 36).

3.3.2 In the case of ST (Child asylum seekers) Sri Lanka [2013] UKUT 292 (IAC) (25 June 2013), heard 30 April 2013 and promulgated on 25 June 2013, the Tribunal confirmed that an assessment of risk (of conditions on return) is required on the hypothesis that the child will be removed at the time of decision (paragraph 29).

3.3.3 Therefore, decision makers must assess the risk of persecution or serious harm using the hypothetical scenario that the unaccompanied child will return to Afghanistan at the time of the decision, considering that return of the child would only take place where:

- family contact is established and ongoing
- adequate reception arrangements are in place
- it is in the best interests of the child, as a primary consideration, to leave the UK, return to their home country and reunite with their family members
- safe and practical return arrangements are confirmed

3.3.4 In the case of Ravichandran [1995] EWCA Civ 16, the Tribunal held that '… in asylum cases the appellate structure… is to be regarded as an extension of the decision-making process'. Thus, applying the general principle that the tribunal must consider asylum cases on the basis of the latest evidence when considering return, including any which postdates the original decision. It must also take into account the hypothetical scenario, utilised in ST [2013], that return and reception arrangements are in place.

3.3.5 If adequate and sustainable reception arrangements with family members cannot be made, and there is no current prospect of them being made, and but for this it would be reasonable for the child to return, decision makers must consider granting UASC leave under paragraphs 352ZC to 352ZF of the Immigration Rules.

3.3.6 The Court of Appeal held in EU (Afghanistan) & Ors v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2013] EWCA Civ 32 (31 January 2013), heard 17 December 2012, that '… to grant leave to remain to someone who has no risk on return, whose Convention rights will not be infringed by his return, and who has no other independent claim to remain here… is to use the power to grant leave to remain for a purpose other than that for which it is conferred' (para 6).

3.3.7 For further guidance on reception arrangements for the return of unaccompanied children, see the Asylum Instruction on Processing children's asylum claims.

Back to Contents

4. Protection

4.1.1 An unaccompanied (lone) child who fears the Taliban (the de facto state) is unlikely to obtain protection.

4.1.2 An unaccompanied (lone) child who fears a non-state actor is unlikely to obtain protection from the Taliban. This is because, in general, the Taliban is neither willing nor able to offer effective protection.

4.1.3 The Taliban has repealed laws relating to child rights and there is no law for punishing offenders for crimes against children (see Legal framework).

4.1.4 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status and the Asylum Instruction on Children's asylum claims.

Back to Contents

5. Internal relocation

5.1.1 Internal relocation is unlikely to be reasonable for unaccompanied (lone) children without family to return to.

5.1.2 Children who have family in Afghanistan may be able to internally relocate, depending on the child's individual circumstances and the proposed return location. Each case must be considered on its facts.

5.1.3 For additional factors to consider see Return and reception arrangements.

5.1.4 For further guidance on considering internal relocation see the Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status and the Asylum Instruction on Children's asylum claims.

Back to Contents

6. Certification

6.1.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

6.1.2 For further guidance on certification, see Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (clearly unfounded claims).

Back to Contents

Country information

About the country information

This section contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the research methodology. It provides the evidence base for the assessment.

The structure and content follow a terms of reference which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

This document is intended to be comprehensive but not exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned this does not mean that the event did or did not take place or that the person or organisation does or does not exist.

The COI included was published or made publicly available on or before **20 August 2024**. Any event taking place or report published after this date will not be included.

Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

Back to Contents

7. Taliban governance

7.1.1 For information on the organisational structure of the Taliban and their territorial control, see the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban.

Back to Contents

8. Demography

8.1 Population

8.1.1 The estimated total population as of 2024 was 43.4 million[1], just over half of whom were under the age of 18[2], and 43% were aged under 15[3].

8.1.2 Reliable demographic statistics about Afghanistan are difficult to obtain[4]. Establishing the number of lone children (without family) is additionally more difficult because sources more commonly estimate figures based on 'orphans', and the definition of 'orphan' varies and can include not only those who have experienced the death of one or both parents, but those who are deprived parental care due to abuse, abandonment, or circumstances in which parents are unable to provide care[5] [6].

8.1.3 Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) Muslim Aid USA (MAUSA) and Orphans in Need USA reported that there were 1.6 million orphans in their respective undated and 2021 reports[7] [8].

8.1.4 The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) May 2024 Country

[1] UNFPA, World Population Dashboard Afghanistan, 2024
[2] UNICEF, How many children are there in Afghanistan?, 2023
[3] UNFPA, World Population Dashboard Afghanistan, 2024
[4] Statista, Afghanistan Statistics and Facts, 3 July 2024
[5] Humanium, Orphans, 18 February 2024
[6] Orphans in Need, What is Orphanhood?, no date
[7] MAUSA, Orphans – Afghanistan, no date
[8] Orphans in Need USA, Help Children in Afghanistan, 26 August 2021

Guidance Afghanistan, based on the EUAA's COI reports, noted that: 'According to reports from January and February 2022, the number of orphans and unsupervised children in Afghanistan was increasing.'[9]

8.1.5 In sources consulted (see Bibliography) no other data could be found.

Back to Contents

8.2 Family structure

8.2.1 Researcher and academic, Nina Evason, writing for Cultural Atlas, which 'aims to inform and educate the public in cross-cultural attitudes, practices, norms, behaviours and communications'[10], noted in 2019 regarding family dynamics in Afghanistan, that 'Family roles vary between ethnicities, socio-economic statuses and regions. Nevertheless, a traditional patriarchal age hierarchy prevails throughout all. The eldest male has the most authority and decision-making power and usually controls all family spending. Every decision has to be approved by the husband or father.'[11]

8.2.2 The same source noted that 'Men carry the economic burden of the family and often have to single-handedly support the entire household. For a husband and father in Afghanistan, this can mean having to earn enough to support himself, his wife, his children and any parent or in-law living with the nuclear family. Brothers and sons must also help to economically support the family, protect the family honour and discipline any misbehaviour.'[12]

8.2.3 UNICEF, Citing 2017 survey data published by the Central Statistics Organization, noted in its Child Notice Afghanistan 2018, which provided the situation for children based on publicly available information as at November 2018, that 'Households in Afghanistan have on average 7.7 members and 3.7 children under the age of 15. Household with 6 to 8 persons are the most common household sizes, but more than half of the Afghan population lives in household[s] with nine persons or more.'[13]

8.2.4 According to Evason, a household was traditionally made up of '… husband, wife, their unmarried daughters, and their sons and sons' spouse and children.'[14] According to a February 2023 report by the International Crisis Group (ICG), which referred to a September 2022 assessment by Reach Afghanistan, '… nearly a quarter of Afghan households are headed by women.'[15]

8.2.5 A UN Development Programme (UNDP) report covering the period from August 2021 to August 2023, published January 2024, noted that, compared to male-headed households, 'Female-headed households care for a relatively greater number of children…'[16]

8.2.6 Regarding family structure, the UNICEF Child Notice Afghanistan stated:

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[9] EUAA, Country Guidance: Afghanistan (paragraph 3.16.4), May 2024
[10] Cultural Atlas, About, no date
[11] Evason, N, Cultural Atlas, 'Afghan Culture' (Family), 2019
[12] Evason, N, Cultural Atlas, 'Afghan Culture' (Family), 2019
[13] UNICEF, 'Child Notice Afghanistan' (page 21), 2018
[14] Evason, N, Cultural Atlas, 'Afghan Culture' (Household structure), 2019
[15] ICG, Taliban Restrictions on Women's Rights Deepen Afghanistan's Crisis, 23 February 2023
[16] UNDP, Two Years in Review: Changes in Afghan Economy… (page 14), 18 January 2024

'Family structure follows a very traditional, patriarchal structure and is centred on notions of honour and shame, governed by tribal codes and interpretations of Islam. The father is seen as the breadwinner, and the wife is seen as the mother. The man generally is the primary decision maker and discipliner in the family. Within the home, the parents are seen as responsible for the upbringing of the child, with support from extended family. Outside of the family, religious leaders, community elders, teachers and mullahs are all seen as responsible for providing guidance in upbringing. Sons are raised to help their father, learning how to provide for the family and become a future breadwinner for their own future family. Daughters are raised to focus more on domestic skills, with social norms attaching honour to preparing for a future marriage.'[17]

8.2.7 A study by the social research group, Samuel Hall, published June 2020, referred to family attitudes towards the responsibilities of children:

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

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

'On the other hand, parents acknowledge their child's right to childhood, even in later stages of adolescence. One father emphasised this: "My child was young, and I saw him as a child, but because of economic problems he went to Iran with my approval; he was 15-16 years old when he migrated to Iran".'[18]

8.2.8 The UNICEF Child Notice Afghanistan noted 'Customary practices in Afghanistan make decisions on the age of maturity based on physical and mental maturity. A study by the Peace Training and Research Organization shows that social norms in Afghanistan view transition from child to adult as occurring sometime starting from 13-18 years old.'[19]

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

'Afghan life and culture very much revolve around families and clans. The laws and moral standards are based on these blood ties much more than on the state and the "rule of law" like in countries such as the UK. Less emphasis is placed on individual rights, and the notion of children's rights isn't as understood or enshrined in the same way as in other countries. Given the decades of conflict that have plagued the country, families do their best to protect their children – especially the girls. Home is usually

[17] UNICEF, 'Child Notice Afghanistan' (page 21), 2018
[18] Samuel Hall, 'Coming back to Afghanistan: Deported minors' needs…' (pages 3, 4), June 2020
[19] UNICEF, 'Child Notice Afghanistan' (page 59), 2018

considered to be the safest place for them, but this sometimes comes at the cost of their education or social life.'[20]

See also Family contact and support networks and Socio-economic rights

Back to Contents

9. Legal framework

9.1 Definition of a child

9.1.1 The report by the UN Secretary-General on the situation of children in armed conflict in Afghanistan, dated 21 November 2023, which covered the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2022, noted that the Taliban's definition of a child was '… in accordance with a March 2022 decree by the Taliban leader, which is not based on age but on physical signs of puberty, rather than defining a child as every human being below the age of 18 years. The definition has resulted in the detention of children in prisons, in addition to the recruitment and use of children.'[21]

Back to Contents

9.2 Child rights

9.2.1 Independent human rights organisation, Rawadari, published its report in November 2023 on the violation of civil and political rights of children between the Taliban takeover in August 2021 up to October 2023. The report, based on interviews that took place from 16 August to 16 October 2023 with 181 people, including defence lawyers, judicial and legal personnel, victims, survivors and their family members, staff of healthcare and education centres, human rights defenders, journalists, and cultural activists in 25 provinces, noted that:

'Under the previous laws in Afghanistan, all forms of violence and criminal behaviour against children were prohibited and considered criminal offenses. However, after returning to power, the Taliban have repealed most of the national laws, including the Constitution, the Law on Prevention of Harassment against Women and Children, the Law on Juvenile Offenses, and the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women. Currently, there is no law for punishing offenders of crimes against children, and the Taliban have not fulfilled their obligations and responsibilities resulting from Afghanistan's accession to international human rights documents over the past two years.'[22]

9.2.2 The report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, covering the period mainly from September 2023 to January 2024, dated 23 February 2024, noted that:

'Since August 2021, in their efforts to protect children, the Taliban has not referred to existing domestic laws, such as the Law on Protection of Child Rights, the Law on Prevention of Harassment against Women and Children or policies such as the national child protection policy. Nor have they taken action to align their approach with international law. The Special Rapporteur

[20] UNICEF, 'Child Notice Afghanistan' (page 22), 2018
[21] UNSC, Children and armed conflict in Afghanistan… (paragraph 11), 21 November 2023
[22] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 8), November 2023

is concerned that there is currently no law to hold perpetrators of crimes against children to account and that allegations are often handled through non-judicial mechanisms, where girls in particular face gender-based discrimination.'[23]

9.2.3 Regarding criminal laws in general, the US Department of State (USSD) stated in its report on 2024 Trafficking in Persons, covering April 2023 to March 2024 (USSD 2024 TiP report) that 'During the previous reporting period [April 2022 to March 2023], the Taliban announced it would review all existing criminal laws and some would remain in effect unless they violated the Taliban's interpretation of sharia, as determined by Taliban courts.'[24] And in regard to child protection, the same report noted 'According to observers, the Taliban has purported to revoke Afghanistan's constitution and criminal code, including all laws on the protection of children, and judicial processes are based on interpretations of religious jurisprudence.'[25]

9.2.4 The same report noted that 'Enforcement of Taliban laws varies across the country, with local leaders frequently issuing their own edicts, because of the elimination of specialized institutions. Observers noted that the Taliban prohibits lawyers from referencing the Afghanistan penal code that was enacted under the pre-August 15, 2021 government in court, leaving vulnerable populations without protection in the justice system.'[26]

See also Juvenile justice.

Back to Contents

10. Documentation

10.1 General accessibility

10.1.1 A study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Afghanistan and social research group, Samuel Hall, published in August 2023, on the accessibility and acceptability of civil documentation under the Taliban (known as the De facto Authorities – DfA), based on research between August 2021 to December 2022, including data collection through a phased approach, including remote quantitative data collection across all 34 provinces and in-person qualitative data collection in Balkh, Herat, Kandahar, Nangarhar, noted that:

'Under the DfA, the functionality of all offices responsible for issuing legal identification documents varies very widely in the country, which has contributed to unequal access. Interviewees for this study stated that they had reports of passport offices taking bribes, as well as others charging different amounts than officially listed. The entire registration system and much of its equipment were looted following the takeover of Afghansitan [sic] by the DfA. Furthermore, the economic picture that has emerged under the DfA – where the majority of Afghans are experiencing extreme poverty levels – has made it more difficult for people to afford documentation costs under the DfA, due to lost or lack of income. The picture that has emerged since

[23] UNHRC, Situation of human rights in Afghanistan… (paragraph 33), 22 February 2024
[24] USSD, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Afghanistan (Prosecution), 24 June 2024
[25] USSD, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Afghanistan (Prosecution), 24 June 2024
[26] USSD, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Afghanistan (Prosecution), 24 June 2024

September 2021 is largely that of unequal access throughout Afghanistan.'[27]

10.1.2 According to the same report:

'… the overall consensus amongst Afghans interviewed is that identification and civil registration documentation have become more difficult to access under the DfA. Survey respondents throughout all 34 provinces cited higher prices, followed by office closures and lack of clarity regarding processes as key barriers. This was confirmed by those interviewed in Balkh, Herat, Nangarhar, and Kandahar, who confirmed that the price increases for e-Tazkiras and passports, combined with the cost of travelling, have been the largest barrier to procuring documentation since August 2021, given the widespread economic and humanitarian crises that have resulted in widespread unemployment. Furthermore, office closures, and reduced number of staff and resources have hampered access to documentation generally under the DfA. For example, under the previous government (GoIRA [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan]), there were many offices in districts where people could get Tazkiras and e-Tazkiras. Currently, however, there are only a few offices that are equipped with the necessary resources to issue these documents. This has caused the processes for applying for documentation to become time-consuming, and people have to wait for months to get their e-Tazkiras, passports, and marriage certificates in particular. Community leaders in Balkh, Herat, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces – who were involved in processing documentation requests for their community members under the former and current government regimes – stated that there were more facilities under the GoIRA. Processes were faster overall under the previous government.'[28]

10.1.3 In a response to information requested by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum on the socio-economic situation, dated 22 February 2024, the IOM noted regarding tazkiras that 'There are a total of 74 electronic ID card distribution centers in Afghanistan (all over the country). All 34 provinces have Tazkira (electronic ID card) distribution centers and different provinces vary regarding the number of these distribution centers. While some provinces have only three distribution centres, others may have ten. But the eTazkira can be obtained in all 34 provinces.'[29]

10.1.4 According to parents interviewed in the IOM study, tazkiras and birth certificates were the most important documents for children to have, as 'Tazkiras are required in order to enrol children in school, and birth certificates ensure that children's age can be verified, as well as relationship to other family members.'[30]

10.1.5 The IOM documentation report noted that some groups faced difficulties accessing documentation under the DfA, particularly women, displaced persons, children, ethnic and religious minority groups, and former government employees[31].

[27] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 11), August 2023
[28] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 15), August 2023
[29] IOM, Information on the socio-economic situation in Afghanistan (page 14), 22 February 2024
[30] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 38), August 2023
[31] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 21), August 2023

10.1.6 Regarding children, the same source stated that 'Age … remains a key factor in determining access to documentation, as children's legal identity remains tied to their parents Tazkira until age 7, after which they are usually required to procure paper or e-tazkiras in order to register for school. If their parents lack documentation, this typically means their children will also lack it. Unaccompanied minors and child heads of household are also more likely to lack documentation.'[32]

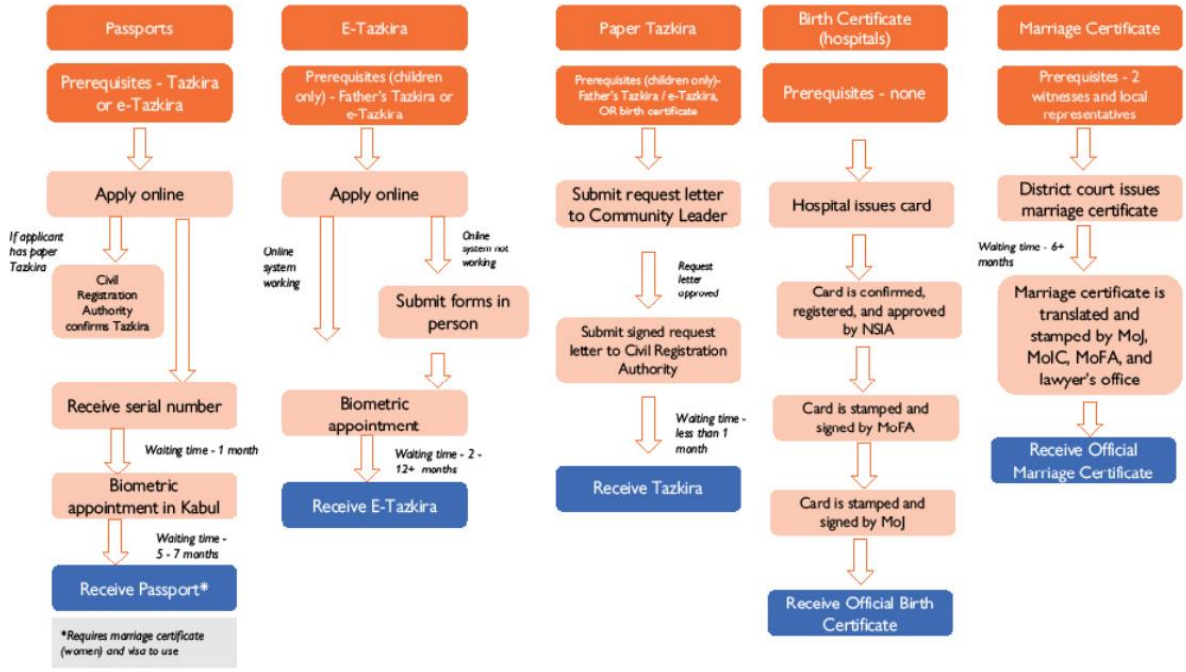
10.1.7 A research brief by Samuel Hall, published in December 2023, which built on the August 2023 IOM documentation study, noted that:

'Unaccompanied minors and children who are heads of households in Afghanistan often struggle to access assistance if they lack any form of documentation, as they are unable to rely upon other relatives to confirm their identity. Children's legal identity is often tied to their parents' documentation until age 7. Moreover, when parents lack documentation their children will also often lack it too. Children's Tazkiras are provided based on their father's Tazkira. As such, enrolment in school or the ability to receive aid is made even more difficult for unaccompanied children, child head of households and children above 7 whose parents nor them have access to Tazkiras. While community leaders could intervene in communities of origin to vouch for the identity of the family and children, enrolment in new areas could be even more difficult.'[33]

10.1.8 The IOM documentation report explained, regarding displaced people and returnees, that 'Displaced people [who lack a tazkira] must go back to their place of birth in order to procure a paper Tazkira. This is partially because paper tazkira records are not available online in one database and must be checked in archives .'[34] However, the report noted that community leaders in the birthplace may refuse to verify the person's identity if they do not personally know them, especially if they had left the area years ago, or if there is a new community leader[35].

10.1.9 The IOM documentation report produced a flowchart showing the steps to procure documentation under the DfA[36]:

[32] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 21), August 2023
[33] Samuel Hall, Documentation & Legal ID… (page 5), December 2023
[34] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 24), August 2023
[35] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 24), August 2023
[36] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 30), August 2023



10.1.10 See also Tazkiras for further information on accessibility.

Back to Contents

10.2 Birth registration

10.2.1 According to the Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2015, the most recent data available, 42% of children under the age of 5 had registered births[37], but only 20% of those registered had a birth certificate[38].

10.2.2 The IOM documentation report stated that:

'Birth certificates were the most commonly held forms of civil registration documentation in the four provinces [Balkh, Herat, Kandahar, Nangarhar] – with around half of all interviewees in Balkh and Herat province reporting that members of their households held these documents. However, nearly three quarters of those in both provinces who had birth certificates only had them for their children – not themselves…

'Overall, the current generation of Afghan children has higher levels of birth certificate possession compared to older generations. Children who are born in hospitals or health clinics are given a card – which must be officially stamped and signed by the civil registry in order to be valid. Many people are unaware of this step – thus many people who claimed their children had birth certificates may not have one that is considered to be official.

'Children who are born at home are highly likely to lack a birth certificate – pointing to potentially a lack of awareness about how to register births outside of hospital or clinical settings in Afghanistan. This was more common in rural areas compared to urban areas.'[39]

10.2.3 The same report noted that, according to a lawyer in Nangarhar, '… the main

[37] UNICEF, Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered, 2015
[38] CSO, Demographic and Health Survey 2015 (page 11), 31 December 2017
[39] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (pages 19 to 20), August 2023

difficulty with obtaining a birth certificate is that people are only able to do this in their own province for 6 years, after which, they are required to go to Kabul. Many people are unable to afford the cost of travel to Kabul – and in many cases prior to August 2021, roads were unsafe to Kabul from certain provinces.'[40]

10.2.4 Regarding age determination for people without a birth certificate, the IOM documentation report stated:

'In order to determine age without a birth certificate, after the applicant applies for Tazkira in a particular district, the person who confirms the applicant's age is the district governor. The district governor confirms the age of the applicant based on their appearance. In cases where someone has lost their birth certificate or procures one at a later date, the age determination is inconsistent with the person's birth certificate, the governor has delegated the authority to determine the age to the head of the Civil Registration Authority.'[41]

10.2.5 Birth certificates, issued immediately by hospitals and health clinics[42], were free of charge, but people had to pay up to 600 AFN [£6.54[43]] in fees to get them 'officialised.'[44]

Back to Contents

10.3 Tazkiras

10.3.1 The IOM documentation report stated that tazkiras, both paper and biometric (e-tazkira) '… were deemed to be the most important document for Afghans under the DfA.'[45] Services requiring a tazkira included:

- Banking
- School registration
- Humanitarian / government aid
- Basic services
- Employment (formal)
- Taxes
- Loans
- Medical access (in some cases)
- Travel within Afghanistan
- Travel outside of Afghanistan (passport)
- Disability and martyrdom pensions
- Legal purposes – court, witness, inheritance

[40] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 25), August 2023
[41] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 51), August 2023
[42] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 29), August 2023
[43] Currency XE, Convert Afghan Afghanis to British Pounds, 1 October 2024
[44] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 31, footnote 107), August 2023
[45] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 33), August 2023

- Ownership of property and assets
- Accessing passports
- Rent / buy housing, land, or property
- Getting a SIM card[46]

10.3.2 The IOM documentation report added that '… Tazkiras are less required for employment, as many people are employed in the informal sector which does not require this form of documentation. Access to medical care also varied, in terms of people's experiences with being asked for documentation. Some interviewees stated they were required at hospitals and at doctor's appointments, whilst others were able to access medical care without any documents for themselves or their children.'[47]

10.3.3 According to the report, around 60% of the population hold a tazkira and, at the time the Taliban took over the country (August 2021), there were 6 versions of the paper tazkira in circulation[48]. The same source noted that, 'Under the DfA, old versions of tazkiras and e-Tazkiras are generally accepted.'[49] The report also noted that the type of tazkira (paper or biometric) being issued by the DfA varied by province, but the cost was unaffordable for many Afghans (100 AFN for a paper tazkira and 300 AFN for an e-tazkira, up from 10 AFN and 100 AFN under the GoIRA respectively)[50]. In February 2024, the IOM stated that a tazkira cost AFN 700[51]. As at 9 August 2024, £1 = 90 AFN[52].

10.3.4 Regarding accuracy, the IOM documentation report noted that:

'Under the DfA, some participants spoke about spelling and age mistakes on Tazkiras, which are more common for those applicants who lack birth certificates. Although this occurred under the previous government, the issue has become exacerbated under the DfA due to changes in staff due to former staff leaving the country or being fired. Women interviewed in Kandahar province reported similar mistakes with their e-Tazkiras, which they were required to pay to correct… Many interviewees attributed this issue [of errors] as well to the lack of literate staff currently working in offices for processing e-tazkiras in particular.'[53]

10.3.5 The IOM documentation report highlighted the difficulties children faced in obtaining tazkiras:

'Female-headed households often struggle to get documentation for their children, as if their father is not present, children are typically unable to access paper Tazkiras and e-Tazkiras alike, which are required in Afghanistan to enrol children in school. This is especially true in cases where the father is deceased, and a death certificate – which is covered under

[46] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 34), August 2023
[47] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 33), August 2023
[48] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 12), August 2023
[49] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 12), August 2023
[50] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 12), August 2023
[51] IOM, Information on the socio-economic situation in Afghanistan (page 15), 22 February 2024
[52] Xe.com, 1 GBP to AFN, as at 9 August 2024
[53] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 17), August 2023

Article 20 of the 2014 Registration of Population Law – is required in order to procure tazkiras, as highlighted by a lawyer interviewed Herat province. Furthermore, children whose parents lack documents will be unable to get documents themselves, such as tazkiras, as children's tazkiras are provided based on their father's Tazkira. Thus, there is a domino effect when parents do not have any form of identification, as parents – namely the father – must get a Tazkira in order for their children to receive one.

'Unaccompanied minors and child heads of households are often at a disadvantage especially if they had no forms of identification, such as a paper tazkira, e-Tazkira, and/or birth certificate. In cases where fathers have died, other men in the family – such as uncles – are accepted as next of kin in proving identity – as mothers' identification are not accepted. However, sometimes they do not support their nephews or nieces in procuring identification…'[54]

Back to Contents

11. Socio-economic rights

11.1 Access to education, including religious schools 'madrassas'

11.1.1 The US Department of State noted in its 2023 report on human rights practices (USSD 2023 HR Report) that:

'Education for boys was compulsory through ninth grade, generally ages seven to 15, although schools generally permitted families to enroll their children, girl or boy, at age six. Primary education was required for girls through sixth grade, generally ages seven to 12, although media reported the Taliban restricting girls from attending primary school once they showed subjective signs of having begun puberty, regardless of age. According to a Taliban edict, girls were prohibited from going to school beyond the sixth grade, effectively excluding 1.1 million girls from further education. The Taliban permitted girls to attend Taliban-approved madrassahs without age limit.'[55]

11.1.2 The IOM response dated February 2024 stated that:

'Girls can only go to school until grade six (6 years of primary education). Girls and women are banned from attending secondary education beyond grade six and are banned from attending all tertiary education, including universities. Despite an increase in primary school attendance and narrowed gender gaps, millions of children, especially girls, remain out of school due to limited access. After the prohibition on girls attending secondary school was enforced, merely 3 per cent of them are enrolled in secondary education. Meanwhile, among boys aged 13-18, the percentage receiving secondary education stands at 44 per cent.'[56]

11.1.3 Samuel Hall, in collaboration with War Child Afghanistan, conducted a needs assessment in Herat, Ghor and Badghis on the situation of children's rights and well-being in western Afghanistan. The study, conducted in October and November 2022, drew upon 12 case studies with children (6 boys and 6

[54] IOM, Documentation and legal identification in Afghanistan (page 25), August 2023
[55] USSD, Country Report on Human Rights Practices (section 6), 22 April 2024
[56] IOM, Information on the socio-economic situation in Afghanistan (page 8), 22 February 2024

girls, aged 12 to 17), 12 parent/caregiver focus group discussions (FGDs), 6 stakeholder FGDs and 15 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with local community actors[57]. Regarding access to education, the report noted that: 'Respondents underlined that families cannot afford books, uniforms, clothes, and food to enable school attendance, nor the opportunity costs when children do not work. On top of that, the quality of education, the limited job opportunities, and for girls, the lack of opportunities to continue studies after sixth grade make parents/caregivers question the value of school overall.' [58]

11.1.4 Human Rights Watch (HRW), in its report focussing on boys' education, published December 2023, based on remote interviews with 22 schoolboys attending grades 8 to 12 and 5 parents of boys in the same grade range in Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Farah, Parwan, Bamiyan, Nangarhar and Daikundi provinces between June and August 2022 and between March and April 2023, noted that 'Boys attending schools across different Afghan provinces report a series of new or heightened barriers to their education, including the absence of female teachers, the increased use of corporal punishment, reduced attendance rates, the elimination of subjects like arts, sports, English language, and civic education, a decline in educational quality, increased anxiety about attending school, and a loss of hope for the future.'[59]

11.1.5 An August 2023 report by UNICEF based on surveys and interviews in 2022 with more than 1,500 children, youth, families, communities and practitioners living in Afghanistan impacted by migration, displacement and return, found, in regard to access to education in the host community for returnee or internally displaced children and young people, that 'Economic factors are the key barrier to school participation as well as a lack of many years of schooling while children were outside Afghanistan. Girls were particularly impacted and were more likely to be prevented from going to schools – either because they were not allowed by government restrictions/school closures or because their families did not want them to attend.'[60]

See also Migration and return

11.1.6 Regarding religious schools, the needs assessment by Samuel Hall noted:

'Madrassas [Islamic religious schools] and mosques are both alternative locations for education which have been used to allow boys to learn in more rural communities where educational facilities may be limited, and as a place for girls' education. One mother explained, "Because we don't have female teachers, we have no girls' school in our community; instead, they go to the mosques where the Mullah teaches them." Others learned more informally from family members in the home – for example, brothers tutoring their sister.'[61]

11.1.7 UN Women noted in a June 2024 report that:

'The DFA is in the process of expanding Islamic education centres,

[57] Samuel Hall, Children in distress: an Afghan Child-focused Needs Assessment (page 2), June 2023
[58] Samuel Hall, Children in distress: an Afghan Child-focused Needs Assessment (page 6), June 2023
[59] HRW, "Schools are Failing Boys Too"… (Background), 6 December 2023
[60] UNICEF, As They Move: Child and Youth Experiences of Migration… (pages 56, 57), August 2023
[61] Samuel Hall, Children in distress: an Afghan Child-focused Needs Assessment (page 6), June 2023

madrasas, in the public education system. In Afghanistan, there are both private and public madrasas. Young Afghan children attend mosque-based education in addition to school. As of 2022, there were 1,142 Islamic educational institutions with a total enrolment of 342,678 students, of which only one third of students – or 29 per cent – are women and girls. While Islamic education is open for girls beyond primary levels, their inclusion in madrasas is limited to 27 per cent of the student population. Public madrasas are required to fully adhere to the de facto MoE [Ministry of Education] approved curriculum where religious subjects constitute approximately 60 per cent of curricula with the rest of content – 40 per cent – dedicated to general education. Textbook content has also changed – all subjects relating to democracy, women's rights, human rights have been removed.'[62]

11.1.8 A report by the UN Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan since 28 February 2024, dated 13 June 2024, noted that the Taliban encouraged people to send their children to madrassas[63], adding:

'The de facto authorities continued to bolster madrassa education. Following a countrywide assessment of madrassas in December 2023, on 13 March [2024], the de facto Ministry of Education established a directorate for the professional development of madrassas to improve madrassa administration and teacher capacity. It also took steps to standardize private madrassa education by conducting examinations during the reporting period for 64,000 recent male graduates of private madrassas to determine whether they had earned bachelor's or master's-level degrees in religious studies. Some civil society activists and academics characterized the exams as an exercise to bolster the credentials of Taliban members and affiliates ahead of possible recruitment into the civil service.

'From 5 February to 15 May, 19 de facto authority-run madrassas, including 6 for women, were inaugurated in 10 provinces, and 1,798 religious scholars graduated from de facto authority-run madrassas. Representatives of the de facto authorities asserted in the media that madrassas offered opportunities for girls beyond the age of 12 to continue their studies. However, precise information on the number of girls availing themselves of these opportunities, or the curriculum offered, remained scarce given the decentralization and non-standardization of these institutions and the reluctance of de facto authorities to share information.'[64]

11.1.9 The quarterly report on US reconstruction efforts (1 October 2023 to 30 January 2024) by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), noted regarding madrassas that:

'USAID told SIGAR that in 2022, the Taliban introduced "jihadi madrassas" as a new category of public Islamic education centers, while "In August 2023, the Taliban confirmed the establishment of at least one public jihadi madrassa in each of Afghanistan's 34 provinces." Jihadi madrassas reportedly enroll children of primary- and secondary-school age. Instruction

[62] UN Women, Afghanistan Gender Profile 2024 (page 46), June 2024
[63] UNGA, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications… (paragraphs 3 and 5), 13 June 2024
[64] UNGA, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications… (paragraph 9), 13 June 2024

in jihadi madrassas focuses on religious studies, with even more limited emphasis on the sciences than regular madrassas. USAID said that although a version of the madrassa system has historic roots in the country, "what is new is the fact that the Taliban are introducing jihadi madrassas as part of the public Islamic education system."'[65]

11.1.10 The same report noted that former Afghan Minister of Education Rangina Hamidi told SIGAR that, '… while the term "jihadi madrassas" reminded her of Pakistani madrassas where young boys were taught militant-related subjects, including suicide bombing, she said she has not seen evidence that the current jihadi madrassas under the Taliban provide such teachings.'[66]

Back to Contents

11.2 Access to healthcare

11.2.1 For information on general access to healthcare, see the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Humanitarian situation.

Back to Contents

11.3 Children with disabilities

11.3.1 The USSD 2023 HR Report noted regarding people with disabilities that:

'Persons with disabilities could not access education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. Persons with disabilities faced barriers such as limited access to educational opportunities, inability to access government buildings, difficulty in acquiring official identification required for many services, lack of economic opportunities, and social exclusion due to stigma.' [67] Disability covers a wide range of conditions and impairments. It is not clear from the source the nature of disabilities this refers to and how it affects individuals.

11.3.2 The same USSD report noted: 'In May, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Afghanistan stated that persons with disabilities in the country were disproportionately affected by the humanitarian crisis. The Taliban reportedly only provided services to its former fighters with disabilities resulting from the war with the United States and NATO, and persons born with disabilities or those who were not Taliban did not receive support.'[68]

11.3.3 According to a United States Institute of Peace (USIP) report on the challenges faced by people with disabilities, dated February 2024:

'Since taking control in 2021, the Taliban have introduced measures aimed at monitoring the distribution of financial aid to disabled individuals irrespective of the origin of their disabilities. While this might seem as though the Taliban have expanded the scope of support for disabled individuals, in truth, the Taliban have simply swapped one bias for another: Resource allocation under the Taliban heavily favors disabled Taliban members above

[65] SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress (page 37), 30 January 2024
[66] SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress (page 37), 30 January 2024
[67] USSD, Country Report on Human Rights Practices (section 6), 22 April 2024
[68] USSD, Country Report on Human Rights Practices (section 6), 22 April 2024

all others… while payments are promptly disbursed to disabled Taliban members, the same cannot be said for others.'[69] It is not clear from the source whether this also applies to children generally and the children of Taliban supporters.

11.3.4 The USIP further noted

'… for those with disabilities from birth, the challenges are even more pronounced. To protect their disabled family members from societal humiliation and scorn, many families find themselves compelled to conceal their severely disabled family members from the outside world entirely. This predicament is notably prevalent in cases involving girls with mental disabilities… another particularly troubling trend under the Taliban: [is t]he expulsion of female students with visual and hearing impairments from schools tailored to meet their specific needs…'[70]

11.3.5 The local NGO, Enabled Children Initiative Afghanistan Organization (ECIAO), provided '… residential, educational, income generation support and emergency aid to children and youth living with disabilities in Afghanistan, and their families' in 6 provinces[71].

Back to Contents

11.4 Humanitarian situation

11.4.1 See the Country Policy and Information Note, Afghanistan: Humanitarian situation.

Back to Contents

12. Juvenile justice

12.1 Judicial process

12.1.1 For general information on the justice system and administration of justice, see the Country Policy and Information Note, Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban.

12.1.2 Rawadari noted in its November 2023 child rights report that, since the Taliban's repeal of laws relating to child rights, there were no laws specifying the judicial rights of a child. The report noted that:

'Strict religious interpretations have replaced the laws, and Taliban courts handle criminal and legal cases based on the religious rulings and orders of their leader. The handling of cases involving accused children follows the same conditions. However, it is worth noting that the judicial process for child offenders varies from one province to another and from one court to another.

'It should be mentioned that a very small number of cases involving child offenders, primarily related to elopement for marriage and "moral offenses", are formally addressed in the courts. Most cases relating to child offences are resolved through non-judicial mechanisms.'[72]

12.1.3 The same report stated '… there is no specific unit within the Taliban's legal

[69] USIP, The Challenges Facing Afghans with Disabilities, 29 February 2024
[70] USIP, The Challenges Facing Afghans with Disabilities, 29 February 2024
[71] ECI, Our Story, no date
[72] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 21), November 2023

and judicial institutions responsible for investigating and addressing child offenses' and found that '… most cases of children are not referred to courts for resolution, but instead, they are resolved through non-judicial mechanisms, where institutions such as the departments of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, provincial police stations, district police stations, provincial & district governors, tribal councils and local elders all play significant roles in addressing cases involving accused children.'[73]

12.1.4 Rawadari noted that children did not have access to defence lawyers and that there was '… no legal framework in Afghanistan to determine the duration of monitoring, detention, and confinement of children.'[74]

12.1.5 Rawadari found that children were discriminated against depending on their gender, noting that girls faced harsher punishments than boys, particularly in cases of so-called 'moral crimes', such as running away from home, having romantic relationships and adultery[75]. The same report added that, child offenders with a familial or tribal relationship with Taliban judges or other judicial officials faced lighter punishments, whilst '… children belonging to different ethnic groups … face more harsh treatment.'[76]

12.1.6 For a detailed insight into the state of access to the justice system (formal and informal) under the Taliban, between August 2021 and January 2023, see the International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC) report Justice Matters: A Status Report on Afghanistan Since the Taliban Takeover.

Back to Contents

12.2 Juvenile detention

12.2.1 Rawadari noted in its November 2023 child rights report that the Taliban had closed many juvenile rehabilitation centres and that children had been detained alongside adult prisoners. The report stated:

'In Nimruz, the Taliban have closed the juvenile rehabilitation center, resulting in 31 children between the ages of 8 and 17 being held in a public prison alongside the adult prisoners. In Panjshir, the Taliban detain children accused of criminal offenses in the juvenile rehabilitation centers, while children accused of "political crimes" are held in detention centers and prisons. Similarly, in Ghor and Herat, the Taliban have transferred the juvenile rehabilitation center to public prisons and the Taliban detain the incarcerated children there. In Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, and Badakhshan, the Taliban hold child suspects under detention and in prisons until the court issues a verdict, after which they are transferred to the juvenile rehabilitation centers.'[77]

12.2.2 The same source reported on the mistreatment of children whilst detained in police stations, including beatings, forced labour, and denied access to family members[78].

[73] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 21), November 2023
[74] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (pages 22 to 23), November 2023
[75] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 24), November 2023
[76] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 26), November 2023
[77] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 23), November 2023
[78] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 24), November 2023

12.2.3 A January 2023 report by the NGO, International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC), which surveyed the justice sector under Taliban rule, through 30 in-depth interviews with lawyers, five of whom were women and all had first-hand knowledge of the conditions of the justice system under both the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban. Those surveyed had experience across 20 provinces. The report noted that civil society organisations had reported an increase in the number of people detained since the Taliban takeover, including hundreds of women and children. The ILAC report added that 'There are also reports that Kabul, Helmand and Herat all have over 100 children detained, including a significant number of girls.'[79]

12.2.4 According to the report on children in armed conflict by the UN Secretary General, covering the period from January to December 2023 (UNSG 2023 Annual Report), dated 3 June 2024, 'A total of 31 children (29 boys, 2 girls) were detained by the Taliban for alleged association with opposing groups, 19 of whom were released, and 1 child died in custody.'[80]

Back to Contents

13. Child soldiers

13.1 Forced recruitment

13.1.1 The UN Secretary-General report on the situation of children in armed conflict in Afghanistan from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2022, noted:

'The Taliban were responsible for the recruitment and use of 217 children … Of those, the majority were recruited in 2021 (145), late-verified in 2022 and released to the [UN] country task force for reintegration into society…

'Children associated with the Taliban were used in combat, including in suicide attack squads, and in support roles, such as making and transporting improvised explosive devices for the Taliban. In 2022, four boys who had been recruited and used were killed in crossfire, while a girl was abducted, recruited and used and then maimed by the Taliban.

'During 2022, through provincial-level advocacy with the Taliban, the country task force facilitated the release of 494 children (all boys) who had been recruited and used in previous years in the north-eastern (252), central (145) and northern (97) regions. All the released boys benefited from the country task force-supported reintegration programme.

'Boys were more likely to be recruited and used than girls owing in part to cultural norms and religious beliefs. Poverty was also a significant push-and-pull factor, with boys more likely to bear the responsibility for meeting the household's economic needs.'[81] The UN figures did not indicate precisely how many children were recruited by the Taliban after its take-over in August 2021.

13.1.2 The US Department of Labor (USDOL) 2023 report on child labour noted: 'Boys in Afghanistan are vulnerable to being recruited and used as child

[79] ILAC, Rule of Law Report 2023 (page 31), January 2023
[80] UNGA, Children and armed conflict; Report of the Secretary-General (paragraph 17), 3 June 2024
[81] UNSC, Children and armed conflict in Afghanistan… (paragraphs 25, 27 to 29), 21 November 2023

soldiers. The Taliban typically recruits boys between the ages of 14 and 17, and 97 percent of these recruits become part of the Taliban's security forces. The Taliban does not have a formalized age verification mechanism to ensure children are not being recruited into the armed forces. Some boys are coerced or recruited under false promises or fraudulent circumstances.'[82]

13.1.3 According to the UNSG 2023 Annual Report 'The recruitment and use in combat (150) and support roles (192) of 342 boys [in 2023] by the Taliban were verified. Most of the children (333) were released by the Taliban in the northern and north-eastern regions.'[83]

13.1.4 Rawadari noted in its November 2023 child rights report that '… the Taliban have been recruiting children under the age of 18 as soldiers and military personnel in various parts of the country ... While the Taliban leader has issued an order banning the recruitment of children, there seems to be little enforcement.'[84]

13.1.5 According to Rawadari's findings, '… some mosque imams and local officials of the Taliban in the southern provinces openly promote the learning of violent warfare tactics and encourage the children to join the ranks of the Taliban … Rawadari has also found other evidence that show that the local Taliban officials are trying to recruit children in military ranks.'[85]

13.1.6 The same report noted that some Taliban had falsified tazkiras by increasing the age of 16-year-old boys to 18 so that they could be employed by security forces[86]. Rawadari also found that:

'… some of the children who have been recruited as soldiers and military personnel over the past two years include those whose fathers and other close relatives have been killed as Taliban fighters in the war against the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. As a show of appreciation for these individuals, the Taliban have employed their children in military roles and pay them salaries. Additionally, a number of these children are relatives and close kin of local Taliban commanders who have been enlisted with the aim of increasing Taliban's military forces. Sources have told Rawadari that Taliban encourage their relatives and kin to send their children to join the ranks of their military forces to expand their trusted personnel.'[87]

13.1.7 The same report further noted that boys, mostly aged between 14 and 18, were employed as bodyguards, secretaries, support staff or drivers for Taliban officials and that some had experienced sexual abuse by their employers[88]. (See also Sexual violence including bacha bazi).

13.1.8 The Special Rapporteur noted in his report covering the period between September 2023 and January 2024 that there had been '… a decrease in the recruitment and use of children, but highlights that children are still used

[82] USDOL, 2023 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (page 1), September 2024
[83] UNGA, Children and armed conflict; Report of the Secretary-General (paragraph 22), 3 June 2024
[84] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 15), November 2023
[85] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (pages 15, 16), November 2023
[86] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 16), November 2023
[87] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 16), November 2023
[88] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 16), November 2023

in combat and support roles.'[89]

13.1.9 The EUAA May 2024 Country Guidance Afghanistan, based on the EUAA's COI reports, noted that:

'An Afghan analyst estimated that thousands of children may remain in Taliban ranks. However, the Taliban have formed a commission to remove child soldiers from their ranks, and today they usually avoid recruiting boys that are too young by rejecting those without a beard. The source added that the idea of childhood ending at 18 is seen as a Western construct, and that in a country where the large majority of the people do not know their date of birth or their age, becoming adult at 18 "makes very little sense", and oftentimes the age is estimated.'[90]

13.1.10 The same EUAA report stated:

'In an October 2021 report, UNHCR referred to information obtained from interlocutors in the field, according to which both the Taliban de facto authorities as well as the ISKP 'recruit widely and use children in their ranks' At the same time, children in the ranks of Taliban have become more visible since its takeover, leading to perceptions that the recruitment of children has increased, despite much of the recruitment likely having occurred previously. The growing rate of poverty was reported to be a driving factor for the recruitment and use of children by armed groups.'[91]

13.1.11 According to the USSD 2024 TiP report, 'The Taliban did not implement measures to prevent children from unlawful recruitment or use in combat and in support roles.'[92]

Back to Contents

14. Violence against children

14.1 Child labour

14.1.1 The USSD 2024 TiP report noted that 'The Taliban reported inspecting 259 factories in 2023 and identifying 42 cases of child labor; however, it did not share any information on law enforcement efforts or services provided.'[93]

14.1.2 The USDOL 2023 report on child labour stated that:

'In 2023, Afghanistan made no advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The humanitarian crisis following the Taliban takeover in August 2021 has resulted in an increase in the prevalence of child labor, including its worst forms, and exacerbated existing child labor risks for girls…the Taliban also lack a mechanism to impose penalties for child labor violations and sufficient programs to address situations of child labor or prevent its occurrence. Lastly, Afghanistan's laws do not meet international standards on the minimum age for work because they do not apply to workers in the informal sector, or on the prohibition of forced labor because Afghan law does not sufficiently criminalize practices similar to slavery,

[89] UNHRC, Situation of human rights in Afghanistan… (paragraph 35), 22 February 2024
[90] EUAA, Country Guidance: Afghanistan (pages 81, 82), May 2024
[91] EUAA, Country Guidance: Afghanistan (pages 81, 82), May 2024
[92] USSD, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Afghanistan (Prevention), 24 June 2024
[93] USSD, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Afghanistan (Prevention), 24 June 2024

including debt bondage.'[94]

14.1.3 The same USDOL report noted children were employed in agriculture, industry, and services. This included farming, mining, carpet weaving, metal work, construction, tailoring, street work, domestic work, transportation (including across international borders) and other service roles. They were also used in illegal activities such as pickpocketing, weapons trafficking, in the production and trafficking of drugs, production of bricks and as truck drivers[95].

Back to Contents

14.2 Child marriage

14.2.1 The USSD 2023 HR Report stated that:

'A Taliban decree banned the forced marriage of women. Despite this ban, child, early, and forced marriage was common across the country. In a June [2023] report, UNICEF expressed concern regarding the increase in child marriage and reported that due to the extremely difficult economic situation in the country, many families were forced to make "disappointing decisions" such as sending children to work and marrying off underage girls. UNICEF estimated that 28 percent of women in the country between the ages of 15 and 49 were married before the age of 18 and noted that teenage girls who were not allowed to go to school were more threatened by the "risk of child marriage."'[96]

14.2.2 According to the USSD 2024 TiP report 'According to an international organization, the dire economic and security situation, political instability, and other factors such as drought in several provinces exacerbates the problem of families selling girls into marriages, including in cases involving Taliban members. Some women and girls are forced into marriage to escape Afghanistan.' [97]

14.2.3 According to a joint report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, dated 15 June 2023, which cited a 2021 UNESCO review:

'As at 2021, approximately one girl in three (35 per cent) married before the age of 18, and one in five (17 per cent) before 15. There is notable evidence of a significant increase in child and forced marriage of girls, highlighting the continued prevalence of this specific form of gender-based violence to cope with the worsening livelihood situation. Between December 2022 and February 2023 alone, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) received 578 separate reports of forced marriage, of which 361 were child marriages. In the words of one interlocutor, "many families feel it is better to sell a child into marriage than for her to die of starvation". A secondary school teacher informed the experts that early and forced marriages were

[94] USDOL, 2023 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (page 1), September 2024
[95] USDOL, 2023 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (page 1), September 2024
[96] USSD, Country Report on Human Rights Practices (section 6), 22 April 2024
[97] USSD, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Afghanistan (Trafficking profile), 24 June 2024

common among her former pupils, since school had been closed to them.'[98]

14.2.4 Rawadari noted in its November 2023 child rights report that:

'… there is currently no law to determine the conditions for marriage contracts and prevent forced child marriages. For this reason and due to the spread of poverty and economic hardship as well as prevalent social norms, the number of forced and early marriages of girls has increased across the country, especially in rural and remote areas, over the past two years...

'Currently, early child marriages are not officially prohibited in Afghanistan, and there are no penalties in place for those involved. Therefore, over the past two years, not a single case of individuals involved in forced child marriages has been held accountable in Taliban's courts. Judicial and legal authorities primarily resolve complaints related to forced child marriages through reconciliation and informal mechanisms, often without considering the consent of the girls and women involved.'[99]

14.2.5 The same source noted 'Rawadari came across and was able to verify several cases of underage and forced marriages of young girls with older men in exchange for money.'[100] Rawadari also found that, despite official orders to the contrary, some local Taliban had forcibly married girls, some as young as 13[101].

14.2.6 Freedom House noted in its 2024 Freedom in the World report that, due to the economic crisis associated with the Taliban takeover, 'Aid agencies fear that as many as 120,000 children were bartered or sold into marriage in the first eight months of the new regime's rule.'[102]

14.2.7 On 24 September the BBC in its article A child bride won the right to divorce - now the Taliban say it doesn't count, reported on the case of a woman who was granted a divorce from her marriage as a child in court which was then operating under the US-backed Afghan government. This has since been revoked by the Taliban. The report noted '[this example of] …divorce is one of tens of thousands of court rulings revoked since the Taliban took control of the country three years ago this month. It took just 10 days from them sweeping into the capital, Kabul, for the man she was promised to at seven to ask the courts to overturn the divorce ruling she had fought so hard for.'[103]

14.2.8 The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) news agency in an interview with Susan Hutchinson from women's rights NGO Azadi-e Zan noted the Taliban '…[is] moving to invalidate all divorces, forcing child brides and women to return to abusive marriages.'[104]

Back to Contents

14.3 Children of former government officials

14.3.1 In its November 2023 child rights report, Rawadari referred to the treatment

[98] UNHRC, Situation of women and girls in Afghanistan… (paragraph 73), 15 June 2023
[99] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (pages 8, 10), November 2023
[100] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 8), November 2023
[101] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (pages 10, 11), November 2023
[102] Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 (G4), 29 February 2024
[103] BBC, A child bride won the right to divorce…, 24 September 2024
[104] ABC, Taliban revokes divorces, 1 October 2024

of students whose relatives had worked for the GoIRA, noting that there were '… reports from some provinces that the Taliban subject students [within schools] to more violence and mistreatment if their fathers or relatives have served in the previous government. Sources from Ghor province have reported that some students in schools are subjected to violent treatment by their teachers because their relatives and next of kin were employees of the previous government.'[105]

14.3.2 According to the same report, 'In April 2022, the Taliban detained three children in the centre of Nawah Mish district of Daikundi province, because their fathers had worked in the previous government. These children were severely beaten and tortured in the police stations to the extent that one of them suffered serious psychological problems.'[106]

14.3.3 For further information on the treatment of family members of people associated with the former government or international forces/organisations, see the Country Policy and Information Note, Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban.

Back to Contents

14.4 Corporal punishment

14.4.1 The EUAA May 2024 Country Guidance Afghanistan, based on the EUAA's COI reports, noted that 'Child abuse is endemic in Afghan society. Children in Afghan families are often subjected to corporal punishment, including slapping, verbal abuse, punching, kicking, and hitting with thin sticks, electrical cables, and shoes.'[107]

14.4.2 In its December 2023 report focussing on boys' education, HRW noted:

'Corporal punishment has been a longstanding problem in schools in Afghanistan. Even before the Taliban's return to power, it was not uncommon for teachers to use physical punishment. A 2008 study in Afghanistan found that violence against children was widely used and socially accepted within Afghan society, families, and schools. Hitting with sticks or rulers, kicking, slapping, and foot whipping students were used as forms of discipline.'[108]

14.4.3 Regarding punishment in schools, Rawadari noted in its November 2023 child rights report that 'In the past two years, the Taliban have employed a considerable number of individuals, mainly graduates of religious madrassas, as school administrators, officials, and teachers.'

14.4.4 The report added:

'An official from the Department of Education in Kandahar Province told Rawadari that violence against children in schools has increased, and the main reason for this is the employment of school principals, officers, and teachers by the Taliban, who use violence and mistreatment with students … Additionally, a student from Badakhshan Province stated that they have

[105] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 13), November 2023
[106] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 24), November 2023
[107] EUAA, Country Guidance: Afghanistan (pages 79), May 2024
[108] HRW, "Schools are Failing Boys Too"… (Corporal Punishment), 6 December 2023

been mostly subjected to violence and mistreatment by new teachers who have been hired by the Taliban over the past two years. They mentioned that these new teachers resort to methods such as hitting with fists and sticks, placing pencils between fingers, drowning in water, and forcing students to perform physical tasks as a form of punishment.'[109]

14.4.5 HRW were told by students and family members that '… following the Taliban takeover, the use of corporal punishment at school increased. Students said that school officials used humiliation, beating, slapping, and foot whipping during morning assemblies as forms of discipline.'[110]

14.4.6 Rawadari reported, regarding children accused of criminal offences, that 'Beating, flogging, whipping, and monetary fines are among the punishments imposed on children by the district police station and departments of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.'[111] (see also Judicial process).

See also Children of former government officials

Back to Contents

14.5 Sexual violence including bacha bazi

14.5.1 The UNSG 2023 Annual Report stated that 'The abduction for sexual violence purposes of 3 children (1 boy, 2 girls) by the Taliban was verified. All children were released.'[112]

14.5.2 The USSD 2023 HR Report noted that 'The Taliban publicly stated that bacha bazi was against Islamic law, but multiple human rights groups reported the practice's prevalence in many parts of the country.'[113]

14.5.3 According to a June 2024 report by UN Women 'Bacha bazi has been notoriously difficult to monitor, as it is practiced discreetly (particularly since its criminalization [under the GoIRA]), mainly by higher-ranking, well-connected Afghan men. While the Taliban outlawed this practice during the period of Taliban regime rule between 1996 and 2001, it has not been explicitly addressed by the DFA since their seizure of State power in August 2021.'[114]

14.5.4 Rawadari reported that it had recorded incidents of child sexual abuse in madrassas, perpetrated by instructors. However, due to social stigma and threats by the Taliban made against victims' families, few incidents were publicly reported[115]. According to the same report, little or no action had been taken to address the mistreatment of students[116].

14.5.5 The EUAA May 2024 Country Guidance Afghanistan, based on the EUAA's COI reports, noted Sexual abuse of children also remained a pervasive problem, with girls being the most frequent victims in their families or

[109] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 13), November 2023
[110] HRW, "Schools are Failing Boys Too"… (Corporal Punishment), 6 December 2023
[111] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 12), November 2023
[112] UNGA, Children and armed conflict; Report of the Secretary-General (paragraph 16), 3 June 2024
[113] USSD, Country Report on Human Rights Practices (section 6), 22 April 2024
[114] UN Women, Afghanistan Gender Profile 2024 (page 30), June 2024
[115] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (page 13), November 2023
[116] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (pages 13, 14), November 2023

communities.'[117]

14.5.6 The USDOL 2023 report on child labour stated that:

'Boys in Afghanistan continue to be subjected to commercial sexual exploitation through the practice of *bacha bazi*, which typically entails keeping a boy for the purpose of sexual gratification. Some boys are sold into the practice by their families. Children subjected to *bacha bazi* often become further victimized by the threat of violence when returning to their families…

'The Penal Code criminalizes the use of male or transgender children in *bacha bazi*, criminalizes forcing children to dance, and criminalizes the forced use of girls in prostitution. However, the legal framework does not criminalize the use of boys or non-forced use of girls in prostitution.'[118]

See also Trafficking

Back to Contents

14.6 Attacks on schools

14.6.1 In September 2022, an attack on a school in Kabul killed at least 54 people and injured another 114, mostly Hazara women and girls preparing for a university entrance exam[119].

14.6.2 According to the report on children in armed conflict by the UN Secretary General, covering the period from January to December 2023 (UNSG 2023 Annual Report), dated 3 June 2024, 'The United Nations verified…attacks on schools (60) …including attacks on protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals, attributed [mostly] to the Taliban…and unidentified perpetrators...'[120]

14.6.3 The same UNSG 2023 Annual Report noted that the UN verified 60 attacks on schools by both the Taliban and unidentified perpetrators[121]. Furthermore, 'The military use of 32 schools by the Taliban was verified; 22 schools that had been used by the Taliban since August 2021 were vacated in 2023.'[122]

14.6.4 NGO The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) in its Afghanistan report covering 2022 to 2023 published in 2024 noted:

'GCPEA identified at least 68 attacks on schools in 2022 and 2023, compared to 76 reported attacks in 2021 and 62 in 2020. Overall, the number of attacks on schools continued to decline from a 2018 peak of 192…

'GCPEA identified at least 15 reports of attacks on school students and teachers in the reporting period. In comparison, GCPEA identified at least 11 such attacks in 2021 and at least 16 in 2020. A large number of attacks were against female students and staff at girls' schools, or against those involved

[117] EUAA, EUAA, Country Guidance: Afghanistan (pages 79), May 2024
[118] USDOL, 2023 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (page 3, 4), September 2024
[119] UNHRC, Situation of women and girls in Afghanistan… (paragraph 38), 15 June 2023
[120] UNGA, Children and armed conflict; Report of the Secretary-General (paragraph 20), 3 June 2024
[121] UNGA, Children and armed conflict; Report of the Secretary-General (paragraph 20), 3 June 2024
[122] UNGA, Children and armed conflict; Report of the Secretary-General (paragraph 21), 3 June 2024

in protests for girls' education.

'In 2022, the UN verified 72 incidents of attacks on schools, students, and personnel; the Taliban was responsible for many of the attacks, including killings. It appeared that many of these attacks were on students and staff, since the report mentions a high number of attacks against protected persons. However, GCPEA could not determine how many were attacks on students or personnel as compared with attacks on schools. Separately, GCPEA identified at least ten reported attacks on school students and teachers in 2022.'[123]

Back to Contents

14.7 Trafficking

14.7.1 EUAA May 2024 Country Guidance Afghanistan, based on EUAA COI reports, noted: 'The trafficking of Afghan children reportedly increased since the Taliban takeover. There have been multiple recent reports of boys being smuggled across the Iranian and Pakistan borders, and of incidents of sexual violence against them committed by paid 'guides'.'[124]

14.7.2 According to the USSD 2024 TiP report:

'Internal trafficking is more prevalent than transnational trafficking… Most Afghan trafficking victims are children forced to work in carpet making, brick kilns, domestic servitude, sex trafficking (including bacha bazi), domestic work, herding livestock, agriculture, workshops, construction, mining, begging, low-skilled labor, poppy cultivation and harvesting, salt mining, petty crime, drug smuggling, weapons trafficking, truck driving, and in the transportation and hotel sectors. Civil society experts indicate boys are more vulnerable to trafficking than girls, especially in bacha bazi.'[125]

14.7.3 The same report noted 'Children, predominantly boys between the ages of 13 and 18, are forced by their families to migrate unaccompanied for work to other parts of Afghanistan or abroad to Türkiye, Iran, or Pakistan to support their families.'[126] The report further noted:

'Afghan men, women, and children pay intermediaries to assist them in finding employment abroad, primarily in Iran, Pakistan, and Europe; some intermediaries and employers force Afghans into labor or sex trafficking. Many Afghans continue to seek refuge in neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan and Iran, many through irregular means. International organizations report hundreds of thousands of Afghans, including tens of thousands of registered refugees, returned or were deported to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran; many of these returnees are vulnerable to trafficking on account of economic instability or other conditions. Some Afghan women and girls who are sold in Afghanistan, India, Iran, and Pakistan are exploited in sex trafficking and domestic servitude by their new husbands…Afghan boys and men are subjected to forced labor and debt bondage in agriculture and construction, primarily in Iran, Pakistan, Greece, Türkiye, and the Gulf

[123] GCPEA, Education Under Attack 2024 – Afghanistan (pages 2-3), 2024
[124] EUAA, Country Guidance: Afghanistan (page 83), May 2024
[125] USSD, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Afghanistan (Trafficking profile), 24 June 2024
[126] USSD, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Afghanistan (Trafficking profile), 24 June 2024

states. Since August 15, 2021, many Afghan refugees fear deportation back to Afghanistan, which makes them less likely to report exploitation to foreign authorities – particularly in Iran, Pakistan, Türkiye, Europe, and Central Asia. Traffickers in Iran, including Iranian criminal groups, exploit Afghan children in forced labor as beggars and street vendors and in forced criminality, including drug trafficking and the smuggling of fuel and tobacco. Iranian police sometimes detain, torture, and extort Afghan child trafficking victims before deportation. Turkish authorities sometimes beat Afghan asylum-seekers and push them back into Iran where they may face deportation to Afghanistan, and some families are separated in the process. The Iranian government and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps compel Afghan migrants, including children as young as 12 years old, to fight in Iran-aligned militia groups deployed to Syria, including through force and by threatening them with arrest and deportation to Afghanistan. Former Afghan soldiers, hiding from the Taliban in Afghanistan or fleeing to other countries, such as Iran, are at risk of recruitment to fight in Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine because of financial instability and threats to their security. Migrant smuggling networks transport Afghan nationals living in Iran to Europe and subject them to sex trafficking and force them to work in restaurants to pay off debts incurred by smuggling fees. Some Afghan traffickers have subjected Afghan boys to bacha bazi in Germany, Hungary, North Macedonia, and Serbia.'[127]

14.7.4 Regarding protection and services for victims of trafficking, the USSD TiP 2024 report noted:

'… the Taliban did not report any protection efforts. The Taliban did not report identifying any trafficking victims or providing services. An NGO reported operating two shelters for child victims of crime and children experiencing homelessness in Kabul, which could also assist child victims of trafficking; the NGO noted it assisted two demobilized child soldiers during the reporting period. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA) operated an orphanage for boys, which could assist victims of crime, including trafficking. There were no reports of Taliban-run shelters for women or men who were victims of crime, including trafficking. Civil society representatives reported significant challenges maintaining or receiving approval to provide protection services, a lack of capacity, and limited funding, hindering overall efforts. Observers have reported the Taliban's firm resistance to discussing sex trafficking and allowing protection services for victims, particularly women and girls. Reportedly, civil society actors, including those assisting crime victims, continued to operate in an environment of uncertainty, fear, harassment, and interference by the Taliban. The Taliban severely limited the work of NGOs by prohibiting Afghan women from working at NGOs outside the healthcare and education sectors and detaining female staff for not being accompanied by a mahram (male chaperone), likely affecting the availability of trafficking victim services. Authorities often placed child trafficking victims in detention centers alongside adults where children experienced unlawful prison labor or conditions with indicators of forced labor, torture, and sexual abuse; detained

[127] USSD, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Afghanistan (Trafficking profile), 24 June 2024

children did not have access to a lawyer.'[128]

14.7.5 Regarding prevention, the USSD 2024 TiP report stated that 'the Taliban did not report any efforts to prevent trafficking. The Taliban's so-called "Deputy Minister of Interior" was responsible for anti-trafficking efforts, and MoLSA, in coordination with security agencies, was responsible for the enforcement of laws related to forced child labor. The Taliban did not report any activities to prevent human trafficking or raise awareness, despite a large number of vulnerable Afghans internally displaced or migrating by irregular means to other countries.'[129]

14.7.6 The USDOL 2023 report noted '…the Taliban considered some child trafficking victims, especially those engaged in *bacha bazi* or in armed conflict, as criminals, housing them in juvenile detention centers, and subjecting them to physical abuse and other forms of ill treatment rather than referring them to victim support services.'[130]

14.7.7 The same USDOL 2023 report noted:

'[The] National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Action Plan: Organizes Afghanistan's response to human trafficking, including bacha bazi, …[it] mandates the National Child Protection Committee to find and respond to bacha bazi cases among Afghan civil servants; encourages the implementation of laws,[and] the prevention of child recruitment into armed conflict… . Research was unable to determine whether this policy was still in force, or whether activities were undertaken to implement it during the reporting period.'[131]

See also Sexual violence including bacha bazi and Child soldiers

Back to Contents

15. Childcare and protection

15.1 Adolescent and youth services

15.1.1 In its key findings, the needs assessment by Samuel Hall noted that:

'Children underlined their dependence on a range of advocates to access any support. These include parents but also other relatives and teachers, who themselves can liaise with those managing or even gatekeeping support initiatives at the local level. Children interviewed called for advocates to address harassment, help them access NGO-provided opportunities, and provide economic support…NGOs / CSOs… are consistently identified as the providers of child protection support, with the De facto Authorities (DfAs) deciding whether or not activities will be allowed to happen. Community leaders interviewed for this research underlined that they often play a key role in implementation, leading local-level beneficiary identification for NGO / CSO support. Respondents suggested that services do not always reach those most in need, who may not find out about support offered until too

[128] USSD, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Afghanistan (Protection), 24 June 2024
[129] USSD, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Afghanistan (Prevention), 24 June 2024
[130] USDOL, 2023 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (page 1), September 2024
[131] USDOL, 2023 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (page 5), September 2024

late.'[132]

15.1.2 Rawadari reported 'Child survivors of sexual abuse do not have access to the necessary health care, counseling, and legal assistance, and the Taliban have limited the activities of non-profit organizations including organizations that support children.'[133]

15.1.3 A report dated January 2024, published by UNFPA (UN Population Fund), based on data collection in September 2023 by the Adolescents and Youth Working Group – a partnership of international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), youth networks and UN agencies – mapped adolescent and youth services in Afghanistan offered by 28 organisations across the country[134]. The report identified a range of services available for young people (males and females) aged from 10 years up to age 35, including but not limited to: formal and informal education, basic life skills, sports and recreational activities, employment skills, and psychosocial support[135]. Information was provided for each of the actors implementing programmes in specific locations across the country[136]. The 28 organisations which took part in the mapping exercise had implemented programmes for young people that reached nearly one million adolescents and youth in the past year[137].

15.1.4 The UNFPA also referred to the Youth Help Line (YHL), described as:

'… a free telephonic health service for adolescents and youth in Afghanistan. It aims at improving the health and well-being of adolescents and youth by providing high-quality, non-discriminatory counselling, information, and referrals to individuals aged 10 to 24, with a focus on vulnerable youth and those in remote areas … the YHL operates six days a week from 8 AM to 8 PM, offering crucial support during these hours. Its primary beneficiaries are Afghan adolescents and youth, with secondary beneficiaries including those up to 35 years old, including parents and caregivers.'[138]

15.1.5 According to UNFPA, based on data since 2018 till the first quarter of 2024, the YHL served about 120,000 young people annually[139].

15.1.6 The August 2023 report by UNICEF found, in regard to access to protection services in the host community for returnee or internally displaced children and young people, that:

'Many children and young people say they are unable to access a wide range of basic services and support. This includes support from social workers and school, but also economic support from working or receiving cash support. Strikingly, respondents reported two areas where they lacked services: having a safe place to stay and access to clean drinking water. The absence of formal support services is often compounded by exclusion from

[132] Samuel Hall, Children in distress: an Afghan Child-focused Needs… (page 3), June 2023
[133] Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Children… (pages 13, 14), November 2023
[134] UNFPA, Adolescents and Youth Service Mapping in Afghanistan (page 3), 29 January 2024
[135] UNFPA, Adolescents and Youth Service Mapping in Afghanistan (page 5), 29 January 2024
[136] UNFPA, Adolescents and Youth Service Mapping in Afghanistan (pages 7 to 35), 29 January 2024
[137] UNFPA, Adolescents and Youth Service Mapping in Afghanistan (page 6), 29 January 2024
[138] UNFPA, Youth Help Line, no date
[139] UNFPA, Youth Help Line, no date

membership in more informal, community-based groups that can play a significant role in providing individual and collective support and foster resilience. For instance, only 1 in 25 older children said they were members of a community group and 4 in 5 were not members of a sports group. Exclusion was especially high for girls.'[140]

Back to Contents

15.2 Orphans and 'street' children

15.2.1 The EUAA May 2024 Country Guidance Afghanistan, based on EUAA COI reports, noted:

'According to reports from January and February 2022, the number of orphans and unsupervised children in Afghanistan was increasing. In war-torn Afghanistan, many children have lost their parents in the conflict, making orphanages in Afghanistan important institutions. At the same time, orphanages have faced serious difficulties to provide care and food for the children due to the country's economic crisis and lack of external and internal funding ...

'Only a few weeks after the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the situation for children was described as particularly dire. In October 2021, the starvation deaths of eight unattended orphan boys in Kabul's District 13 were reported. In February 2022, of the 68 public orphanages in Afghanistan, only 9 were reportedly still open, while 36 private orphanages were also still operating.'[141]

15.2.2 The same report stated: 'Living conditions in the orphanages were reported to be poor, with no regular access to running water, heating in winter, indoor plumbing, healthcare service, recreational facilities or education. Children were reportedly subjected to psychological, physical, and sexual abuse, forced labour, and sometimes became the victims of trafficking…'[142]

15.2.3 According to Khaama Press News Agency, reporting in October 2023, an orphanage, which housed around 48 girls, had been transformed by the Taliban into a religious school[143].

15.2.4 Pajhwok News reported that orphanages had been built in all 34 provinces but, in June 2024, the Taliban's Ministry of Work and Social Affairs announced the construction of orphanages at district levels. According to the Work and Social Affairs Ministry, there were 10,000 children raised in orphanages across the country[144]. Tolo News noted that the Ministry was 'striving to create separate orphanages for orphaned girls.'[145]

15.2.5 The USSD TiP 2024 report noted: 'Observers noted police often arrested children begging in the streets without conducting any screenings for trafficking indicators.'[146]

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[140] UNICEF, As They Move: Child and Youth Experiences of Migration… (page 56), August 2023
[141] EUAA, Country Guidance: Afghanistan (pages 84, 85), May 2024
[142] EUAA, Country Guidance: Afghanistan, (page 85), May 2024
[143] Khaama Press, Aladdin Orphanage becomes religious school following…, 22 October 2023
[144] Pajhwok News, Orphanage facilities to be built at district levels, 3 June 2024
[145] Tolo News, Educational Opportunities Provided for Orphans in Takhar, 13 June 2024
[146] USSD, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Afghanistan (Protection), 24 June 2024

15.2.6 In sources consulted (see Bibliography) there was limited information on the treatment of lone 'street children' in Afghanistan. For information on homeless children and their families see the Country Policy and Information Note Afghanistan: Humanitarian situation.

Back to Contents

16. Migration and return

16.1 Family contact and support networks

16.1.1 In sources consulted, see Bibliography there was no recent (within last 2 years) information on family contact and support networks and if / how this has altered since the Taliban takeover. UNHCR noted in April 2024 that the majority of studies on Children's return to Afghanistan were conducted prior to the political transition[147].

16.1.2 For previously published information on migrants abroad maintaining contact with their families in Afghanistan, see section 10 of the archived Country Policy and Information Note Afghanistan: Unaccompanied children (v3.0).

16.1.3 For information on social support networks, see section 9 of the EUAA report Key Socio-Economic Indicators in Afghanistan and in Kabul City, August 2022.

Back to Contents

16.2 Treatment of returnees

16.2.1 For general information on returnees and the concept of 'Westernisation', see the Country Policy and Information Note, Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban.

16.2.2 Cedoca – the research and documentation service of the Belgium Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless persons (CGRS) – noted, in its December 2023 report on migration movements of Afghans since the Taliban takeover, that 'Multiple sources indicated that there is little concrete information on the current situation of Afghans returning to Afghanistan, both from the West and from neighbouring countries. The available information on this is described as scant, limited and often rather more anecdotal.''[148]

16.2.3 UNHCR noted studies conducted prior to the Taliban takeover '…highlight some of the broad challenges they face upon return to the country, including lack of access to services such as education, risk of recruitment into armed groups and discrimination as a result of being 'returnees'… [and] re-migration due to lack of services and support once returned to area of origin.'[149]

16.2.4 The same UNHCR report also noted 'Existing analysis [based on the Samuel Hall report published December 2019]…points to a persistent lack of assistance for longer-term reintegration of children who have returned, including inadequate focus on the psychological and social dimensions that

[147] UNHCR, Protection Interventions for Afghan Returnees from Pakistan (page 4), April 2024
[148] Cedoca, Migration movements of Afghans since the Taliban… (page 39), 14 December 2023
[149] UNHCR, Protection Interventions for Afghan Returnees from Pakistan (page 4), April 2024

constitute sustainable reintegration.'[150]

16.2.5 The same UNHCR report 'The situation [for returning children] is aggravated by the limited resources and enabling policies; limited capacity of service providers; and low prioritization of Afghan children in contexts of high protection concerns among governments as well as host populations. Child protection remains a major concern in Afghanistan [more] broadly…'[151]

16.2.6 In sources consulted (see Bibliography) no further information could be found on children returning to Afghanistan.

Back to Contents

[150] UNHCR, Protection Interventions for Afghan Returnees from Pakistan (page 4), April 2024
[151] UNHCR, Protection Interventions for Afghan Returnees from Pakistan (page 5), April 2024

Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the Common EU [European Union] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information (COI), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2024. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

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

Commentary may be provided on source(s) and information to help readers understand the meaning and limits of the COI.

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

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

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the bibliography.

Back to Contents

Terms of Reference

The ‘Terms of Reference’ (ToR) provides a broad outline of the issues relevant to the scope of this note and forms the basis for the country information.

The following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Demography, including family structure
  - Population
  - What is the make-up/structure of a typical Afghan family, including wider relatives?
  - How are children perceived within Afghan society
  - When is a male no longer considered to be a child
- Legal rights
- Taliban and rule of law
  - Forced recruitment/child soldiers
  - Any reports of Taliban mistreating children who may have previously disobeyed Taliban orders?
  - Any reports of Taliban mistreating children whose family members may have previously disobeyed Taliban orders or were part of the Afghanistan government/police pre-Taliban take-over?
  - Any reports of retaliation/kidnap of children due to family members working with western companies such as oil companies?
- Documentation
  - Update on issuance of Tazkira and accuracy of DOB
  - Reliable methods of determining authenticity of Tazkiras
  - Other ID Documents & Biometrics
- Socio-economic rights
  - Access to education
  - Access to healthcare
  - Children with disabilities
- Violence against children
  - Corporal punishment
  - Attacks on schools
  - Marriage
  - Labour
  - Sexual abuse (including bacha bazi)
  - Trafficking

- Justice system and local dispute resolution
  - Juvenile justice
  - Reliance on the Malik/Jirga system
  - Taliban view on Malik/Jirga system links to former government
- Childcare and protection
  - State/NGO support
  - Youth services
  - Orphans and children's homes
- Migration, displacement and return
  - Is it feasible that a family who have paid for a child to come to the UK would not remain in contact, or arrange for contact to be made once in the UK
  - Freedom of movement
  - Treatment of returnees
  - Westernisation
  - Reception arrangements in Kabul

Back to Contents

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Back to Contents

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Back to Contents

Version control and feedback

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **4.0**
- valid from **6 November 2024**

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

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

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

Back to Contents

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and assessment

Back to Contents

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Back to Contents

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

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Back to Contents