



# Afghanistan

## Key socio-economic indicators

Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City

Country of Origin Information Report







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August 2020

More information on the European Union is available on the Internet (<http://europa.eu>).

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Afghan shoppers through the Mandave main market in downtown Kabul, Afghanistan. Friday, 10 January 2014.



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It must be noted that the review carried out by the mentioned departments and organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but it does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EASO.

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# Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019).<sup>1</sup> The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

'Refugee', 'risk' and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither EASO nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 27 July 2020. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#).

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<sup>1</sup> The EASO methodology is largely based on the Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI), 2008, and can be downloaded from the EASO website: <http://www.easo.europa.eu>.

## Glossary and abbreviations

AAN	Afghanistan Analysts Network
ACBR	Afghanistan Central Business Registry
ACCI	Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries
ACJC	Anti-Corruption Justice Center
ALCS	Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey; long running survey of the Afghan population conducted by NSIA
ANMDP	Afghanistan New Market Development Project
APPRO	Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization
Arazi	Afghanistan's independent land authority
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
AUWSSC	Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Corporation of Afghanistan
Bazaar	A traditional type of marketplace
<i>Be naqsha</i>	Without permission
BPHS	Basic Package of Health Services
<i>Chaperone</i>	A male relative that accompanies a woman when she leaves the house or travels <sup>2</sup>
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
EHPS	Essential Package of Hospital Services
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCV	Fragility – Conflict - Violence
GCPEA	Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack
<i>Ghayr-e plani</i>	Unplanned residential area
<i>Ghayr-e qanuni</i>	Illegal
ICRC	International Committee for the Red Cross
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
IGC	International Growth Centre
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPSO	International Psycho-Social Organization
ISKP	Islamic State in Khorasan Province; affiliates of ISIL based in Pakistan and Afghanistan

<sup>2</sup> Corboz, J., Bacha posh in Afghanistan: factors associated with raising a girl as a boy, 17 June 2019, available at: [url](#)

IWA	Integrity Watch Afghanistan
IWPR	Institute for War and Peace Reporting
Madrasa	Islamic religious school
MCN	Ministry of Counter Narcotics
Microraiou	Soviet-style residential area in Kabul City
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoLSAMD	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
<i>Nahiya</i>	Administrative district
NEET	Neither in Employment, Education or Training
NSIA	National Statistics and Information Authority, formerly known as the Central Statistics Organisation (CSO)
NPR	National Public Radio
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
<i>Qawmi</i>	A social unit based on kinship, residence, or occupation
SCA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
SEHAT	System Enhancement for Health Action
<i>Shahrak</i>	Residential complex
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction; an independent oversight body on US-funded reconstruction programs
<i>Tazkera</i>	Afghan identity document
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USDOS	US Department of State
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
WFP	World Food Programme
<i>Zor Abad</i>	Informal settlement. Literally translates as ‘land taken by force’. It refers to the areas where people grabbed government and public land and sold it to others or built their houses without seeking official permission <sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Beall J. and Schütte S., Urban Livelihoods in Afghanistan, in AREU, August 2006 available at [url](#), p. 21

# Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide relevant information for the assessment of international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection. In particular, it is intended to inform the update of the chapter on Internal Protection Alternative within the Country Guidance on Afghanistan 2020 update.

## Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of this report build on the input received from policy experts from EU+ countries and UNHCR within the context of the pilot development of a country guidance on Afghanistan, initiated in 2016, as reflected in '[Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City](#)' (August 2017). Terms of reference for this report can be found in [Annex II](#).

## Methodology

This report is produced in line with the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019)<sup>4</sup> and the EASO COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019).<sup>5</sup> The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 30 June 2020. Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 27 July 2020.

The report is meant as an update of the [EASO COI Report Afghanistan, Key socio-economic indicators 2019](#).<sup>6</sup> In some cases, sections from the 2019 EASO COI report have been reproduced, after having thoroughly verified the current validity of the information and the accessibility of sources.

To verify whether the drafters respected the EASO COI Report Methodology, a peer review was carried out by COI specialists from the departments listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. In addition, a review of the report was carried out by the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD). All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report. EASO performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

## Structure and use of the report

During 2016, EASO initiated a pilot project to facilitate Member States' cooperation on the development of country guidance notes on Afghanistan. In the context of this project, the need for updated information was identified on topics of relevance for the consideration of Internal Protection Alternative (IPA) in Afghanistan, with a focus on the cities of Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e Sharif. This choice of focus was also kept for the 2020 update of Country Guidance on Afghanistan.

After providing some background information on these three cities and discussing their accessibility, the report looks into several socio-economic indicators. The information is provided for the country as a whole, and where available for the three cities separately. Additional attention is paid to specific vulnerable groups such as IDPs, returnees, women and children.

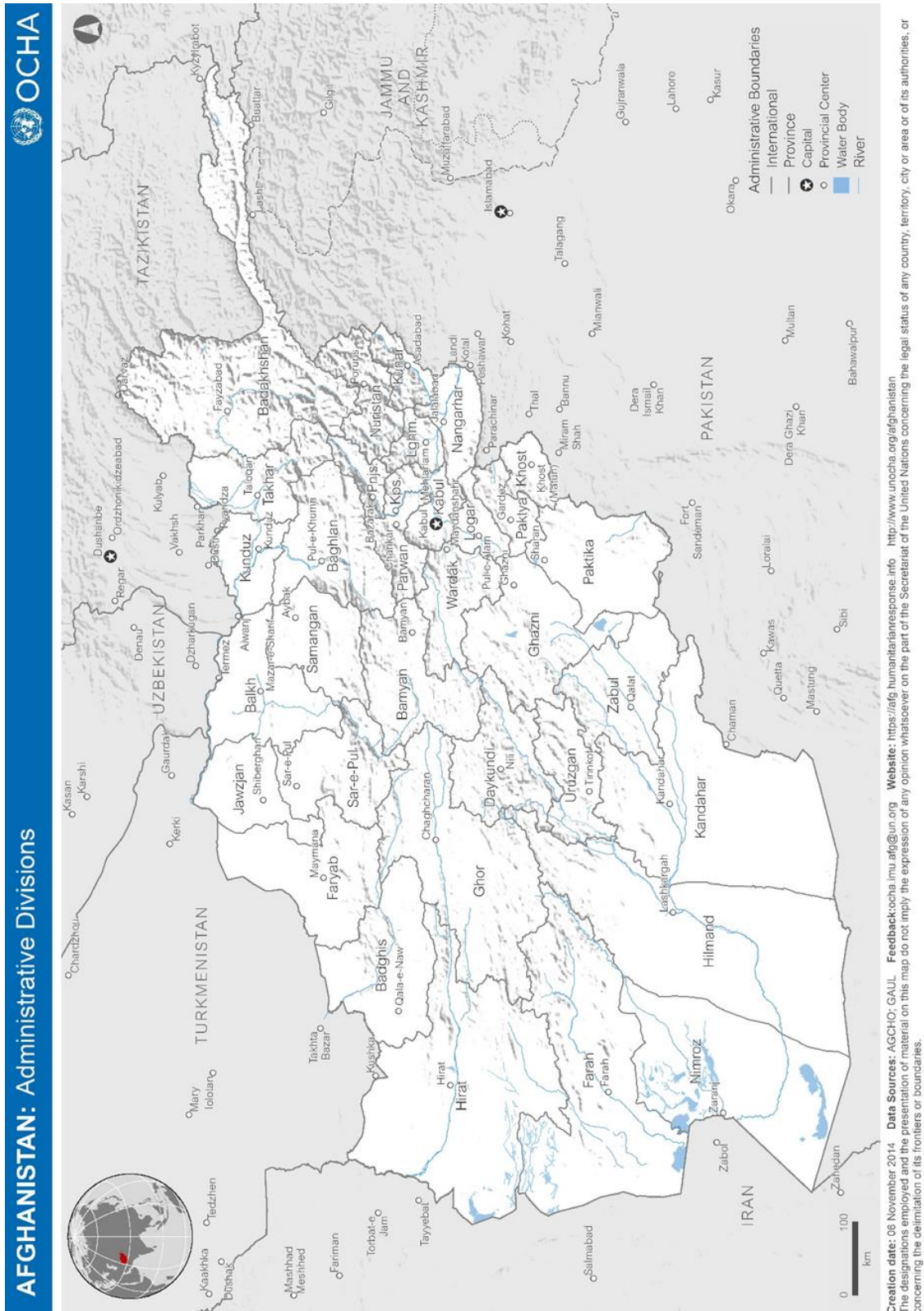
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<sup>4</sup> EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> EASO, Writing and Referencing Guide for EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>6</sup> EASO COI Report, Afghanistan Key socio-economic indicators, August 2019, [url](#)

# Map



Map 1: Afghanistan - administrative divisions, source: UNOCHA<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan - administrative divisions, January 2014, [url](http://www.unocha.org/afghanistan)

# 1. Background information on Kabul City, Herat City and Mazar-e Sharif

## 1.1 Population

### 1.1.1 Kabul

Kabul City is the capital of Afghanistan and of Kabul province, of which it is a separate district alongside 14 others.<sup>8</sup> Kabul province is located in the central region of Afghanistan<sup>9</sup> and has borders with the provinces of Parwan and Kapisa to the north, Laghman to the east, Nangarhar to the south-east, Logar to the south and Wardak to the west.<sup>10</sup>

Kabul is by far Afghanistan's most populous and influential city. In the absence of a proper census, the number of people living in Kabul City is not known. Estimates on its population vary considerably from 3.5<sup>11</sup> to 6 million<sup>12</sup>, with the Afghan National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) figure for 2018-19 estimating the total population of Kabul province at 4.8 million, of which 4.1 million reside in urban areas and almost 720 000 in rural areas.<sup>13</sup> Kabul has become one of the world's fastest growing cities<sup>14</sup>, its population increasing fourfold since 2001.<sup>15</sup> Kabul's urbanised area has tripled since the 1978 master plan of the city, continuously expanding<sup>16</sup> in almost all directions and on the rocky hills surrounding the city.<sup>17</sup> Kabul City consists of 22 administrative districts (*nahiya*), an expansion from 12 before 2001.<sup>18</sup>

Kabul has historically been a majority Persian-speaking city with its own distinctive Dari dialect.<sup>19</sup> It is an ethnically diverse city with communities of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluch, Sikhs and Hindus all residing there.<sup>20</sup> Expert Fabrizio Foschini describes Kabul City as consisting of three rings, Kabul's city centre (the areas of Shahr-e Kohna, Shahr-e Naw, Shash Darak, Wazir Akbar Khan) forming the inner ring. Neighbourhoods popular with young Afghan professionals that were planned and developed between the 1950s and 1980s form the second ring (Taimani, Qala-ye Fathollah, Karte Se, Karte Chahar, Karte Naw and the Soviet-style *microraiions* or microdistricts). The outer, growing ring of the city expanded rapidly after 2001, mainly housing Afghans who have migrated to the capital since then. Districts in Kabul's outer rings are ethnically more homogenous than the city centre, for example northern outskirts and districts, such as Khairkhana, being primarily associated with the Tajiks and western outskirts, such as Dasht-e Barchi, primarily with the Hazaras.<sup>21</sup> In 2017, the Afghan

<sup>8</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan Kabul Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> Based on the Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, the classification of provinces into regions is the following: Central: Kabul, Kapisa, Logar, Panjshir, Parwan, Wardak; South: Ghazni, Khost, Paktika, Paktya; East: Kunar, Laghman, Nangarhar, Nuristan; Northeast: Badakhshan, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar; North: Balkh, Faryab, Jawzjan, Samangan, Sar-e Pul; West: Badghis, Farah, Herat; Southwest: Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Uruzgan, Zabol; West Central: Bamyan, Daykundi, Ghor; for more information, see Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 99

<sup>10</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan Kabul Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 9-10;

<sup>12</sup> Foschini F., Kabul Unpacked: A geographical guide to a metropolis in making, AAN, 2 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>13</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2018-19, July 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>14</sup> Foschini F., Kabul Unpacked: A geographical guide to a metropolis in making, AAN, 2 March 2019 [url](#), p. 4

<sup>15</sup> Guardian (The), Kabul - The Fifth Fastest Growing City in the World - Is Bursting at the Seams, 11 December 2014, [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>17</sup> Reuters, Afghan Capital's Thirsty Residents Dig Deep to Combat Drought, Overuse, 28 February 2017, [url](#)

<sup>18</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>19</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>20</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>21</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 6-8; For more detailed information on Kabul's 22 urban districts see: Foschini F., Kabul Unpacked: A geographical guide to a metropolis in making, AAN, 2 March 2019 [url](#)

government declared a key area of the capital where important government institutions are located along with foreign embassies and some businesses as the green zone and established new check points.<sup>22</sup>

In his thematic report on Kabul City published in March 2019, Foschini explains that as a result of the boom and emerging real estate market after 2001, properties in the most popular residential areas suddenly increased in value; as a result, many owners were pressured to sell and many residents were evicted. He noted that while thousands of Kabul's youth have left for Europe seeking better opportunities and security, many other people have moved to the capital. Kabul became a 'forced' destination for many fleeing the battle lines in the Shomali Plateau to the north during the Taliban times. After 2001, many who had fled within the province or abroad returned to the city. Moreover, the enormous presence of the international community has generated a booming economy, making the capital an attractive destination for workers, clerks and students from across the country.<sup>23</sup>

### 1.1.2 Herat

Herat City is the provincial capital of Herat province, which is located in the western region of Afghanistan, bordered with Iran (west), Turkmenistan (north) and the provinces of Badghis (north-east), Ghor (east), and Farah (south). The population of Herat Province is one of the largest in the country; and the province is known for its production of saffron, grapes, pistachios, cashmere and wool.<sup>24</sup> NSIA's figures for 2018-19 estimate the total population of Herat province at over 2 million, of which around 613 000 reside in urban areas and around 1.4 million in rural areas.<sup>25</sup> Herat city has 15 districts<sup>26</sup> and consists of a historical city centre, suburbs built around it during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and newly built residential enclaves, *shahraks*, that have developed around the city.<sup>27</sup> Herat city is a centre of trade with Iran and Turkmenistan and is connected by roads with the neighbouring provinces.<sup>28</sup>

Herat is a Persian-speaking city and the majority of its people are either Sunni or Shia Tajiks/Farsiwans. There is also a consistent Pashtun minority.<sup>29</sup> In 2015, Jolyon Leslie described Herat city as historically 'a Tajik-dominated enclave in a Pashtun-majority province that includes sizeable Hazara and Aimaq minorities'. Up to one fourth of the urban population may be Hazaras, many of whom having spent time in exile in Iran and after their return having settled in neighbourhoods such as Jebrael in the west of the city that was estimated to be home to some 60 000 predominantly Hazara residents. According to Leslie, the degree of ethnic segregation was 'pronounced' in Herat, with members of certain ethnic groups inhabiting specific quarters.<sup>30</sup>

### 1.1.3 Mazar-e Sharif

Mazar-e Sharif is the provincial capital of Balkh province<sup>31</sup>, located in the northern part of Afghanistan bordered with Kunduz and Baghlan provinces to the east, Samangan province to the south-east, Sar-e Pul province to the south-west, Jawzjan province to the west and an international border with Uzbekistan to the north and Tajikistan to the north-east and Turkmenistan to the north-west.<sup>32</sup> NSIA's figures for 2018-19 estimate the total population of Balkh province at over 1.4 million, of which around 550 000 reside in urban areas and around 892 000 million in rural areas.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Tolonews, Security Check Points Stepped Up In Kabul, 7 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> Foschini F., Kabul Unpacked: A geographical guide to a metropolis in making, AAN, 2 March 2019, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>24</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Final Report of Herat Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey, 7 March 2017, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>25</sup> Afghanistan NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2018-19, July 2019, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>26</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Final Report of Herat Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey, 7 March 2017, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>27</sup> Leslie J., Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, USIP, 2 April 2015, [url](#), pp. 7, 11-12

<sup>28</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica, Herat Province, Afghanistan, 2 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> Foschini F., Back to Stopgap Appointments? The Story behind the Replacement of Herat's Governor, AAN, 24 July 2013, [url](#)

<sup>30</sup> Leslie, J., Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, USIP, 2 April 2015, [url](#), pp. 8, 13

<sup>31</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan Balkh Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 14 April 2014, [url](#); GADM, Afghanistan [Map], 2018, [url](#)

<sup>33</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2018-19, July 2019, [url](#), p. 6

The population of Balkh is heterogeneous with Tajiks and Pashtuns forming the largest groups, followed by Uzbeks, who constitute the majority in certain districts of the province and in several neighbouring provinces as well<sup>34</sup>, and also Hazaras, Turkmens, Arabs and Baluchis<sup>35</sup>, Aimaq, Sunni Hazara (Kawshi).<sup>36</sup>

Balkh – and more specifically Mazar-e Sharif – is an import/export hub as well as a regional trading centre.<sup>37</sup> The highway leading to the Uzbek border crossing point Hairatan-Termiz branches off the Ring Road approximately 40 km east of Mazar-e Sharif. Furthermore, a highway facilitating transport from Balkh to Bamyan in the centre of Afghanistan is reportedly under construction.<sup>38</sup>

## 1.2 Displacement and returnees

### 1.2.1 Internal displacements

Protracted international displacement<sup>39</sup> has defined Afghanistan's history for long. Reportedly, a third of the population were displaced in the years following the Soviet invasion of 1979. Of the millions that fled to Iran and Pakistan, some returned to Afghanistan in the early 1990s. The ousting of the Taliban in 2001 coincided with the beginning of a massive wave of returns to Afghanistan. Between 2001 and 2015, UNHCR assisted 4.8 million Afghans to return and many more are believed to have returned without official assistance.<sup>40</sup>

According to estimations by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's (IDMC) 2020 Global Report, Afghanistan rates fifth among the ten countries with the highest number of IDPs due to conflict and violence, and first for the highest number of people still displaced as a result of natural disasters. As of 31 December 2019, a total of around 4.2 million people were displaced in Afghanistan; of which around 3 million were displaced by conflict and violence and around 1.2 million by natural disaster, especially drought and floods.<sup>41</sup>

During 2019, due to escalating fighting between the government forces and the Taliban as well as attacks by other armed groups, the number of new IDPs caused by conflict and violence increased to around 461 000, bringing the total number of conflict-induced displacement to around 3 million, the highest figure on record for the country.<sup>42</sup> In the first months of 2020, both ongoing conflict and natural disasters have continued to drive displacement and humanitarian needs, and many remain displaced as conflict and poverty prevent them from returning to their areas of origin. Due to conflict in their areas of origin, about 111 000 of the 245 000 people displaced in the western provinces in 2018-19 mainly because of drought were still displaced as of April 2020.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Foschini F., email, 9 November 2018, in EASO COI Afghanistan Key socio-economic indicators. Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>35</sup> APPRO, Afghanistan Rights Monitor: Baseline Report, April 2016, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>36</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Balkh, n.d., [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Balkh Provincial Review, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Hall, Economic Assessment and Labour Market Survey of Mazar-i Sharif, Pul-i Khumri, Kandahar City and Kunduz City, 16 January 2017, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>38</sup> Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

<sup>39</sup> The UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement define IDPs as 'persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters'; see UN, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 2004, [url](#), p. 1. The UN definition was entirely reflected in Afghanistan's National IDP Policy adopted in 2013; see Afghanistan, The National Policy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on Internal Displacement, June 2013, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>40</sup> World Bank, Fragility and population movement in Afghanistan, 3 October 2016, [url](#), p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> IDMC, 2020 Global Report on Internal Displacement, 28 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12; 102

<sup>42</sup> IDMC, 2020 Global Report on Internal Displacement, 28 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 49-50

<sup>43</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Snapshot of Population Movements - January to March 2020, 21 April 2020, [url](#)



The significant numbers of returnees in 2016-18 along with the continued displacement to urban areas, particularly high return areas such as Kabul and Nangarhar, added pressure on community services and social infrastructure affecting Afghanistan's limited absorption capacity.<sup>44</sup> According to Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) data for 2016-17, Kabul province hosted most migrants and immigrants in Afghanistan, secondary destinations being the provinces of Nangarhar, Balkh and Herat.<sup>45</sup> According to a UNHCR study conducted in 2017-18, 38 % of former refugees did not settle in their province of origin upon return for reasons including insecurity, the presence of non-state armed groups and lack of services and economic opportunities.<sup>46</sup> The study found that especially returnees and IDPs living in areas that were contested between the government and armed opposition forces faced challenges, such as being more likely to be forced to skip meals, have children working, girls out of school or have less access to health care, as compared to similar populations in government-controlled areas.<sup>47</sup>

As of 1 April 2020, the World Bank reported that the returns of an estimated 1.7 million documented and undocumented Afghan refugees during 2016-2017 remains a pressure on Afghanistan's economy and institutions, stating that both 'internal displacement and large-scale return [...] pose risks to welfare for the displaced and for host communities' within a difficult economic and security context.<sup>48</sup>

Displaced people often live in precarious situation, due to inadequate shelter, condition of food insecurity, insufficient access to sanitation and health facilities, as well as a lack of protection.<sup>49</sup> Vulnerability forces people, including IDPs, to resort to negative coping mechanism such as early/forced marriages, child labour and begging. UNOCHA noted that this situation has been exacerbated by COVID-19. Insecure housing is a main source of vulnerability for many Afghans, particularly IDPs, returnees and women and the risk of eviction is considered 'especially real' for returnees and those unable to pay their rent due to COVID-19.<sup>50</sup>

## 1.2.2 Deportations and voluntary returns

IDPs may include among other groups returnees - returning refugees and migrants deported back to Afghanistan.<sup>51</sup> It happens that returnees to Afghanistan find themselves living in internal displacement thus becoming 'returnee-IDPs', either by being unable to return to their place of origin or by being displaced after return to their place of origin.<sup>52</sup> Afghanistan remains the second largest country of origin of refugees in the world, with 2.7 million refugees in the first half of 2019.<sup>53</sup> The majority of registered Afghan refugees are hosted by Pakistan (1.4 million) and Iran (951 100).<sup>54</sup>

According to UNHCR, the return of over 5.2 million Afghan refugees since 2002 assisted by the agency has been 'the largest voluntary repatriation programme in UNHCR's history'.<sup>55</sup> While voluntary repatriation has decreased in recent years due to deteriorating security situation and a continued lack of capacity to absorb returnees, Afghan refugees have continued to return.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>44</sup> UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), pp. 5, 21

<sup>45</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 39

<sup>46</sup> UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>47</sup> UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>48</sup> World Bank (The), Afghanistan Overview, last updated 1 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>49</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements (as of 26 April 2020), Actual displacements between 1 January 2020 and 18 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>50</sup> UNOCHA, COVID-19 and the Afghanistan Response HRP Revision – June 2020, 8 June 2020, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>51</sup> NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>52</sup> NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Going "Home" to Displacement - Afghanistan's Returnee-IDPs, December 2017, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>53</sup> UNHCR, Mid-Year Trends 2019, 10 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6; IOM, World Migration Report 2020, 27 November 2019, [url](#), p. 39

<sup>54</sup> UNHCR, Mid-Year Trends 2019, 10 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>55</sup> UNHCR, The Afghanistan Situation: Strengthening International Solidarity & Achieving Solutions, 6 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>56</sup> UNHCR, Afghanistan; Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration: A synopsis; January 2020, January 2020 [url](#)

In 2016, there was a spike in returns<sup>57</sup>, with about 1 million documented and undocumented Afghans returned to Afghanistan. Over 610 000 people returned from Pakistan and Iran in 2017.<sup>58</sup> During 2018, a total of 805 850 returns were registered from Iran and Pakistan, of which 773 125 were from Iran.<sup>59</sup> In 2019, around 500 000 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran (about 485 000) and Pakistan (about 18 800).<sup>60</sup> In 2020 (between 1 January and 4 July 2020), IOM recorded a total of 363 963 returns to Afghanistan, over 362 000 of which from Iran, and over 1 880 from Pakistan.<sup>61</sup>

As a precautionary measure linked to the outbreak of COVID-19, UNHCR temporarily suspended the return of registered Afghan refugees from Pakistan, Iran and other countries as of 4 March 2020.<sup>62</sup> As of 30 April 2020, voluntary repatriation from Iran was resumed by UNHCR upon request by the Iranian Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs.<sup>63</sup>

In a press briefing held in April 2020, UNHCR's spokesperson Babar Baloch stated that the outbreak of COVID-19 and the lockdown of economic activities have left many Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan with an inability to meet even their most basic needs, and that Afghans continue to return from both Iran and Pakistan despite persistent risks and insecurity in Afghanistan. UNHCR's spokesperson further warned that 'a dramatic increase' in returns could risk creating overwhelming pressure on medical and social services in Afghanistan, in a context of rising poverty levels and 'hundreds of thousands of people' already living in displacement sites.<sup>64</sup> In their 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview released in December 2019, UNOCHA stated that 'the return of hundreds of thousands of citizens of Afghanistan from Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Europe each year, combined with the loss of remittances which are vital to the survival of their families at home, is having a de-stabilising impact on peace, prosperity and security in Afghanistan.'<sup>65</sup>

Cited by the Finnish Immigration Service (FIS/Migrationsverket) in their fact-finding mission report published in October 2019, UNHCR noted that, in general, there were no reports of community tensions associated with increasing number of returnees in Kabul or other parts of the country. UNHCR also stated that many people returning from Europe have experienced societal discrimination due to the fact that they are perceived as doing 'immoral' things or perceived as wealthy and prone to take advantage of international aid. Dr Sima Samar, former chairperson at the AIHRC, told FIS/Migrationsverket that, in general, there is a perception of failure associated more to people returning from Europe than to those returning from Iran or Pakistan.<sup>66</sup>

### Returns from Iran

In 2018, there was a massive increase of returns from Iran, compared to 2017, mostly driven by the political and economic issues of the country.<sup>67</sup> In May 2018, US President Donald Trump decided to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers and to reimpose sanctions on Tehran. As a result, Iran's currency weakened and unemployment rose.<sup>68</sup> Since Afghans mostly work

<sup>57</sup> UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>58</sup> UNHCR and IOM, Returns to Afghanistan in 2017: Joint IOM-UNHCR Summary Report, 28 February 2018, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>59</sup> IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, (January-December 2018 – 1-5 January 2019), 5 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>60</sup> IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, (15-28 December 2019), 28 December 2019, [url](#); IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, (29 Dec 2019 – 4 Jan 2020), 4 January 2020, [url](#);

<sup>61</sup> IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, 15-28 December 2019, (28 June – 4 July 2020), 4 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>62</sup> UNHCR, Afghanistan Border Monitoring update, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>63</sup> UNHCR, Afghanistan Border Monitoring update - COVID-19 Response (31 May-6 June 2020), 9 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>64</sup> UNHCR, Coronavirus – Now is not the time to forget Afghanistan and its neighbours, 14 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>65</sup> UNOCHA, 2020 Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview - Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2020 (Issued December 2019), 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>66</sup> Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019, Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 10 October 2019, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>67</sup> IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, Weekly Situation Report, (Jan-Dec 2018/1-5 Jan 2019), 5 January 2019, [url](#) p. 1

<sup>68</sup> RFE/RL, Things Are So Bad In Iran That Afghan Migrants Are Going Home, 1 August 2018, [url](#)

in Iran's informal economy, the demand for their work declined drastically.<sup>69</sup> The imposition of new US sanctions in January 2020<sup>70</sup>, following an escalation of tension between the US and Iran<sup>71</sup>, reportedly triggered more returns to Afghanistan, due to the rise of living and healthcare costs, scarcity of jobs and rising hostility from local population towards undocumented Afghans.<sup>72</sup>

As of 14 March 2020, spontaneous returns from Iran have reached new record totals due to fears over the COVID-19 outbreak. Reporting data by the Border Monitoring Team of the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR), IOM estimated that over 53 069 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran, showing a 171 % increase from the previous week (19 562).<sup>73</sup>

Forced deportations of Afghan refugees by Iranian authorities have long been reported.<sup>74</sup> In the first quarter of 2020, according to media sources, Iranian officials were forcibly deporting Afghan refugees on a daily basis<sup>75</sup>, and following the new US sanctions they threatened more deportations.<sup>76</sup> In May 2020, Afghan authorities said they were investigating reports of Iranian border guards beating, torturing and then forcing into a river up to 70 Afghan nationals who illegally crossed into Iran. Authorities in the province of Herat said they had retrieved 12 bodies from the Harirud River.<sup>77</sup> On 3 May 2020, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) issued a press release confirming that such incident occurred on 1 May 2020 in Karez-e Elyas village of Gulran District in Herat. According to survivors and local officials in Herat interviewed AIHRC, some of the people intercepted by Iranian authorities had managed to escape, while others had drowned.<sup>78</sup>

The International Psychosocial Organisation (IPSO), a psychosocial and mental health centre in Kabul providing support to all Afghans including returnees, told FIS/Migrationsverket that people returning from Iran are 'totally lost and do not know what to do. Those with no family do not know where to go and what to do.' High level of drug addiction has also been reported among returnees from Iran, due to 'alienation caused by discrimination and wide supply of narcotics at cheap prices'.<sup>79</sup>

### Returns from Pakistan

Pakistan hosted over 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees, as of 18 March 2020.<sup>80</sup> However, the actual number of Afghan refugees in the country might be higher than the official numbers, according to the executive director of the Society for Human Rights & Prisoners Aid (SHARP), Liaqat Banori, interviewed during a fact-finding mission by the Belgian COI unit Cedoca in February 2020.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>69</sup> IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, Weekly Situation Report, (Jan-Dec 2018/1-5 Jan 2019), 5 January 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>70</sup> CNBC, US slaps new sanctions on Iran following strikes on US targets, 10 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>71</sup> In January 2020, Iranian general Qasim Suleimani, considered as Iran's most powerful military commander, was killed by a US drone in Iraq; which resulted in an escalation of tension between the US and Iran. BBC, Qasem Soleimani: US kills top Iranian general in Baghdad air strike, 3 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>72</sup> New Humanitarian (The), US-Iran tensions push Afghans home to conflict, 6 February 2020, [url](#); New Humanitarian (The), On the move: Conflict, refugee returns fuel Afghanistan displacement, 20 January 2020, [url](#); Aman F. Afghan migrants: Unwanted in Iran and at home, Atlantic council, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>73</sup> IOM, Return of undocumented Afghans, Weekly situation report (8-14 March 2020), 14 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>74</sup> HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran's Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, 20 November 2013, [url](#); VOA, Iran Continues Deporting Undocumented Afghan Refugees, 21 May 2017, [url](#); Aman F. Afghan migrants: Unwanted in Iran and at home, Atlantic council, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>75</sup> Foreign Policy, Why Iran Is Deporting Scores of Afghan Refugees, 13 January 2020, [url](#); IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, (24- 30 May 2020), 30 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>76</sup> New Humanitarian (The), US-Iran tensions push Afghans home to conflict, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>77</sup> RFE/RL, HRW Calls For Investigation Into 'Shocking' Allegation Of Iranian Border Guards Drowning Afghan Migrants, 4 May 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghanistan Investigating Claims Migrants Were Killed by Iranian Guards, 2 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>78</sup> AIHRC, Press Release: Reported Abuse and Drowning of Afghan Refugees Aiming to Cross the Border to Iran, 3 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>79</sup> Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019, Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 10 October 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>80</sup> UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situation- Statistics Afghan refugees in Pakistan, last updated: 18 March 2020, [url](#); UNHCR, Pakistan - Afghan Refugee Info-graphic Update, Monthly Update (February 2020), 18 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>81</sup> During the interview with Belgian Cedoca in February 2020, Liaqat Banori stated that there is no proper and reliable data available on the population of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. According to his opinion, the actual number of Afghan refugees

In 2016, there was a spike in returns<sup>82</sup>, with a total of 620 000 Afghans returned from Pakistan.<sup>83</sup> Human Rights Watch stated that, in response to several deadly security incidents and deteriorating political relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Pakistani authorities ‘mounted a concerted campaign to drive Afghans out of the country’ in 2016.<sup>84</sup> Between August 2017 and February 2018, the Pakistani government, in close collaboration with the Government of Afghanistan and with the support of IOM and UNHCR, carried out a country-wide exercise to identify undocumented Afghans. Some 880 000 previously undocumented Afghan nationals were identified during the exercise.<sup>85</sup> The goal of the documentation exercise was to provide undocumented Afghans with identification credentials that will allow to legalise and regularise their stay in Pakistan for a limited period of time.<sup>86</sup> UNHCR reported that a total of 13 584 Afghans returned from Pakistan in 2018, noting that this was 76 % lower compared to the number of refugees who returned from Pakistan in 2017.<sup>87</sup> In 2019, IOM reported 19 881 undocumented returnees from Pakistan, of which 2 608 were deported.<sup>88</sup> In 2020 (between 1 January and 4 July 2020), IOM recorded a total of 1 880 undocumented returnees from Pakistan, 124 of which were deported.<sup>89</sup>

In June 2019, UNHCR, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed on a 12-point joint declaration, in conclusion of the 30<sup>th</sup> Tripartite Commission Meeting reaffirming the commitment by the three parties ‘to uphold the principle of voluntary repatriation, in safety and dignity, under the Tripartite Agreement’.<sup>90</sup> (For more information see Sections 2.3.2 Return of registered Afghan refugees; 2.3.3 Return of unregistered Afghan refugees in [EASO COI Report, Pakistan: Situation of Afghan refugees, May 2020](#)).

A study by World Bank Group and UNHCR for the year 2018, found that, in general, Afghan refugees who returned from Pakistan after 2014 ‘tend to be worse off than those who remained in Pakistan’.<sup>91</sup>

## Kabul

Kabul province, and in particular Kabul City, has been a main gravitational centre for both people moving internally and for those returning from abroad.<sup>92</sup> Since 2001, a significant number of Afghans who had lived for years in Pakistan or Iran started to return to Afghanistan. Many of them settled in Kabul regardless of their place of origin in Afghanistan, and without any government support settled according to their capacity.<sup>93</sup> A third of all Afghan returnees have settled in Kabul and Nangarhar.<sup>94</sup> According to Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17 by NSIA, more than one third of the residents of Kabul province were born abroad or elsewhere in the country.<sup>95</sup> As of 30 June 2019, IOM recorded an inflow of 443 238 returnees and IDPs in Kabul province, 190 693 of which in Kabul

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could be higher than the numbers given by UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan. For more information, see EASO COI Report Pakistan: Situation of Afghan Refugees, May 2020, [url](#) p. 17

<sup>82</sup> UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>83</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Dashboard (as of 31 Dec 2016), 22 March 2017, [url](#)

<sup>84</sup> HRW, Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity 13 February 2017. [url](#), p. 1

<sup>85</sup> UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>86</sup> IOM, UN Migration Agency Supports Pakistan’s Documented of Undocumented Afghans, 24 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>87</sup> UNHCR, Afghanistan, Voluntary Repatriation Update, January 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>88</sup> IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, (29 Dec 2019 – 4 Jan 2020), 4 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>89</sup> IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, 15-28 December 2019, (28 June – 4 July 2020), 4 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>90</sup> UNHCR, Conclusions of the 30<sup>th</sup> Tripartite Commission meeting between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Pakistan and UNHCR, 18 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>91</sup> World Bank Group/UNHCR, Living conditions and settlement decisions of recent afghan returnees, Findings from a 2018 Phone Survey of Afghan Returnees and UNHCR data, June 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>92</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 38-39

<sup>93</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 12-13

<sup>94</sup> World Bank Group/UNHCR, Living conditions and settlement decisions of recent afghan returnees, Findings from a 2018 Phone Survey of Afghan Returnees and UNHCR data, June 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>95</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 38

district.<sup>96</sup> Data from UNHCR, until 30 June 2020, show that 34 % of the registered refugee population returned to Kabul province in 2020.<sup>97</sup>

Alongside returnees from abroad, the most sizeable communities are migrants from Wardak, Parwan, Ghazni, Bamyan, Nangarhar, Panjshir and Kapisa.<sup>98</sup> Most returnees live outside the city centre of Kabul, often in very remote areas, and many of them live in camps.<sup>99</sup> According to analyst Foschini, immigrants mainly end up in Kabul's peripheral neighbourhoods where recent immigrants from the same regional or ethnic background perpetuate a village society which often has more direct connections with the province of origin of local residents than with Kabul's central areas.<sup>100</sup> The reasons why many Afghans who returned settled in Kabul are a relatively higher security situation than in their areas of origin, as well as their expectations - 'realistic or not' of finding better job opportunities and support facilities.<sup>101</sup>

Kabul saw a surge of displaced people between May and October 2016, with informal settlement populations growing.<sup>102</sup> Many IDPs without family connections or the ability to rent a house ended up in camps. The number of settlers and the locations of informal settlements, such as Chaharrah-e Qanbar, Pol-e Charkhi and Chaman-e Babrak, were 'volatile and depend on the season, the attitudes of city officials, income opportunities and access to services'.<sup>103</sup>

UNHCR and other sources interviewed by the Finnish Immigration Service during their fact-finding mission to Kabul in April 2019 confirmed that, although Kabul is among the top cities and provinces of destination for those returning, the percentage of returnees who are originally from Kabul is very low. Many returnees are originally from other provinces or were born in Iran or Pakistan; they have no extended family or safety net in the capital, and as a consequence they are described as 'lost' due to the lack of governmental services they can rely on.<sup>104</sup>

## Herat

Herat province - Herat city and its neighbouring Injil district in particular - has historically been a significant destination for IDPs. At the end of 2015, Herat was one of the provinces hosting the largest numbers of IDPs in Afghanistan, some of whom have lived in the province for as long as two decades.<sup>105</sup> Herat is one of the provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who did not originate there.<sup>106</sup> Being 'the regional magnet of attraction in the west', Herat province received migrants especially from the western provinces of Badghis, Farah and Nimroz.<sup>107</sup>

In 2018, Afghanistan suffered from the worst drought in its recent history hitting the western region hardest. As a result, around 60 000 new IDPs were displaced to Herat by September 2018. According to NRC, the IDPs that fled to Herat have been living in dire conditions in makeshift shelters.<sup>108</sup> The displacement due to conflict and drought has had serious impacts on access to services, land, shelter

<sup>96</sup> IOM, Afghanistan - Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results (March-June 2019), 1 July 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>97</sup> UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations: Afghanistan - Refugee Returnees demographic breakdown, as of 30 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>98</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>99</sup> Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>100</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 6-8

<sup>101</sup> Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>102</sup> REACH, Kabul Informal Settlement Profiling, November 2016, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>103</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>104</sup> Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019, Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 10 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>105</sup> UN-Habitat et al., Inter-Agency Durable Solutions Initiative - Profile and Response Plan of Protracted IDP Settlements in Herat, October 2016, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>106</sup> UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>107</sup> Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 40-41

<sup>108</sup> NRC, Millions of Afghans Face Risks of Drought Related Displacement, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

and has resulted in negative coping mechanisms including child marriage, using children as collateral for loans or petty crime for example.<sup>109</sup>

As of 30 June 2019, IOM recorded an inflow of almost 1 million (988 539) returnees and IDPs in Herat province, 369 007 of which in Herat district.<sup>110</sup> Due to the COVID-19 outbreak in Iran, as of March 2020 there has been a spike in returns from Iran<sup>111</sup>; between 1 January and 30 May 2020, some 183 000 returned from Iran to Herat, including undocumented, assisted, spontaneous returnees, and deportations.<sup>112</sup> In addition, data from UNHCR, until 19 May 2020, shows that 35.3 % of the registered refugee population returned to Herat in 2020.<sup>113</sup>

AAN researcher Reza Kazemi noted, in an article published on 21 April 2020, that there is contradictory information available on the number of returnees and IDPs living in Herat. He further explained that, between 2019 and the first months of 2020, Herat saw an increased level of violence, including targeted killings and attacks on the police; one of the most prevalent theories on the increase in violence blamed the influx of large number of returnees from Iran and IDPs from neighbouring provinces, in particular from Badghis, Ghor and Farah. However, he observed that:

‘There is, however, little or no evidence to link these populations to the spike in violence. The bias against this particular population may be partly driven by the fact that among those displaced from the adjacent provinces, many have settled in makeshift mud houses in specific areas, notably Shaidayi in the east of the city. Also, among those returning from Iran, many of whom have settled in informal settlements around the city, some are drug users. Many locals including the police, journalists and residents point the finger at vulnerable people, like drug users and IDPs in general, when security incidents take place in the city (...), especially in the eastern parts of Herat city (...), attributing all insecurity to them smacks of scapegoating.’<sup>114</sup>

### Mazar-e Sharif

Mazar-e Sharif has been known as the economic hub of the north, attracting economic migrants from rural areas with its work opportunities and relative safety.<sup>115</sup> Being ‘the regional magnet of attraction in the north’, Balkh province received migrants especially from the northern provinces of Samangan, Sar-e Pul, Jawzjan and Faryab. Like in Kabul, Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar, an important number of IDPs and refugees live in informal settlements located in and around Mazar-e-Sharif.<sup>116</sup> According to a 2015 CSO survey, about 38 % of Mazar-e Sharif’s population are migrants, mostly descending from other Afghan provinces and only 17 % are returnees from abroad.<sup>117</sup>

As of 30 June 2019, IOM recorded an inflow of 294 618 returnees and IDPs in Balkh province, 76 670 of which in Mazar-e Sharif.<sup>118</sup>

## 1.3 Access to the *tazkera*

The main identification document in Afghanistan is called *tazkera*.<sup>119</sup> As noted by a 2019 report by Landinfo on ‘Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan’, the Afghan Law on

<sup>109</sup> UNHCR Afghanistan, email, 8 November 2018, in EASO COI Afghanistan Key socio-economic indicators. Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City, April 2019, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>110</sup> IOM, Afghanistan - Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results (March-June 2019), 1 July 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>111</sup> IOM, Spike in migrant arrivals as IOM supports COVID-19 response in Afghanistan, 17 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>112</sup> IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report 24-30 May 2020, 30 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>113</sup> UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations: Afghanistan - Refugee Returnees demographic breakdown, latest updated 19 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>114</sup> Kazemi, R. S., Herat City’s Reported Spike in Insecurity: What a sober reading of events reveals, AAN 21 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>115</sup> Samuel Hall, Urban Poverty Report - A Study of Poverty, Food Insecurity and Resilience in Afghan Cities, 2014, [url](#), pp. 31-32

<sup>116</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 40-41; p. 224

<sup>117</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey Balkh, 5 January 2015, [url](#), pp. 28-32

<sup>118</sup> IOM, Afghanistan - Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results (March-June 2019), 1 July 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>119</sup> Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Tazkera, passports and other ID documents, 22 May 2019, [url](#), p. 5; NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 16

Registration of Population Records (2014) stipulates that all Afghan citizens are required to have a *tazkera*,<sup>120</sup> however such a provision is not implemented in practice. Citing an international organisation as their source, Landinfo reported that about 60 % of the Afghan population holds a *tazkera*, with considerably more men than women in possession of this document.<sup>121</sup> A joint study by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Samuel Hall in 2016 stated that 90 % of men possessed a *tazkera* compared to 38 % of women.<sup>122</sup> The percentage of those possessing a *tazkera* among IDPs and nomads is reportedly lower than the percentage estimated for the overall population.<sup>123</sup> According to the 2016 NRC and Samuel Hall study, 21 % of IDP women had a *tazkera* compared to 54 % of returnee women, noting that for men the impact of displacement on the possession of a *tazkera* was less noticeable, with 87 % of male IDPs and 88 % of male returnees reported having a *tazkera*.<sup>124</sup> The possession of a *tazkera* is also less common among residents of remote rural areas.<sup>125</sup> ALCS 2016-17 found that 61 % of urban children were registered at birth, compared to only 22 % of rural children.<sup>126</sup> In an email to EASO in 2018, UNHCR stated that very few children have *tazkera*.<sup>127</sup>

A *tazkera* is ‘necessary’ in order to access a range of public services, such as education; it also is necessary in order to obtain other identity documents (i.e. passports and driving licences).<sup>128</sup> The *tazkera* is also required for the issuance of housing, land and property certificates, title deeds and is considered the ‘gateway’ document in order to access employment, healthcare and loans.<sup>129</sup> Having a valid *tazkera* is also a necessity for accessing other types of documentation such as passports or marriage certificates.<sup>130</sup> The 2016 report by NRC and Samuel Hall found that civil documentation, allowing access to services and rights, was ‘crucial’ for social integration, noting that the lack of *tazkera* could increase a person’s vulnerability; women are found to be particularly vulnerable, for instance with regards to access to judicial system, inheritance and family disputes.<sup>131</sup>

*Tazkeras* are issued by the Population Registration Department (PRD), within the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA), and Afghan citizens can submit their application both to their district governors or to Kabul city.<sup>132</sup> According to NRC and Samuel Hall, the procedure for obtaining a *tazkera* varies if the application is submitted in the districts or in provincial capital cities.<sup>133</sup> Citing a 2013 report by Afghan think tank The Liaison Office (TLO), Landinfo reported that the first step in the procedure in order to obtain a *tazkera* is to verify the identity of the applicant through a birth certificate. However, since most Afghans do not hold a birth certificate, applicants are required to submit as a proof of identity a *tazkera* of a male family member on the father’s side (ie. father, brother, uncle or male cousin); in addition, two testimonies are required. The same source further explained that if a non-resident of Kabul applies for a *tazkera* in the capital city without being able to prove his identity, this

<sup>120</sup> Article 9 (2) of the 2014 Law on Registration of Population Records reads: ‘Afghans citizens, inside and outside Afghanistan, shall be obligated to record their identity with offices of registration of population records and acquire national identity cards pursuant to the provisions of this law’. Afghanistan, Law of 2014 on Registration of Population Records 2014, Article 9 (2), available at: [url](#)

<sup>121</sup> Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Tazkera, passports and other ID documents, 22 May 2019, [url](#) p. 5

<sup>122</sup> NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>123</sup> Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Tazkera, passports and other ID documents, 22 May 2019, [url](#) pp. 5-6; NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 23; NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>124</sup> NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>125</sup> Foschini F., email, 9 November 2018, in EASO COI Afghanistan Key socio-economic indicators. Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City, April 2019, [url](#), p. 21; Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Tazkera, passports and other ID documents, 22 May 2019, [url](#) pp. 5-6

<sup>126</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 167

<sup>127</sup> UNHCR Afghanistan, email, 9 November 2018, in EASO COI Afghanistan Key socio-economic indicators. Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City, April 2019, [url](#), p. 14-15

<sup>128</sup> Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Tazkera, passports and other ID documents, 22 May 2019, [url](#) p. 5; NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>129</sup> NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>130</sup> NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>131</sup> NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), pp. 38-39

<sup>132</sup> Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Tazkera, passports and other ID documents, 22 May 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>133</sup> NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), pp. 16-17

applicant must return to his area of origin where the local village chief (*malik*) can verify his identity. The attestation of identity by the village chief is then submitted to the local authorities who can issue the *tazkera*.<sup>134</sup>

A joint report by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Samuel Hall and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in 2018, noted that, to obtain a *tazkera*, IDPs are generally required to travel to their district of origin, which is 'impossible' for many due to transport costs and insecurity (See Section [3.2 Travel restrictions and documents required for travel](#)). The same source stated that the government of Afghanistan has been working with international organisations such as IOM to address this issue, and temporary changes were introduced to the system, including measures by the Ministry of Education aiming at facilitating enrolment in school without a *tazkera*. However, the source noted that it continues to occur that IDPs must travel back to their places of origin to receive their documents.<sup>135</sup>

Afghan citizens residing abroad also have the right to obtain a *tazkera*.<sup>136</sup> For instance, Afghan citizens residing in Norway can apply for a *tazkera in absentia* to the Consular Section at the Afghan Embassy in Oslo.<sup>137</sup> The website of the Afghan Directorate General of Consular Affairs within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) provides information on the procedure for applying to and obtaining a *tazkera in absentia* (Absentee National Identity Card, ANIC).<sup>138</sup> According to the Afghan embassy in Tehran interviewed by Landinfo in 2017, Afghan citizens residing in Iran can also obtain a *tazkera* issued by the Afghan foreign service missions in Iran.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Tazkera, passports and other ID documents, 22 May 2019, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>135</sup> NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>136</sup> Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Tazkera, passports and other ID documents, 22 May 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>137</sup> Afghanistan Embassy in Oslo, Norway, Absentee Tazkera, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>138</sup> Afghanistan, Directorate General of Consular Affairs (MoFA), Obtaining Absentee National ID Card (Tazkera), n.d., [url](#); A list of Afghan Embassies and Consulates operating across the world is also available on their website at the page: Afghan Embassies and Consulates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>139</sup> Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Tazkera, passports and other ID documents, 22 May 2019, [url](#), p. 6



## 2. Key socio-economic indicators

### 2.1 Economic climate

The World Bank noted that the growth rate of Afghan economy fell from an average of 9 % between 2003 and 2013 to 2.7 % in 2014 and 1.5 % in 2015.<sup>140</sup> In 2016 and 2017, the economic growth revealed a slight recovery due to ‘consistent reform progress and a stabilization of the political environment’ but slowed to 1.8 % in 2018 because of severe drought and political uncertainty.<sup>141</sup> In its 2019 report, OECD noted that Afghan state institutions were weak and under-financed, failed to protect Afghan citizens and businesses, and were unable to offer quality public services.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, Bertelsmann Stiftung underlined that the country’s public administrative institutions failed to function efficiently, despite the gradual improvement in the performance of several ministries, i.e. the ministries of economy, agriculture, and justice.<sup>143</sup> Political uncertainty of 2019 was reported to affect the Afghan banking sector, causing currency depreciation, decline in deposits, departure of capital, few or no opportunities for loans, and closure of several international bank branches.<sup>144</sup>

Asian Development Fund (ADF) predicted in November 2019 that Afghanistan would face substantial financing requirements—and even a rise in financing requirements if the peace process progresses—with major needs in infrastructure development.<sup>145</sup> As noted by the World Bank in January 2020, ‘adverse regional economic or political developments could negatively impact Afghanistan through reducing remittance flows, driving increased returnees and displacement, or placing pressure on the local security environment’ while ‘significant improvements in security conditions following a political settlement with the Taliban could help boost growth and private investment.’<sup>146</sup> At the same time, the World Bank reported that the country’s economy and institutions remained under the pressure due to a high number of IDPs and returnees. Most recently, the economy was hard-hit by the outbreak of the COVID-19, which affected consumption, exports, and remittances.<sup>147</sup>

The Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, which is the most recent household survey at the time of writing, listed population growth, difficulties for women to participate in society, and the lack of quality of education and investments among ‘structural factors’ that could prevent Afghanistan’s development.<sup>148</sup>

#### 2.1.1 Economic growth

In its July 2020 Afghanistan Development Update, the World Bank stated that Afghanistan’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is set to contract by between 5.5 % and 7.4 % in 2020 as a result of COVID-19 measures, exacerbating poverty, and leading to a sharp decline in government revenues.<sup>149</sup> In 2019, the GDP in Afghanistan decreased for the second year in a row, with figures by the World Bank estimating its worth at 19 101 billion UDS (compared to 19 484 billion USD in 2018 and 20 192 billion UDS in 2017); while the population continued to steadily grow. Since 2013, there has been a sharp fall in the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, which was estimated at 540 USD in 2019 (compared to

<sup>140</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>141</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>142</sup> OECD, Boosting Private Sector Development and Entrepreneurship in Afghanistan, 2019, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>143</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Afghanistan, 2020, 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>144</sup> Sabit G.M., For Peace in Afghanistan, the Economy is Key, Diplomat, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>145</sup> ADF, Afghanistan: progress and Remaining Challenges, ADF 13 Replenishment Meeting, November 2019, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>146</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>147</sup> World Bank, The World Bank in Afghanistan, Overview, updated 1 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>148</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>149</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update 2020, Surviving the Storm, July 2020, [url](#), p. 15; World Bank, Hit Hard by COVID-19, Afghanistan Needs Continued International Support, 15 July 2020, [url](#);

660 USD in 2013). Afghanistan has one of the lowest Human Capital Index (HCI) in the world, estimated to be below 0.4.<sup>150</sup>

The economy grew by nearly 2.9 % in 2019, after the agriculture sector recovered from the drought of 2017-2018.<sup>151</sup> Due to increased wheat cultivation and production of cereals, the agriculture sector was estimated to have grown by 7.5 % in 2019, which accounted for at least 1.37 % of overall growth that year.<sup>152</sup> However, with the economy growing at a slower pace than population growth, more than half of the population is estimated to be below poverty line.<sup>153</sup> The World Bank also noted that the returns of about 1.7 million documented and undocumented Afghan refugees during 2016-2017 remains a pressure on Afghanistan's economy and institutions, as of 1 April 2020.<sup>154</sup> In addition, political uncertainty and increased insecurity affected negatively the growth of industry and services sectors. The industry sector grew only by 2 % in 2019, compared to 2.5 % in 2018. The services sector was affected by overall weak confidence and grew by 1.8 %, which is a similar figure to that in 2018. At the same time, the World Bank noted that private sector sentiment, while improving slightly over 2019, remained negative, particularly among small and medium enterprises (SMEs).<sup>155</sup>

A research paper by the Poverty and Equity Global Practice of the World Bank Group, released in March 2020, analysed the impact of conflict on the Afghan economy looking simultaneously into formal, informal and illicit activities. The study pointed out that most estimates of the impact of conflict on economic activity rely on formal sector data, giving less importance to informal and illicit activities, which instead are common, 'if not predominant', in conflict-affected countries. The study found that, while the escalation of conflict in Afghanistan resulted in a major drop in formal sector activity, it also had the effect of increasing informal sector and illicit activities. However, the researcher paper remarked that 'this finding should not be interpreted as downplaying the adverse consequences of conflict', rather as a change in the structure of the economy, noting that informal and illicit activities may have important indirect consequences, including greater insecurity and corruption.<sup>156</sup>

Afghan national currency revealed a moderate depreciation in 2019 and showed better stability compared to 2018, despite the uncertainty around the presidential elections.<sup>157</sup> In 2019, inflation was reported to remain modest at 2.3 %.<sup>158</sup> According to SIGAR, the state's fiscal position in 2020 could be seriously affected by increased border closures related to the spread of COVID-19, as the customs duties and taxes constituted approximately one-fifth of the state's revenues. At the same time, SIGAR reported on the rise in the state's expenditures by 13.5 %.<sup>159</sup>

The drought of the 2017-2018 winter reduced the area under opium poppy cultivation, which led to a decrease in opium production by 29 %: from approximately 9 000 tons in 2017 to around 6 400 tons in 2018. However, as estimated by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the amount of illicit opium produced in 2018 was at the second highest level since the start of the monitoring (1994) after the record numbers of 2017.<sup>160</sup> With a sharp decline of poppy cultivation areas (particularly in the northern part of Afghanistan), the overall opiate economy in the country (heroin production and trafficking to the border) fell in 2018 by two thirds compared to 2017 and was estimated between USD 1.2 and 2.2 billion in 2018. While this number signifies a decrease of around 27 % to 51 % between

<sup>150</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Data, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>151</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 2; World Bank, The World Bank in Afghanistan, Overview, updated 1 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>152</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Overview, last updated 1 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>153</sup> New York Times (The), Afghanistan Needs Billions in Aid Even After a Peace Deal, World Bank Says, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>154</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Overview, last updated 1 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>155</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>156</sup> Galdo, V., et al., Conflict and the Composition of Economic Activity in Afghanistan, Poverty and Equity Global Practice - World Bank Group, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 19-21

<sup>157</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>158</sup> World Bank, The World Bank in Afghanistan, Overview, updated 1 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>159</sup> SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 129

<sup>160</sup> UNODC, Afghanistan opium survey 2018 – Challenges to sustainable development, peace and security, July 2019, [url](#), pp. 8, 10, 23

2017 and 2018<sup>161</sup>, the value of the overall opiate economy was estimated to be worth between 6 % and 11 % of the country's GDP and exceeded the value of officially recorded licit exports of goods and services.<sup>162</sup>

In 2019, poppy cultivation decreased compared to 2018,<sup>163</sup> nonetheless the overall production remained the same as in 2018 due to a more productive harvest. Data by the 2020 UNODC World Drug Report estimated that in 2019 opium poppy was planted on 163 000 hectares, with a 38 % decrease compared to 2018 (when 263 000 hectares were planted).<sup>164</sup> However, as AAN's analysts Jelena Bjelica noted,<sup>165</sup> favourable weather conditions and absence of plant disease contributed to yield increase of 60 % on average, with a production of 6 400 metric tons of opium in 2019.<sup>166</sup>

While many communities became dependent on the income gained from opium poppy to sustain their livelihoods<sup>167</sup>, the joint survey by UNODC and the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) for the year 2018 revealed that opium poppy cultivation takes frequently place in less secure areas and villages controlled by non-state groups. Around 53 % of headmen in opium-cultivating villages stated that their villages were under the control of insurgents and other non-state actors, including the Taliban, compared with 26 % for villages not engaged in opium cultivation.<sup>168</sup> In her analysis of the UNODC World Drug Report 2020, Jelena Bjelica concluded that some of the factors for the decrease in opium cultivation in 2019 may include weather conditions, demand, price and security situation, adding that the eradication campaigns by US and Afghan government 'had no effect on the country's opium economy in 2019.'<sup>169</sup>

## 2.1.2 Business climate

In its Doing Business Index for 2020, the World Bank ranked Afghanistan 173 out of 190 countries.<sup>170</sup> The World Bank reported that private sector confidence in Afghanistan remained limited in 2019 due to political uncertainty<sup>171</sup> and expected only a marginal improvement in 2020.<sup>172</sup> Private businesses in Afghanistan were reported to face corruption and limited access to financial instruments and were affected by heavy regulations, lack of coordinated support, and poor connectivity within the country and the neighbouring countries.<sup>173</sup> Reporting on corruption in Afghanistan, UNAMA noted in 2018 that Afghans 'were required to pay bribes in nearly every aspect of daily life' and suffered from the effects of 'widespread nepotism and patronage'.<sup>174</sup> Corruption was cited frequently both by Afghan and foreign firms as a difficulty when doing business, specifically in permits and licenses, government procurement, regulatory requirements, and taxation.<sup>175</sup>

<sup>161</sup> UNODC, Afghanistan opium survey 2018 – Challenges to sustainable development, peace and security, July 2019, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>162</sup> UNODC, Afghanistan opium survey 2018 – Challenges to sustainable development, peace and security, July 2019, [url](#), pp. 3, 23

<sup>163</sup> UNODC, World Drug Report 2020, 25 June 2020, Booklet 1, [url](#), p. 40; US ONDCP, ONDCP Releases Data on Poppy Cultivation and Potential Opium Production in Afghanistan, 7 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>164</sup> UNODC, World Drug Report 2020, 25 June 2020, Booklet 1, [url](#), p. 40; Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>165</sup> In her article analysing the UNODC World Drug Report 2020, AAN's analyst Jelena Bjelica noted that it's the first year since 1994 that UNODC did not release its findings in an annual opium survey, suspecting that the government may have blocked the publication. Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>166</sup> Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>167</sup> UNODC, Afghanistan opium survey 2018 – Challenges to sustainable development, peace and security, July 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>168</sup> UNODC, Afghanistan opium survey 2018 – Challenges to sustainable development, peace and security, July 2019, [url](#), pp. 5, 32

<sup>169</sup> Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>170</sup> World Bank, Doing Business 2020: Comparing Business Regulation in 190 Economies - Economy Profile of Afghanistan, 24 October 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>171</sup> World Bank, The World Bank In Afghanistan, Overview, updated 1 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>172</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>173</sup> OECD, Boosting Private Sector Development and Entrepreneurship in Afghanistan, 2019, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>174</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan's fight against corruption – From Strategies to Implementation, 14 May 2018, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>175</sup> USDOS, 2019 Investment Climate Statements: Afghanistan, 14 July 2019, [url](#)

The Afghan economy continues to be dominated by a large informal sector ‘that generates little growth and often undercuts formal-sector firms’.<sup>176</sup> OECD underlined that limited access to finance as well as heavy regulations, corruption, poor connectivity within Afghanistan and with neighbouring countries, and physical insecurity prevent the establishment and growth of businesses, particularly SMEs that look for opportunities to operate in the formal sector. The country has the lowest in the world credit to the private sector – 3.5 % of GDP. SMEs and start-ups face difficulties in meeting collateral requirements: interest rates were reported to reach up to 25 % and loans to have short maturities. Thus, only 5 % of businesses profited from credit or bank loan while other sources of finance—with the exception of the hawala (‘an honour-based network of money transfer providers’<sup>177</sup>)—remained underdeveloped. Another issue that prevented ‘the expansion of both traditional and non-traditional financial instruments’ was lack of financial literacy of the population.<sup>178</sup>

### **Business climate in Kabul City, Herat City, and Mazar-e Sharif**

The World Bank’s 2017 report noted that businesses in Herat and Balkh provinces required visiting three different agencies when starting a business, which resulted in twice as many procedures as in Kabul. Starting a business in Herat took one more day, compared to Kabul and Balkh.<sup>179</sup>

According to phone interviews conducted by the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI) with companies in the provinces of Kabul, Balkh, Kandahar, Nangarhar, and Herat in November 2019, around 83 % of businesses indicated the lack of access to electricity as the most limiting infrastructural problem. Besides, many businesses reported difficulties in dealing with custom tariffs and taxes, which they named as ‘too sophisticated and non-transparent’.<sup>180</sup>

As noted by F. Foschini in the correspondence with EASO in 2018, the lack of cheap and reliable provision of electricity was always a major setback for all productive activities in Afghanistan with a heavy weight on the production costs, making Afghan enterprises non-competitive in the face of foreign goods and companies. This disadvantage hampered significantly the development of Herat’s industrial parks. These were among the better positioned in the whole country to yield results due to the relatively permissive security environment of the city and the vibrant local businessmen community but were paradoxically dependent for energy on their main competitor, Iran.<sup>181</sup>

Following restrictions on movement established in Herat to prevent the outbreak of COVID-19 in mid-March 2020, around 35 000–36 000 shops and factories were reported to be closed while ‘hundreds of thousands of people’ lost their jobs, according to the head of the trade association.<sup>182</sup> In June 2020, officials of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Balkh province stated that the COVID-19-related lockdown downturned about 80 % of the economy and business deals in the province; Mazar-e Sharif, the provincial capital, was reported to be lockdown for the second time since the spread of the virus.<sup>183</sup>

## **2.1.3 Development aid**

In 2019, Afghanistan lacked domestic resources to recover its economy<sup>184</sup>: while the development assistance had fallen by almost half since 2009, the Afghan economy remained largely dependent on

<sup>176</sup> OECD, Boosting Private Sector Development and Entrepreneurship in Afghanistan, 2019, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>177</sup> DAB Afghanistan Central Bank, National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2020-2024, 7 September 2019, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>178</sup> OECD, Boosting Private Sector Development and Entrepreneurship in Afghanistan, 2019, [url](#), pp. 13-14

<sup>179</sup> World Bank, Doing Business In Afghanistan 2017, 2017, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>180</sup> ACCI, Business Monitor 2019, 2019, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>181</sup> Foschini F., email, 9 November 2018, in EASO, Afghanistan, Key socio-economic indicators, Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City, April 2019, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>182</sup> Tolonews, Thousands Lose Jobs as Businesses Close in Herat, 16 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>183</sup> Afghanistan Times, Coronavirus Triggers Economic Crisis in Balkh, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>184</sup> OECD, Boosting Private Sector Development and Entrepreneurship in Afghanistan, 2019, [url](#), p. 13

international grants<sup>185</sup>, which—*besides covering nearly half of the government budget*—financed around 75 % of total public expenditure and nearly 90 % of security expenditure as of 2019.<sup>186</sup>

The World Bank and ADF noted that Afghanistan would remain in need of international development assistance<sup>187</sup> over the medium term.<sup>188</sup> Current security and civilian grant support pledges are due to expire by the end of 2020 and, with some major donors probably intending to significantly reduce support<sup>189</sup>, the situation reveals uncertainty regarding future aid levels and the sustainability of security and development expenditures. Furthermore, grants will gradually decline over the medium term both for on- and off-budget expenditures from an estimated USD 8.2 billion in 2020 to USD 6.9 billion by 2024. Particularly, the decline is expected in security grants (from around USD 4.9 billion to USD 4 billion per year) and civilian grants (from around USD 3.4 billion in 2020 to USD 2.7 billion in 2024). The share of grants delivered on-budget is expected to remain roughly constant, at around 30 % and 40 % for security and civilian grants respectively. The World Bank stated that ‘while there is scope for gradual reductions in civilian grant support over the medium-term, precipitous reduction in aid flows would lead to a contraction of government spending, deteriorating access to services and infrastructure, and weakening private sector confidence.’<sup>190</sup>

As noted by the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs in 2017, development assistance allocated to Afghanistan did not result in a reduction of poverty, while ‘humanitarian assistance has been used primarily as a “band aid”’.<sup>191</sup> Even with the significant amount of aid distributed since 2001, as a research paper of AAN pointed out in 2018, poverty was more widespread in 2016-2017 (according to ALCS figures) than it was immediately after the Taliban regime, which was ‘nothing but a result of continuing ineffectiveness’.<sup>192</sup> A joint report by Oxfam and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) stated in 2018 that effective aid delivery was a major challenge given the security situation and level of corruption in Afghanistan.<sup>193</sup> In November 2020, a pledging conference co-organised by the Afghan government, Finland and the United Nations is due to be held in Geneva with the aim to pledge financial support for Afghanistan to the international community.<sup>194</sup>

## 2.2 Employment

The Afghan labour market is dominated by agriculture.<sup>195</sup> The agriculture and livestock sector employs 44 % of the national workforce and accounts for a quarter of the national GDP.<sup>196</sup> The Afghan labour market is also characterised by a large share of self-employed or family workers, which indicates a high level of informality.<sup>197</sup> While the informal sector provides Afghans with employment opportunities, it leaves workers without social and legal protection, and influences in a negative way certain aspects such as resource allocation, job quality, and equality in employment.<sup>198</sup>

<sup>185</sup> OECD, Boosting Private Sector Development and Entrepreneurship in Afghanistan, 2019, [url](#), p. 13; World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>186</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>187</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>188</sup> ADF, Afghanistan: progress and Remaining Challenges, ADF 13 Replenishment Meeting, November 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>189</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. II

<sup>190</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), pp. 1; 15-16

<sup>191</sup> Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Afghanistan: A Political Economy Analysis, December 2017, [url](#), p. 44

<sup>192</sup> Bjelica J. and Ruttig T., The State of Aid and Poverty in 2018: A new look at aid effectiveness in Afghanistan, AAN, 17 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>193</sup> Oxfam and SCA, Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan, March 2018, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>194</sup> Finland, MoFA, 2020 Afghanistan Conference, n.d., [url](#); Tolonews, Afghan Govt Prepares for Intl Fund-Pledging in Geneva, 26 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>195</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 67

<sup>196</sup> World Bank Group in Afghanistan, Country Update, Issue 055, October 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>197</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey - Economically Active Population, Provinces of Kabul, Bamyan, Daykundi, Ghor, Kapisa and Parwan, 8 June 2017, [url](#), p. 35

<sup>198</sup> OECD, Boosting Private Sector Development and Entrepreneurship in Afghanistan, 2019, [url](#), p. 13

Afghanistan has one of the world's lowest employment-to-population ratios (the proportion of a country's working-age population that is employed<sup>199</sup>) and 21 % of the country's working population are considered underemployed.<sup>200</sup> According to the World Bank's report, employment and labour force participation fell between 2013 and 2017, most noticeably among women in rural areas, where the employment-to-working-age population ratio fell from 21.2 % to 18.3 %, equalling the loss of almost 130 000 jobs. Employment of men between the ages of 25 and 50 showed a similar decline, that is, from 93.4 % in 2011/12 to 84.3 % in 2016/17 – this equalled a drop in employment by about 176 000 jobs.<sup>201</sup> As the World Bank noted in 2018, many young people were trying to enter the labour market every year, but employment opportunities failed to keep up with the population growth because of inadequate development resources and poor security.<sup>202</sup> According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) modelled estimates for 2019, the employment-to-population ratio – which indicates the ratio of employed persons to the working-age population (i.e. persons aged 15 and above) – was 43.5 %, showing a decrease compared to 2018 (49.5 %<sup>203</sup>). In 2019, the labour dependency ratio – which indicates the ratio of dependents to total employment (ie. persons under age 15, working-age persons outside the labour force or unemployed) – was estimated at 3, showing that there are more dependent persons than employed.<sup>204</sup>

## 2.2.1 Unemployment

ILO modelled estimates for 2020 show an increase in unemployment rates in Afghanistan compared to 2019 and 2018, indicating the total unemployment rate (people aged 15+) at 11.2 %, with youth unemployment (aged 15-24) estimated at 17.5 %; overall, 14.1 % of women were estimated to be unemployed in 2020 compared to 10.4 % of men. In 2019 the overall unemployment rates were estimated at 11.1 % and youth unemployment (aged 15-24) at 17.4 %, while 14 % of women were unemployed compared to 10.3 % of men.<sup>205</sup> Unemployment rate for 2018 was at around 9 % and youth unemployment rate at around 18 %.<sup>206</sup> As noted in BTI 2020 Country Report, 'more than half of the population' was 'estimated to be looking for work'.<sup>207</sup>

According to ILO, the difference between urban and rural male youth neither in employment nor in education/training (NEET) was small—18 % for urban male youth and 19 % for rural male youth—while for female youth the NEET rate differed more significantly: 57 % for urban female youth and 69 % for rural female youth.<sup>208</sup> Overall, 80 % of the NEET population in Afghanistan was female, which was the result of women's low labour force, low participation in education and training, and high female unemployment.<sup>209</sup> In 2019, the ability of the labour market to engage the available workforce has been influenced by continued insecurity and drought conditions and unemployment continued to grow 'with nearly 400 000 new job seekers entering the workforce' each year in the conditions in which a quarter of the country is already unemployed.<sup>210</sup>

Further, unemployment has a seasonal character: as revealed by ALCS 2016-2017, the unemployment rate is relatively low during spring and summer months (around 20 %) but reaches almost 33 % in the winter.<sup>211</sup> Moreover, labour-driven migration was a traditional coping mechanism for Afghans, many

<sup>199</sup> ILO, Indicator description: Employment-to-population ratio, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>200</sup> World Bank, No Household Left Behind : Afghanistan Targeting the Ultra Poor Impact Evaluation, 10 June 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>201</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>202</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>203</sup> ILO, Afghanistan – Employment and Environmental Sustainability Fact Sheets 2019, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>204</sup> ILO, ILO modelled estimates, Employment statistics 2019, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>205</sup> ILO, ILO modelled estimates, Unemployment rate by sex and age, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>206</sup> ILO, Afghanistan – Employment and Environmental Sustainability Fact Sheets 2019, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>207</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Afghanistan, 2020, 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 19. The report covers the period between 1 February 2017 and 31 January 2019.

<sup>208</sup> ILO, ILOSTAT Blog, Not in employment, education or training: the reality for many young rural women, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>209</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 61

<sup>210</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>211</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 61

of whom left for Turkey, Pakistan, or Iran in search of employment opportunities. However, as noted in a research published by AAN in 2018, the economic migration became a less effective option after Iran increased the number of deportations.<sup>212</sup> In Turkey, Afghan migrants were similarly reported to face deportations as well as lack of legal employment and social security, low incomes, long work hours, and child labour.<sup>213</sup> According to the 2019 Asia Foundation Survey, among the 37.9 % of respondents who said they would leave Afghanistan, 51.6 % mentioned unemployment as a reason for leaving, while 77.7 % cited insecurity and 28.4 % cited bad governance (including corruption, injustice, and high prices).<sup>214</sup>

## 2.2.2 Employment opportunities and working conditions

In its Afghanistan Development Update issued in July 2020, the World Bank stated that COVID-19 measures have significantly impacted industry, services and business activities causing declines in remittances and job losses. Per capita GDP is expected to fall sharply - by 13 % by 2021 - estimating to remain below pre-COVID-19 levels for the medium-term. As a result, 'lower incomes are expected to lead to a deterioration in employment and poverty outcomes, with the poverty rate potentially reaching 73 percent over 2020'.<sup>215</sup> The high number of returnees and IDPs is also putting pressure on limited services and employment opportunities in main urban centers.<sup>216</sup>

According to Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS), the provinces of Kabul, Herat, and Nangarhar faced an extensive reduction in job opportunities due to restriction on movement implemented in March 2020 as a result of COVID-19 measures. Poor urban households who were dependent on daily wage labour were reported to find themselves in a particularly impoverished situation.<sup>217</sup>

Almost 53 % of the rural population was employed in agriculture according to ALCS 2016-17; among the urban working population, 36.5 % was engaged in various services and 5.5 % in agriculture.<sup>218</sup> Salaried employment in public or private sector held less than 20 % of all employed persons. Given that employers formed only a small group (2.6 %), salaried workers constituted 'the only visible category in the labour market that can be considered to have more or less secure jobs'.<sup>219</sup> As noted by F. Foschini, the public sector offered limited salaries but it was more secure than other forms of employment in Afghanistan.<sup>220</sup> Daily wage labourers and self-employed workers in agriculture were reported to be paid poorly. Irrespectively of a job type, approximately half of the employed persons earned between AFN 5 000 and 10 000 (around USD 70-130) per month. However, only 6 % of those self-employed in agriculture and 3 % of self-employed in non-agriculture earned more than AFN 10 000 per month while 32 % and 22 % of salaried private sector employees and non-agricultural daily wage labourers, respectively, earned more than AFN 10 000 per month.<sup>221</sup>

As of 2018, ILO defined 66 % of employment as vulnerable and noted that the most of the vulnerable workers had own-account status and were more likely to face low job and income security and lower coverage by social and employment protection systems.<sup>222</sup> As poor job quality and insecure employment were reported to be widespread, the World Bank noted that 'neither education nor

<sup>212</sup> Bjelica J., Less Rain and Snowfall in Afghanistan: High Level Of Food Assistance Needed Until Early 2019, AAN, 30 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>213</sup> Mackreath H. and Rabiei F., The Bottom Rung of Migrant Hierarchy: Afghans in Istanbul, Los Angeles Review of Books, 30 January 2018, [url](#)

<sup>214</sup> Asia Foundation, A Survey of the Afghan People – Afghanistan in 2019, December 2019, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>215</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update 2020, Surviving the Storm, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 3; 15

<sup>216</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update 2020, Surviving the Storm, July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>217</sup> FEWS, Afghanistan, Food Security Outlook Update, April 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>218</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 68

<sup>219</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 63-64

<sup>220</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>221</sup> World Bank and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, Findings from a 2018 Phone Survey of Afghan Returnees and UNHCR data, June 2019, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>222</sup> ILO, Afghanistan – Employment and Environmental Sustainability Fact Sheets 2019, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

employment are a guarantee out of poverty.<sup>223</sup> Holding a salaried job can bring poverty rates below 50 % while for those households that are headed by daily labourers or self-employed persons, poverty rates are as high as 66 % and 53 % respectively.<sup>224</sup>

While the law sets the 40-hour workweek for both the public and private sectors and provides workers with such rights as overtime pay, health insurance, and compensation for work-related injuries, it has no mentioning of day workers in the informal sector. Moreover, the authorities fail to enforce the laws regarding to inspection and imposing penalties for violations, while most of the workers were reported being unaware of the law. According to USDOS, ‘employers often chose not to comply with the law or preferred to hire workers informally. Most employees worked longer than 40 hours per week, were frequently underpaid, and worked in poor conditions, particularly in the informal sector.’<sup>225</sup>

Although there is no comprehensive data of workplace accidents, USDOS mentioned that ‘poor and dangerous working conditions’ had been reported on several occasions and underlined that there were no occupational health and safety regulations or officially adopted standards as of 2020. Moreover, debt bondage was used in some industries (e.g. brick kiln facilities), putting the workers into a situation, in which avoiding forced labour endangering their health or safety was not possible.<sup>226</sup>

### Kabul

Kabul is largely an urban province with its economically active population divided into professions ‘related to trade, services and elementary occupations’.<sup>227</sup> The capital has a large share of salaried workers, while self-employment is less common compared to rural parts of the country.<sup>228</sup> The major employers in Kabul include community, social and personal services as well as the public administration.<sup>229</sup> As a major trade and employment hub in Afghanistan, the capital attracts labourers from small villages in such provinces as Parwan, Logar, and Wardak, who commute to the capital of a daily or weekly basis to trade agricultural products or work as guards, household staff, or wage labourers.<sup>230</sup> Salaries in Kabul were reported to be generally higher than in other provinces, particularly for those working for foreign organisations (e.g. computer technicians could earn in 2017 a monthly average of AFN 25 000, nearly USD 375 according to the 2017 exchange rate).<sup>231</sup>

### Herat

As underlined by Jolyon Leslie in 2015, the young age structure of Herat population meant that the economically most productive age group (15-64 years) was rather small and therefore carried the burden of providing for a large number of people in the dependent ages. In addition, half of the working population in Herat city were daily labourers with their income vulnerable to the vagaries of the labour market.<sup>232</sup>

In the correspondence with EASO in 2018, F. Foschini explained that Herat’s economy has long provided job opportunities in trade, including the import and export of goods with neighbouring Iran, mining and manufacturing. Some of the age-old artisanal crafts (carpets, glass, embroidery) have managed to survive, while a set of modern industrial activities has also developed (e.g. food processing

<sup>223</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update, 28 October 2018, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>224</sup> World Bank, Poverty in Afghanistan, Results based on ALCS 2016-17, July 2018, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>225</sup> USDOS, Afghanistan 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 44

<sup>226</sup> USDOS, Afghanistan 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 44

<sup>227</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Economically Active Population, Provinces of Kabul, Bamyan, Daykundi, Ghor, Kapisa and Parwan, 8 June 2017, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>228</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>229</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Economically Active Population, Provinces of Kabul, Bamyan, Daykundi, Ghor, Kapisa and Parwan, 8 June 2017, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>230</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 5, 7-8

<sup>231</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>232</sup> Leslie J., Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, USIP, 2 April 2015, [url](#), p. 19



and packaging). However, all these workplaces have been threatened by insecurity (particularly the kidnapping of businessmen or their relatives by criminal networks with connivance inside the police), by power shortages and the difficulty of competing with Iranian and other foreign imports and rising unemployment.<sup>233</sup>

### Mazar-e Sharif

Mazar-e Sharif is a regional trading centre for northern Afghanistan and an industrial centre with large-scale manufacturing operations and a huge number of SMEs providing handicrafts, rugs and carpets.<sup>234</sup> As of November 2018, the city was relatively more stable compared to Herat or Kabul, according to Foschini.<sup>235</sup> In 2014, the largest group of workers in the city were service and sales workers (23.1 %), followed by managers/professionals/technicians and clerks (20.9 %).<sup>236</sup>

## 2.2.3 Employment opportunities for IDPs and returnees

As found by ALCS 2016-17, IDPs and returnees preferred to settle in urban centres, looking for security, employment, and services.<sup>237</sup> Due to the ongoing conflict and the drought of the winter 2017-18, many Afghan rural inhabitants had to abandon their places of residents, losing employment and incomes.<sup>238</sup> The rural-urban migration, caused by the deterioration of agricultural production, stressed further 'limited urban employment opportunities'.<sup>239</sup> As noted by UNOCHA in 2019, migrants, IDPs, and returnees had often to 'compete for limited employment opportunities', which 'created an imbalance in the supply of labour and demand of jobs' and 'caused plummeting daily wage rates'.<sup>240</sup>

In 2017, Nassim Majidi noted that many return and reintegration programs did not sustain long-term livelihoods and reliable shelter and failed to 'bridge the gap' between the skills returnees had and those that were in-demand in the local markets.<sup>241</sup> Oxfam stated in its 2018 study that the government's capacity was limited to address the reception and reintegration of returnees, 30 % of them faced difficulties finding livelihood opportunities and 18 % had challenges when accessing food.<sup>242</sup> The concentration of returnees and IDPs in urban centres has the risk of 'overwhelming services and generating large humanitarian needs'.<sup>243</sup>

The 2018 Oxfam study revealed that extended family networks were vital for returnees in finding and maintaining employment and housing, however having a family network did not necessarily remove all vulnerabilities. For unaccompanied minors, single women and female-headed households' vulnerabilities were higher even with family support. Many returnees, particularly those without family connections settled in cities assuming that those were safer and livelihood opportunities were better. While returnees were not perceived as a source of conflict in general, they clearly represented competition for resources and employment.<sup>244</sup>

According to joint 2019 report of the World Bank and UNHCR, most returnees chose to settle in their provinces of origin, even if those tended to be less economically developed, preferring to have better

<sup>233</sup> Foschini F., email, 9 November 2018, in EASO, Afghanistan, Key socio-economic indicators, Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City, April 2019, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>234</sup> Afghanistan, State of Afghan Cities 2015, Volume One, 2015, [url](#), p. 63

<sup>235</sup> Foschini F., email, 9 November 2018, in EASO, Afghanistan, Key socio-economic indicators, Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City, April 2019, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>236</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey: Balkh, 5 January 2015, [url](#), p. 42

<sup>237</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 102

<sup>238</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 58

<sup>239</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Building Confidence Amid Uncertainty, June 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>240</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 58

<sup>241</sup> Majidi N., From Forced Migration to Forced returns in Afghanistan: Policy and Program Implications, MPI, November 2017, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>242</sup> Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>243</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>244</sup> Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 17 - 18

social networks to a general economic situation in a place of their future residence. In this way, they were more likely to be employed, even if not in the same type of job they did before the return. To those returnees who did not settle in their province of origin, safety, and access to economic opportunity were the main drivers behind the choice of the place of residence. At the same time, these provinces of return 'tended to be more urbanized'.<sup>245</sup> According to the same survey, returnees were found to have fewer employment opportunities compared with their situation in their host countries: while the average unemployment rate of family breadwinners was 3 % before their return to Afghanistan, it rose to 10 % after the return. Concerning the form of employment, a slight shift from being employed/self-employed towards daily labour work and, in consequence, lower salaries and decrease in income were also reported.<sup>246</sup> Often employed on a daily basis in the non-agricultural sector and having large families, returnees were reported to live frequently close to or below the poverty line.<sup>247</sup>

Based on interviews and focus group discussion, Oxfam noted that IDPs reported to face more risks and vulnerabilities than returnees did.<sup>248</sup> Based on surveys conducted with IDPs, a joint 2018 study by the NRC, Samuel Hall and the IDMC found that Afghanistan was 'struggling to absorb increasingly large numbers of refugees and migrants'. The study showed an increase in 'returnee-IDPs' – those IDPs who reported becoming secondarily displaced after their return to Afghanistan. Three quarters of the returnee-IDP respondents were unable to go back to their home as a result of insecurity and 72 % reported having been displaced twice while nearly a third were displaced three times. Only 25 % of IDPs received some kind of aid assistance and one in two respondents reported having difficulties fulfilling their food needs on a regular basis. At the same time, an increasing number of IDPs adopted harmful coping mechanisms, e.g. skipping meals or relying on child labour.<sup>249</sup>

## Kabul

Kabul and Nangarhar accounted for a third of all returnees as of mid-2019. As people move to relatively urban areas looking for safety, services, and jobs, it is expected that some additional pressure would be put on urban and peri-urban areas already hosting IDPs.<sup>250</sup> According to the 2018 study on IDPs by NRC, Samuel Hall and IDMC, 46 % of the respondents stated that their household's access to livelihoods was restricted; this was 67 % in Kunduz, while Kabul seemed to have a better situation with 33 %.<sup>251</sup>

According to the 2018 study by Oxfam, Kabul had a total inflow of 680 260 returnees and IDPs by June 2017 with most returnees living outside the city centre, often in remote areas and camps. Chaman-e Babrak, a camp located in urban Kabul had hardly any relationship with the host community. While there were no reports of major tension from the host community here, the people interviewed by Oxfam perceived the returnees 'as a source of pressure on the job market and local wages'. Most of the returnees interviewed stated that they depend on relatives for accommodation and other support. Those who have been in Kabul for years pointed at the deterioration of the situation because of the increased local prices, unemployment, insecurity, and crime.<sup>252</sup>

Oxfam's research noted that returnees were generally able to work only occasionally in Kabul as daily wage workers and most of them could not find jobs every day, which made their earnings unstable. At

<sup>245</sup> World Bank and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, Findings from a 2018 Phone Survey of Afghan Returnees and UNHCR data, June 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>246</sup> World Bank and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, Findings from a 2018 Phone Survey of Afghan Returnees and UNHCR data, June 2019, [url](#), pp. 5, 22-23

<sup>247</sup> World Bank and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, Findings from a 2018 Phone Survey of Afghan Returnees and UNHCR data, June 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>248</sup> Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>249</sup> NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>250</sup> World Bank and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, Findings from a 2018 Phone Survey of Afghan Returnees and UNHCR data, June 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>251</sup> NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>252</sup> Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 23

the time of the research, most documented returnees received some financial support from UNHCR, while some undocumented returnees received assistance from IOM. No further support from the government or NGOs was reported, although such support was perceived as very much needed, particularly ‘in terms of shelter and basic social services’.<sup>253</sup> In July 2019, AP news reported on employment of IDPs as daily workers at a brick factory on the outskirts in Kabul: factory owners were reported to travel to villages offering loans to cover necessities and ‘forcing families to work them off during the summer months in a form of indentured servitude’. Involving frequently child labour, a family of 10 persons was reported to earn an average USD 12-18 a day.<sup>254</sup>

### Herat

Herat’s absorption capacity was reported to be put under pressure by the growing number of returnees and IDPs that seek economic opportunity within the city and often have their families follow.<sup>255</sup> In October 2016, an inter-agency research found that the majority of IDP families in Herat were engaged in daily labour or other insecure, seasonal forms of employment with men mostly working in construction or loading and unloading goods in marketplaces and women working as cleaners in local houses or as vendors. A large number of children collected garbage, cleaned vehicles or were hawking goods at road intersections. Families reported earning AFN 1 000-3 000 (USD 45 at the time of reporting) per month, which proved insufficient to run the household.<sup>256</sup>

### Mazar-e Sharif

According to IOM report of 2017, IDPs and returnees in Balkh province worked largely in daily labour jobs, if they were available. Only few of IDPs and returnees were reported to work in agriculture or own livestock. Markets and small businesses in Mazar-e Sharif provided employment opportunities but these were often only temporary.<sup>257</sup>

## 2.2.4 Employment opportunities for women

The score for Afghan women in the Human Development Index (HDI) was estimated at 0.364, compared to the average score for South Asian countries at 0.583.<sup>258</sup> The 2004 Constitution of Afghanistan protects women’s equality before the law, their right to education, and their right to work.<sup>259</sup> Afghanistan’s development framework made gender equality and women’s empowerment key priorities.<sup>260</sup> Women became increasingly represented in the public service and politics, occupying 27.4 % of the seats in the parliament<sup>261</sup> and constituting around 21 % of civil servants and around 16 % of civil servants in the senior management group.<sup>262</sup> However, as noted by USDOS in March, women constituted only 7 % of the overall workforce.<sup>263</sup> According to the 2019 Whole of Afghanistan (WOA) Assessment, women tended to be engaged in home-based work, i.e. ‘weaving carpets, selling handicrafts, working as tailors, working as household help or washing clothes’.<sup>264</sup>

<sup>253</sup> Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>254</sup> AP, Mired in poverty, Afghans bring their children to work, 24 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>255</sup> Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>256</sup> UNHCR and UN-HABITAT, Inter-Agency Durable Solutions Initiative - Profile and Response Plan of Protracted IDP Settlements in Herat, October 2016, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>257</sup> IOM, Afghanistan - Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results, June 2017, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>258</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Afghanistan, 2020, 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 17. ‘The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living,’ for the details see UNDP, Human Development Reports, Human Development Index (HDI), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>259</sup> Afghanistan, Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2017-2021, 29 January 2017, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>260</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-2017: Highlights Report, 2018, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>261</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Afghanistan, 2020, 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>262</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>263</sup> USDOS, Afghanistan 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>264</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 9

According to ALCS 2016-17 data, the female unemployment rate was more than twice as high as that of men: 41 % against 18 %.<sup>265</sup> The World Bank's 2019 report noted that women's labour force participation in Afghanistan was low at 27 %, while women's unemployment was extremely high at 41 %.<sup>266</sup> USDOS reported on continuous discrimination faced by Afghan women, who were frequently prevented from entering labour market by either their relatives or hiring practices that favoured men; furthermore, employed women reported to encounter 'insults, sexual harassment, lack of transportation, and an absence of day care facilities'. In private sector, salary discrimination was reported. Moreover, 'female journalists, social workers, and police officers reported they were often threatened or abused. Persons with disabilities also suffered from discrimination in hiring.'<sup>267</sup>

ALCS 2016-17 also showed that the overall percentage of women in vulnerable employment (almost 90 %) exceeded the male percentage (77.5 %).<sup>268</sup> In March 2020, CEDAW expressed its concern about the lack of laws to protect women's labour rights, noting that 'the level of women's labour force participation remains low and that women are concentrated in the informal economy, especially in agriculture, domestic work and unpaid care work, and have no access to social protection.'<sup>269</sup>

Asia Foundation's 2019 survey found that unemployment and poverty were seen as the major problems faced by Afghan women. With around 24 % and 9 % respectively, these economic issues, taken together, were evaluated as more important than domestic violence (17 %), lack of women's rights (13.5 %), and engagement in forced marriages (12 %).<sup>270</sup> Women in Afghanistan were reported to be frequently judged for working outside the home and to face multiple economic and social challenges in the country's traditionally conservative culture.<sup>271</sup> However, the Asia Foundation's 2019 survey showed that 76 % of Afghans supported the idea that women should work outside the home. The survey also indicated women's contribution to household income at almost 19 %, which is a slight decrease from 19 % in 2018 and 20 % in 2017.<sup>272</sup>

### **Participation of women in workforce in Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif**

According to Fabrizio Foschini, the participation of women in the workforce varied greatly by sector in Kabul and was limited mostly to areas like teaching, cleaning, cooking, and weaving or other textile-related industries, although 'some young educated professionals are hired by the government and by international or national companies at many professional levels'. Women working outside their home in Kabul were mostly Hazaras with many returnees from exile in Iran or Pakistan among them.<sup>273</sup>

According to a survey conducted among economically active women in Mazar-e Sharif, the biggest number of the economically active women belonged to the age groups of 16 – 25 and 26 – 35 (around 33 % each), followed by the age groups of 36 – 45 (around 20 %) and 46 – 55 (around 12 %); while only 2 % of economically active women belonged to the age group 56 – 65.<sup>274</sup> The respondents of the survey named insecurity, sexual harassment on street and at work, and involvement in childcare as the main reasons for their unemployment, followed by the belief that women should not work for religious or cultural reasons. According to the same study, there was a correlation between woman's education

<sup>265</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 59

<sup>266</sup> World Bank, No Household Left Behind : Afghanistan Targeting the Ultra Poor Impact Evaluation, 10 June 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>267</sup> USDOS, Afghanistan 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>268</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 64

<sup>269</sup> CEDAW, Concluding observation on the third periodic report of Afghanistan, CEDAW/C/AFG/CO/3, 10 March 2020, [url](#), p. 13; World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#),

<sup>270</sup> Asia Foundation, A Survey of the Afghan People – Afghanistan in 2019, December 2019, [url](#), p. 95

<sup>271</sup> IWPR, Afghan Women Fight to Stay in Business, 5 April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>272</sup> Asia Foundation, A Survey of the Afghan People – Afghanistan in 2019, December 2019, [url](#), p. 96

<sup>273</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>274</sup> Paikar G. R., Female labor force participation in Afghanistan: A case study from Mazar-e-Sharif city, Afghan Economic Society, Volume 048, 2018, [url](#), p. 3. The data for this case study consists of information from 504 women and their households that were collected through a field survey, on the methodology, see p.2.

and the probability that she would enter the labour market: with the increase of education by one year, the probability of being employed was believed to increase by 31 %.<sup>275</sup>

## 2.2.5 Child labour

With 48 % of its population being younger than 15 years, Afghanistan is one of the four countries in the world with the highest proportion of persons under the age of 15.<sup>276</sup> UNICEF estimated the number of children engaged in child labour at 60 000 in 2017<sup>277</sup> and reported that 30 % of children in Afghanistan were engaged in child labour as of 2019.<sup>278</sup> According to USDOS, children were employed in the carpet industry, brick kilns, coalmines, and poppy fields, besides working as domestic servants, street vendors, peddlers, and shopkeepers.<sup>279</sup> In some instances, men, women, and children were exploited in bonded labour, extending to multiple generations, while some children were sold into sex trafficking by their families.<sup>280</sup>

Afghanistan ratified all key international conventions concerning child labour and established its own laws and regulations<sup>281</sup>, adopting its first Child Rights Protection law in 2019.<sup>282</sup> The Afghan labour law sets the minimum age for employment at 15 years to work up to 35 hours per week in non-hazardous work, allows 14-year olds to work as apprentices, and prohibits children younger than 14 years from working under any circumstances.<sup>283</sup> The law bans the employment of children in hazardous work that can threaten their health or cause disability, including mining and garbage collection; work in blast furnaces, waste-processing plants, and large slaughterhouses; work with hospital waste; drug-related work; security-guard services; and work related to war. USDOS reported for 2019 that the Afghan government failed to enforce the law because of poor institutional capacity and inefficiency to conduct inspections.<sup>284</sup>

The 2018 joint study by NRC, Samuel Hall and IDMC found that while child labour is still underreported, it is more prevalent among the displaced families than it was in 2012. Nearly one in five families responded relying on child labour to meet their basic needs. Around 24 % of returnee-IDP households responded relying on child labour compared to 16 % of IDP families. Child labour is more widespread among urban IDPs (21 %) compared to those residing in peri-urban (18 %) and rural areas (15 %) and is particularly prevalent in Kabul. This likely reflects the greater economic vulnerability of IDPs in the capital and the demand that Kabul's 'relatively vibrant' economy creates for child labour.<sup>285</sup>

In February 2020, UNAMA reported on the recruitment and use of 64 boys by the Taliban (58), Afghan national security forces (3) and pro-government armed groups: Afghan Local Police and pro-government militias, noting that the incidents of child recruitment 'are believed to be widely underreported given the sensitivities involved and concerns about the safety of the children. Documented cases of recruitment and use of children by the Taliban concerned 'planting IEDs, transporting explosives, assisting in intelligence gathering, carrying out suicide attacks and participating in hostilities.'<sup>286</sup> Commenting on the issues of child requirement in 2018, Fabrizio Foschini

<sup>275</sup> Paikar G. R., Female labor force participation in Afghanistan: A case study from Mazar-e-Sharif city, Afghan Economic Society, Volume 048, 2018, [url](#), pp. 8-9

<sup>276</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-2017: Highlights Report, 2018, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>277</sup> UNICEF and Samuel Hall, Evaluation of "Improving Street-working Children's Access to Education and Livelihood Support for their Families" Kabul, Afghanistan, September 2017, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>278</sup> UNICEF, Preserving hope in Afghanistan – Protecting Children in the world's most lethal conflict, December 2019, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>279</sup> USDOS, Afghanistan 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p.43. For an account on children working in brick kilns, see AP, Mired in poverty, Afghans bring their children to work, 24 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>280</sup> USDOS, Afghanistan 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), 2020, p. 42

<sup>281</sup> USDOL, 2017 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Afghanistan, 20 September 2018, [url](#), p. 105

<sup>282</sup> UNICEF, Preserving hope in Afghanistan – Protecting Children in the world's most lethal conflict, December 2019, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>283</sup> USDOS, Afghanistan 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 42; APPRO, Chronic Conflict, Poverty and Child Labor: Evidence from Kandahar, Bamyan, Herat and Balkh, April 2018, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>284</sup> USDOS, Afghanistan 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 42

<sup>285</sup> NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>286</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2019, February 2020, [url](#), p. 24

noted that the underage recruiting happened on both sides of the conflict, particularly among the local units, which were less directly under the control of the central military commands: village self-defence militias and Afghan Local Police in case of the government, local fronts of fighters co-opted but not established anew by the Taliban. While both sides theoretically did not condone the practice, they seemed unwilling or unable to suppress it.<sup>287</sup> In the correspondence with EASO in 2018, UNHCR added that the scale of problems children were facing was likely much larger, as underreporting was common, due to social stigma and cultural issues.<sup>288</sup>

## 2.3 Poverty

### 2.3.1 General trends

In its Afghanistan Development Update issued in July 2020, the World Bank reported that as a result of the COVID-19 measures the percentage of Afghans living in poverty may increase from 55 % in 2017 to between 61 % and 72 % in 2020, due to declining incomes and rising prices of food and other vital household goods. Mainly due to the increase of food prices, consumer prices area also expected to increase by around 5 % in 2020.<sup>289</sup> Around 15 million people in Afghanistan (2 million households) rely for at least 50 % of their income on remittances or vulnerable sources of incomes, with a poverty rate estimated at 53 % (close to the national average of 54.5 percent %). The consumption levels for 70 % of these households are below 1.5 times the value of the poverty line, indicating a high vulnerability to income shocks. The largest concentration of this section of population is in Kabul, with around 2.9 million people, followed by the provinces of Nangarhar, Herat, Ghazni and Balkh.<sup>290</sup>

According to the ALCS 2016-17, the number of Afghans living below national poverty increased from around 38 % in 2012-2013 to 54.5 % in 2016-2017.<sup>291</sup> The World Bank underlined in 2019 that the high poverty rates were due to slow economic growth, increasing demographic pressures, and worsening security situation, with all the factors lasting for decades.<sup>292</sup> UNOCHA and UNICEF reported on the aggravation of poverty in recent years.<sup>293</sup> UNOCHA estimated that over 80 % of Afghans lived on less than the internationally applied poverty line (USD 1.90 per day) in 2019.<sup>294</sup> The World Bank expects poverty to remain high in 2020, due to 'weak labour demand and security-related constraints on service delivery', compiled with declining per capita incomes.<sup>295</sup>

The ALCS 2016-17 revealed a correlation between poverty rates and household sizes: one third of households with 1-5 members lived below the poverty line compared to 60 % of households with eight members or more. According to the same source, around 59 % of the population lived in a household where the head of the household was engaged in vulnerable employment, i.e. was self-employed, a day labourer, or an unpaid worker. Data showed that poverty tended to rise in larger households: households with three or more dependents for each working-age member of the household had a 70 % poverty rate. Four out of five persons defined as poor lived in rural areas.<sup>296</sup>

The World Bank reported in 2019 that rural poverty remained consistently higher than urban poverty, although the deterioration in welfare became more widespread across the country.<sup>297</sup> In rural areas,

<sup>287</sup> Foschini F., email, 9 November 2018, in EASO, Afghanistan, Key socio-economic indicators, Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City, April 2019, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>288</sup> UNHCR Afghanistan, email, 9 November 2018, in EASO, Afghanistan, Key socio-economic indicators, Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City, April 2019, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>289</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update 2020, Surviving the Storm, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 5; 15

<sup>290</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update 2020, Surviving the Storm, July 2020, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>291</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 100

<sup>292</sup> World Bank, Hunger before the Drought: Food Insecurity in Afghanistan, 1 June 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>293</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 16; UNICEF, Preserving hope in Afghanistan – Protecting Children in the world's most lethal conflict, December 2019, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>294</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), pp. 9, 16

<sup>295</sup> World Bank, The World Bank In Afghanistan, Overview, updated 1 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>296</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 108-113

<sup>297</sup> World Bank, Hunger before the Drought: Food Insecurity in Afghanistan, 1 June 2019, [url](#), p. 1

the poor constituted 82 % of the population as of 2019<sup>298</sup>; moreover, 65 % of households relying on agriculture as the main source of income and 66 % of households relying on livestock were reported to live in poverty.<sup>299</sup>

Poverty in Afghanistan had a seasonal character, in which welfare deteriorated in winter months due to increase in prices, particularly food, and a decline in income-generating opportunities in agriculture.<sup>300</sup> The figures for the rural poor were reported to be particularly high in the north-east and south-west regions (17 % each), followed by the north region (15 %)<sup>301</sup>; while the central, east, north, and north-east regions displayed the largest increase (17-20 %) in poverty between 2011-12 and 2016-17.<sup>302</sup> While there was no available data, the World Bank expected that drought as well as slower economy growth and continued displacements were the factors that aggravated poverty in 2018<sup>303</sup>, with many of the rural poor being negatively affected by the drought of the winter 2017-2018.<sup>304</sup>

According to Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook for 2018-2019, the overall prices for food decreased by 1.1 % in 2018, after an increase of 6.9 % in 2017. The national consumer price index was influenced by the decrease in the prices of vegetables, sugar and sweets, and spices. Non-food prices were reported to have increased both in 2017 and 2018 by 3.2 % and 2.3 % respectively. The increase was particularly visible in the prices of clothing, tobacco, transportation and education, which increased by 3.5 - 6.6 %.<sup>305</sup>

### 2.3.2 Urban poverty

FEWS estimated that COVID-19 lockdown measures brought a reduced access to income and weakened purchasing power in urban areas of almost all provinces. In April 2020, FEWS reported on a significant decrease of access to income of poor households, which, in general, ‘earn[ed] income from daily wage labour and other small trades’ and which were affected by the restrictions of movement, imposed by the government in main cities.<sup>306</sup>

While humanitarian efforts focus mostly on rural areas, data on urban poverty in Kabul is largely limited to the population of Kabul informal settlements. According to Foschini, the cost of living in Kabul was significantly higher compared to other provinces, particularly for housing but also for some food items. Foschini noted that residents of Kabul tended to rely more on credit compared to other urban areas. Given that food expenses could make up half of a household’s expenditure and rent one third, many households were pushed to find alternative sources of cash, ‘whether by accessing informal credit or sending a family member abroad’. Furthermore, almost 78 % of Kabul households lived below the poverty line, according to a 2014 survey.<sup>307</sup> In April 2020, UNOCHA reported on deterioration of purchasing power in Kabul, estimated a decline of purchasing power of casual labourers by 31 %.<sup>308</sup>

According to the ALCS 2016-17 data, the central region, including Kabul, accounted for half of the urban poor, while a third of the urban poor lived in the northern, north-east, and south-west regions.<sup>309</sup> Kandahar, Kabul, Herat, Balkh, and Kunduz were the areas where the increase of urban poverty has

<sup>298</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Building Confidence Amid Uncertainty, June 2019, [url](#), pp. i, 5

<sup>299</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Building Confidence Amid Uncertainty, June 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>300</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 109

<sup>301</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 108

<sup>302</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 107

<sup>303</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>304</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Building Confidence Amid Uncertainty, June 2019, [url](#), p. i

<sup>305</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2018-19, July 2019, [url](#), p. 212

<sup>306</sup> FEWS, Afghanistan, Food Security Outlook Update, April 2020, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>307</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 34

<sup>308</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Brief: COVID-19 No. 36, 16 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>309</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 108

been concentrated since 2011. These provinces together accounted for 80 % of the urban poor in 2016-17 with Kabul alone accounting for nearly half.<sup>310</sup>

In 2016-2018, the increased numbers of refugees and undocumented Afghans returning to certain areas in Afghanistan, especially to Kabul, as well as the continued displacement added further pressure on community services and social infrastructure in the country.<sup>311</sup> In Kabul, despite of the city's growth in physical dimensions, the development of industrial and trading facilities were reported to remain limited, leaving the state of employment at alarming levels and causing increase in poverty.<sup>312</sup>

### 2.3.3 Situation of female-headed households

In its 2019 report, UNOCHA underlined that traditional family units were disrupted because of the high number of men killed on the battlefield or in the course of violence, as a result of which women, the elderly, and sometimes children had to take the role of their households' breadwinner.<sup>313</sup> HRW added in 2018 that insurgent attacks against civilians had a devastating impact on the victim's family, particularly on women who suddenly became dependent on members of their husband's family and faced limitations as to where they could live and work.<sup>314</sup>

ALCS 2016-17 found that only 1.2 % of households were headed by women with 212 000 people living in female-headed households overall.<sup>315</sup> In 2017, UNOCHA noted that female-headed households were 67 % more food insecure than those headed by men<sup>316</sup>, while displaced female-headed households earned up to 61 % less (AFN 5 687), than male-headed households (AFN 9 298).<sup>317</sup>

Based on the 2019 Whole of Afghanistan (WOA) Assessment, UNOCHA noted that female-headed displaced households were more vulnerable in regards to having stable income sources and employment.<sup>318</sup> Moreover, the WOA Assessment revealed that 18 % of female-headed households reported that no household members had a *tazkera*, which was two times more than in case of male-headed households (9 %).<sup>319</sup> As reported by UNOCHA in 2017, the lack of documentation blocked women's ability to access certain services and legal protection.<sup>320</sup>

### 2.3.4 Situation of IDPs and returnees

According to the 2019 report of the World Bank, the number of returnees from Iran and Pakistan increased pressure on services, employment opportunities, and humanitarian assistance.<sup>321</sup> USDOS noted that 'limited opportunities to earn a livelihood following the initial displacement often led to secondary displacement.'<sup>322</sup> UNOCHA reported on 'limited ability' of IDPs to repay debts, which creates a situation of 'serious safety concerns for IDPs' as there were reports on a few cases in which children were abducted or kidnapped by creditors to pressure parents to repay their debts.<sup>323</sup> The joint 2018 report by NRC, IDMC, and Samuel Hall noted that three quarters of IDP households in Afghanistan did not receive aid and many practiced 'harmful coping strategies such as skipping meals or relying on child labour'. IDPs were exposed to ongoing risks by lacking access to food, water, housing, and services, e.g. education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities trapping them in 'protracted cycles

<sup>310</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 102

<sup>311</sup> UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>312</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>313</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>314</sup> HRW, "No Safe Place": Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Afghanistan, May 2018, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>315</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>316</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2021, 1 December 2017, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>317</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2021, 1 December 2017, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>318</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>319</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>320</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2021, 1 December 2017, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>321</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Building Confidence Amid Uncertainty, June 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>322</sup> USDOS, Afghanistan 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>323</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 68



of endemic poverty'.<sup>324</sup> As noted by UNOCHA, IDP households, in which a breadwinner had a disability, were more vulnerable while earning a livelihood: they had fewer employed household members and were more dependent on borrowing and/or loans.<sup>325</sup>

Returnees from Iran, Turkey, or Europe were reported to comprise mostly young men, whereas returnees from Pakistan were mostly families.<sup>326</sup> Returnees who came from Pakistan and Iran were the most vulnerable, according to a representative of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), interviewed by the Finnish Immigration Service in Kabul in April 2019. According to the source, returnees from the mentioned countries frequently live in informal settlements and might lack documentation. The source also noted that begging on the streets increased and women and children were more frequently used 'to get small contributions to their family economy'.<sup>327</sup>

## 2.4 Food security

### 2.4.1 General situation

In its 2019 report, UNOCHA listed the following key drivers of acute food insecurity in Afghanistan: high unemployment and lack of household incomes, 'reduced purchasing power and access to food', ongoing conflict and displacement, 'loss of livelihoods and reduced agricultural production' as farmers cannot access their lands to cultivate and harvest timely, natural disasters (e.g. floods) that destroy shelters and affect farmland, and lasting impacts of the 2017-2018 drought.<sup>328</sup> According to UNOCHA, 9.4 million of the Afghan population, with 56 % being children, would be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2020 due to 'the cumulative impact' of conflict and natural disasters.<sup>329</sup>

An increase in prices was reported in March 2020, following the border closures and export restrictions related to the spread of COVID-19. For instance, the price of wheat flour was reported to surge across Afghanistan, rising by 20 % in the city of Faizabad in the north of the country.<sup>330</sup> Following the introduction of lockdown measures and increase in domestic demand, FEWS reported on the rise of prices in late March and early April, stating that many households 'are expected to be unable to meet all food and essential non-food needs' as their purchasing power has reduced.<sup>331</sup> As revealed in a field study conducted in rural areas of Herat province by AAN researcher Reza Kazemi in April 2020, the lockdown measures increased socio-economic vulnerabilities and unemployment and brought a rise in primary foods' price. Women were reported to be disproportionately affected by the situation.<sup>332</sup>

UNOCHA reported that the nutritional status of children under five years has deteriorated in most parts of Afghanistan, with 25 out of 34 provinces in emergency level of acute malnutrition (Kapisa, Wardak, Nangarhar, Laghman, Bamyán, Paktika, Paktiya, Kunar, Nuristan, Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Samangan, Balkh, Sar-e Pul, Ghor, Daykundi, Urozgan, Zabul, Jawzjan, Faryab, Helmand, Badghis, Herat, and Farah).<sup>333</sup>

<sup>324</sup> NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, *Escaping War: Where to Next?*, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>325</sup> UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>326</sup> Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, *Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019, Situation of Returnees in Kabul*, 10 October 2019, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>327</sup> Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, *Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019, Situation of Returnees in Kabul*, 10 October 2019, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>328</sup> UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>329</sup> UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>330</sup> New Humanitarian (The), *Food prices soar under coronavirus threat in Afghanistan*, 7 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>331</sup> FEWS, *Afghanistan, Food Security Outlook Update*, April 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>332</sup> Kazemi R. S., *Covid-19 in Afghanistan (3): Distributing aid and changing aid politics – view from a Herati village*, AAN, 16 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>333</sup> UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 23

According to the ALCS 2016-2017 data, collected before the drought conditions of winter 2017-2018, which was caused by lack of rain and snowfall<sup>334</sup>, more than 13 million people—or almost 45 % of the population of the country<sup>335</sup>—were very severely to moderately food insecure.<sup>336</sup> Before the drought, 9.7 million Afghans of 16 million who were defined as poor were food insecure; moreover, food insecurity affected other 3.4 million Afghans who were not poor.<sup>337</sup> The employment status of the head of household had a significant impact on food security: households with an employed head are less food insecure (41.5 %) compared to those where the head of household is underemployed (47.2 %), unemployed (50.8 %) or inactive (51.5 %).<sup>338</sup>

The drought, which affected 22 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, is expected to continue affecting food insecurity in addition to other factors, such as changing climatic conditions and growing population.<sup>339</sup> As noted by UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), ‘the drought has limited food production, depleted farmers and herders’ assets and livelihoods, reduced people’s income by half and weakened their health, prompting Afghans to engage in negative coping mechanisms, including begging, indebtedness and sale of assets and livestock.’<sup>340</sup> Moreover, in 2019, 280 000 people were affected by ‘unseasonal flooding in atypical locations’ because of heavy rainfall.<sup>341</sup>

As reported by FAO in September 2019, 3.9 million Afghans were ‘in need of emergency food and livelihoods assistance’ since they were affected by the 2017-2018 drought, while 13.5 million were severely food insecure, having ‘limited food production, depleted assets and livelihoods, reduced incomes and weakened health’.<sup>342</sup> According to the 2019 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report, 10.2 million of the Afghan population were acutely food insecure while 11.3 million would need humanitarian assistance in winter 2020-2021. Despite the passing of the drought, hunger and malnutrition were reported to remain ‘at dangerously high levels’; almost 14.3 million people were estimated ‘to be in either crisis or emergency food insecurity’ (IPC 3 and 4) from November 2019 to March 2020.<sup>343</sup> In 2019, the provinces of Badakhshan, Daykundi, Ghor, Nimroz, Nuristan, and Uruzgan were classified as emergencies (IPC 4).<sup>344</sup>

### **Food security in the cities of Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif**

According to FEWS report of April 2020, households located in Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif—as well as those in Jalal Abad, Kandahar, and other major cities—and dependent on small business or petty trade, remittances, non-agriculture wage labour, and low salary jobs were the worst affected by the reduced access to employment and significantly increased food prices.<sup>345</sup>

## **2.4.2 Food security for IDPs and returnees**

Referring to the WOA Assessment, UNOCHA noted in 2019 that 75 % of recent IDPs ‘have either poor or borderline food consumption’ while 31 % of households who were displaced because of the conflict were facing ‘either severe or moderate hunger’.<sup>346</sup> In September 2019, FAO reported that due to continuing recovery from the 2017-2018 drought undocumented returnees and displaced households in Badghis Province were ‘expected to continue to suffer’ a crisis level of food insecurity (IPC Phase 3).<sup>347</sup> According to FEWS, the majority of undocumented returnees would similarly face a crisis level of

<sup>334</sup> World Bank, Hunger before the Drought: Food Insecurity in Afghanistan, 1 June 2019, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>335</sup> World Bank, Hunger before the Drought: Food Insecurity in Afghanistan, 1 June 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>336</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 118

<sup>337</sup> World Bank, Hunger before the Drought: Food Insecurity in Afghanistan, 1 June 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>338</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 124

<sup>339</sup> World Bank, Hunger before the Drought: Food Insecurity in Afghanistan, 1 June 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>340</sup> FAO, Afghanistan, Situation Report, September 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>341</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>342</sup> FAO, Afghanistan Situation Report – September 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>343</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>344</sup> WFP, Afghanistan – Country Brief, March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>345</sup> FEWS, Afghanistan, Food Security Outlook Update, April 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>346</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 58

<sup>347</sup> FAO, Afghanistan, Situation Report, September 2019, [url](#), p. 2

food insecurity 'or worse outcomes' because of loss of their livelihood income in areas of origin and limited employment opportunities in major urban areas.<sup>348</sup>

A joint study on IDPs by NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall published in 2018, reported that 71 % of respondents listed the lack of food and water as one of their three main challenges. The situation was more severe in the provinces of Kabul, Kunduz, and Herat, compared to Kandahar and Nangarhar. The study also found no correlation between receiving assistance and struggling to access food and water: 47 % of respondents in Kabul mentioned receiving emergency assistance, while 83 % still reported access to food and water as a major challenge. The study also found that causes for food insecurity for IDPs were structural and according to the respondents, were connected particularly to their inability to find work, which 'may be down to a lack of skills suitable for their new environment, a lack of knowledge and networks or, in the case of women, cultural barriers to their economic integration'. Even though WFP and other organisations provided assistance, the underlying issues were not addressed: most IDPs had only two meals per day and some reported not having meals every day.<sup>349</sup>

## 2.5 Education

In its 2020 report, the World Bank noted improvement in literacy rates in Afghanistan. From 2011 to 2018, the literacy rate was reported to increase from around 32 % to 43 % for adults and from 47 % to 65 % for the youth.<sup>350</sup> As of 2018, the highest literacy rate was among men aged 15-24 (74 %), followed by women of the same age group (56 %). Only around 25 % of men and 3 % of women older than 65 were reported as literate.<sup>351</sup>

MoE 2018-2019 survey indicated a total number of 16 328 schools with 9 171 724 students, including 3 513 757 female students, studying in primary, secondary, professional, teacher training, vocational, and religious schools. The total number of teachers working in government-financed schools in 2018 was 203 201, 66 076 of whom were women; additionally, 28 748 teachers were employed in private schools. In 2018, 11 911 literacy courses were offered with 197 032 persons taking part in literacy education.<sup>352</sup>

Attending formal education, either in public schools, private schools, or *madrasas*, is compulsory in Afghanistan until the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.<sup>353</sup> However, according to the Ministry of Education (MoE), around 3.7 million children were out of school across Afghanistan in 2018 and 60 % of them were girls.<sup>354</sup> According to the findings of ALCS 2016-17, the main problem of education in Afghanistan was making a start at school. Place of residence, gender, disability and/or poverty status were reported as the factors which 'invariably differentiate[d] education outcomes, always strongly and often accumulatively impairing the outcomes of girls, rural inhabitants and Kuchis, people with disabilities, and the poor'.<sup>355</sup> Most of the out-of-school children lived in rural areas while the attendance rates, particularly for women, were considerably higher in urban areas than in rural Afghanistan.<sup>356</sup>

The challenges faced by Afghan education include 'insecurity, shortages of school buildings and textbooks, rural access issues, poor data reliability, and the alleged appointment of teachers on the basis of cronyism and bribery'<sup>357</sup> as well as 'poverty, damaged and inadequate supply of classrooms, shortage of teachers (especially female teachers), insufficient relevant learning and teaching resources, lack of inclusive facilities at schools, cultural norms which de-prioritise education for girls,

<sup>348</sup> FEWS, Afghanistan, Food Security Outlook Update, April 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>349</sup> NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>350</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>351</sup> UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Afghanistan, 2020, [url](#)

<sup>352</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2018-19, July 2019, [url](#), p. 1, 55

<sup>353</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 141

<sup>354</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, 3.7m Afghan Children, Mostly Girls, Out of School, 11 October 2018, [url](#)

<sup>355</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 139

<sup>356</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 143, 153-154

<sup>357</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Afghanistan, 2020, 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

and long travel distances to schools for many children'.<sup>358</sup> HRW reported in 2020 that girls with disabilities were often unable to receive schooling, because they might not be able to overcome daily journeys, as proper transportation was not available. Moreover, public schools did not have the infrastructure to enable the participation of students with disabilities in school activities.<sup>359</sup>

UNOCHA named 'parental level of education, general poverty and the ancillary costs of schooling' as additional key barriers to education. Families were reported to use negative coping mechanisms, *e.g. removing children from schools or arranging early marriages for girls*.<sup>360</sup> According to a study conducted by MoE, UNICEF, and Samuel Hall in 2018, the groups of marginalised children who were disproportionately excluded from and deprived of access to school comprised children with disabilities (including psychosocial issues), children from ethnic, linguistic, and religious minority groups, children living in urban slums and on the street, children whose families migrate seasonally for work, and refugee and IDP children.<sup>361</sup> Engagement in child labour was an additional factor for a considerable drop in school performance.<sup>362</sup> According to the 2019 WOA Assessment, referred to by UNOCHA, 21 % of households, in which at least one child was not attending school 'reported withdrawing children from school in order to bring in extra income'.<sup>363</sup>

### Gender gap

ALCS figures for 2016-17 put the female net attendance rate for primary school at 45.5 % (65.5 % for males), secondary school at around 24 % (almost 47 % for males), and tertiary school at nearly 5 % (almost 15 % for males).<sup>364</sup> According to the survey conducted by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN), girls had access to a school in 47 % of villages controlled by the government and in 18 % of villages under the control of non-state groups<sup>365</sup>, while for school access for boys the figures were 59 % and 42 % respectively.<sup>366</sup> A joint 2018 study by the MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall found the highest prevalence of out-of-school girls in the southern provinces, most notably Uruzgan (98 %), Zabul (95 %), Paktika (94 %), and Kandahar (90 %). The proportion was lower than average in the central and central highland provinces, such as Panjshir (38 %), Bamyan (34 %), and Daykundi (35 %).<sup>367</sup>

Schoolgirls and schools for girls continued to be targeted during the armed conflict.<sup>368</sup> According to UNOCHA, 'the combination of actual exposure to and potential fear of violence has left parents with little choice but to take pre-emptive measures to protect their children from harm.' According to the WOA Assessment, referred to by UNOCHA, around 18 % of shock-affected households reported that their girl-children did not attend school in 2019 'due to security concerns about their child travelling to or being at school'. Next to it, 32 % of households reported cultural reasons as the main barrier.<sup>369</sup> In the communication with EASO in 2018, Fabrizio Foschini added that in Afghan society it was usually considered inappropriate that girls moved around because of a real or perceived insecurity and cultural

<sup>358</sup> UNOCHA, 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>359</sup> HRW, "Disability is Not Weakness" – Discrimination and Barriers Facing Women and Girls with Disabilities in Afghanistan, April 2020, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>360</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 52

<sup>361</sup> Afghanistan, MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall, All in School and Learning: Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children – Afghanistan Country Study, June 2018, [url](#), p. 75

<sup>362</sup> Afghanistan, MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall, All in School and Learning: Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children – Afghanistan Country Study, June 2018, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>363</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 52

<sup>364</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 143

<sup>365</sup> UNODC, Afghanistan opium survey 2018 – Challenges to sustainable development, peace and security, July 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>366</sup> UNODC, Afghanistan opium survey 2018 – Challenges to sustainable development, peace and security, July 2019, [url](#), p. 35

<sup>367</sup> Afghanistan, MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall, All in School and Learning: Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children – Afghanistan Country Study, June 2018, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>368</sup> CEDAW, Concluding observation on the third periodic report of Afghanistan, CEDAW/C/AFG/CO/3, 10 March 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>369</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 25

reasons.<sup>370</sup> According to HRW, cultural barriers led to lower enrolment numbers more among Pashto speakers, compared to Dari speakers.<sup>371</sup>

Besides socio-economic and cultural barriers, female students and teachers were reported to face sexual violence and harassment. Furthermore, schools in Afghanistan were reported to lack frequently female teachers and infrastructure to meet the hygiene needs of girls, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas.<sup>372</sup> HRW reported in 2017 that 30 % of Afghan government schools lacked safe drinking water and 60 % did not have toilets, which particularly affected girl students.<sup>373</sup>

### Kabul

According to Fabrizio Foschini, Kabul has not only been the most educated part of Afghanistan for long but it also acts as a magnet for educated people from various parts of the country. The quality of teaching at the universities is higher in the capital than in the provinces and Kabul's job market, with the office of the government and national and international companies located there, has a greater capacity to absorb educated people.<sup>374</sup>

Kabul province has the highest literacy rate in Afghanistan: for 2016-17, the youth literacy rate was at around 74 % and the literacy rate for all the population above 15 years of age in the province was at around 54 %.<sup>375</sup> Kabul is also among the provinces that have the highest net attendance rates for primary school for boys and girls.<sup>376</sup> According to the World Bank's 2018 report, 22 % of all children were out of school in Kabul as of 2018; for female students the proportion was 30 %.<sup>377</sup>

### Herat

According to ALCS figures for 2016-17, Herat province's youth literacy rate was 52.5 % and the literacy rate for all the population above 15 in the province was 34.5 %, which was almost the same as the national average.<sup>378</sup> In Herat city, the literacy rate for people aged 15 years and above was around 57 % according to 2016 data: the rate for males was around 66 % and for females around 48 %.<sup>379</sup>

According to 2016 data, the net attendance rate in primary schooling in Herat city was 78 % (around 80 % for boys and around 76 % for girls). In secondary school, the attendance rate was 42 %, with almost similar figures for girls and boys.<sup>380</sup> According to UNHCR 2018 figures, Herat had the lowest returnee male children school enrolment rate (32 %), after Samangan and Parwan (31 %).<sup>381</sup>

### Mazar-e Sharif

According to ALCS figures for 2016-17, Balkh province's youth literacy rate was 57.7 % and the literacy rate for all the population above 15 in the province was 37.9 %, which was slightly above the national average.<sup>382</sup> The literacy rate for people aged 15 years and above in Mazar-e Sharif was around 62 % as of 2015: almost 72 % for boys and 51 % for girls.<sup>383</sup>

<sup>370</sup> Foschini F., email, 9 November 2018, in EASO, Afghanistan, Key socio-economic indicators, Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City, April 2019, [url](#), p. 40

<sup>371</sup> HRW, "I Won't Be a Doctor, and One Day You'll Be Sick" - Girls' Access to Education in Afghanistan, October 2017, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>372</sup> CEDAW, Concluding observation on the third periodic report of Afghanistan, CEDAW/C/AFG/CO/3, 10 March 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>373</sup> HRW, "I Won't Be a Doctor, and One Day You'll Be Sick" - Girls' Access to Education in Afghanistan, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 21-22

<sup>374</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>375</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Provincial Profile, 2018, [2018], [url](#), p. 9

<sup>376</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 144

<sup>377</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan: Promoting Education During Times of Increased Fragility, 15 August 2018, [url](#), pp. 9-10

<sup>378</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Provincial Profile, 2018, [2018], [url](#), p. 71

<sup>379</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Final Report of Herat Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey, 7 March 2017, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>380</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Final Report of Herat Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey, 7 March 2017, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>381</sup> UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>382</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Provincial Profile, 2018, [2018], [url](#), p. 9

<sup>383</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey: Balkh, 5 January 2015, [url](#), p. 17

Balkh province had one of the highest female school enrolment rates in the country as of 2014 (48 %).<sup>384</sup>

### 2.5.1 The impact of conflict on education

UNICEF reported on 192 attacks on schools and school personnel for 2018, which exceeded almost three times the number of attacks registered in 2017. The attacks were mostly attributed to the Taliban and comprised targeting of schools or killing, injury or abduction of personnel. UNICEF noted that many parents took their children out of school.<sup>385</sup> Due to insecurity, 718 schools were confirmed closed, with the biggest numbers in the provinces of Kandahar (128), Hilmand (119), Uruzgan (83), Zabul (67), Ghazni (63), Farah (59), and Paktika (47).<sup>386</sup>

In 2019, schools were attacked in election-related violence as well as general insecurity and cross-fire.<sup>387</sup> The 2019 presidential election period revealed a peak in targeting school facilities due to the use of government-owned schools as polling centres and caused a 'long-term impact' on the access to education.<sup>388</sup> Because of insecurity, 722 schools were closed and remained closed as of the end of October 2019.<sup>389</sup>

The Taliban and other armed groups, e.g. the ISKP, were reported to oppose girls' access to education and target their attacks against girls' schools, female students and their teachers.<sup>390</sup> For instance, in August 2019, the local media, with a reference to the Ministry of Interior, reported that Taliban militias set on fire a school in Shakardara district, Kabul province, in which at least 700 girls were enrolled.<sup>391</sup>

In November 2019, VOA reported on the death of nine primary school children on their way to school in Takhar province, due to a Taliban-planted land mine explosion.<sup>392</sup>

In an interview with EASO during the finalisation of this report, Kate Clark, co-director at the AAN explained the recent position of Taliban towards education as follows:

'When in 2009 and 2010 the Taliban's Layha changed, the general order to attack schools and teachers was dropped. In general, Taliban seem not to particularly like schools, but schools are popular with many of the people living in areas under their control, particularly boys' education. Generally, in districts that don't have schools, if the Taliban take control, they don't open schools. In some districts in Helmand, they have opened schools eventually because local people have travelled and seen what is happening in other places and wanted education for their boys, at least. Schools for small girls, primary education, is usually not a problem, but, again, if there are no girls' schools in areas coming under Taliban control, the Taliban will not open them. In such districts, people are likely not to be very interested in having girls educated anyway. However, local people do support girls' education, they may lobby for it. In Obeh district of Herat, for example, people managed to keep their schools for girls open right up to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The Taliban said they had to have female teachers only. There weren't enough, so they organised for girls who had finished 12<sup>th</sup> grade to fill the gaps. Basically, what happens with schools is quite variable; it all depends on the local commander and the population.'<sup>393</sup>

<sup>384</sup> Sahar, Culture of Education in Balkh Province: An Unique Example, 1 June 2017, [url](#)

<sup>385</sup> UNICEF, Preserving hope in Afghanistan – Protecting Children in the world's most lethal conflict, December 2019, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>386</sup> EiEWG, Afghanistan EiEWG: Schools closed due to insecurity in Afghanistan: January - December 2018, 13 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>387</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>388</sup> AOAV, The direct and reverberating impact of IEDs on children in Afghanistan, 1 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>389</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 52

<sup>390</sup> HRW, "I Won't Be a Doctor, and One Day You'll Be Sick" - Girls' Access to Education in Afghanistan, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 17, 66

<sup>391</sup> Tolonews, Girls School Torched in Kabul, 20 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>392</sup> VOA, 9 School Children Killed in Afghanistan Land Mine Blast, 2 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>393</sup> Clark K., Online video Interview with EASO, 27 July 2020

## 2.5.2 Education opportunities for IDPs and returnees

A joint survey by the World Bank and UNHCR on returnees, found that, as of 2018, access to schooling was improving after the return to Afghanistan as more households tended to send girl children to school compared to a prior return situation. Thus, 37 % of households with girl children reported to send all the girls to school; in households with boy children, the figure reached 61 %. Gender-gap in schooling after the return was also reported to decrease.<sup>394</sup>

As noted by a joint 2018 study of MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall, there were limitations in the access to education for IDPs and undocumented refugee returnees.<sup>395</sup> In 2019, UNOCHA reported that schools in locations with a high number of IDPs and returnees were overloaded, leaving many schools incapable to cope with the high numbers of students.<sup>396</sup> In the eastern region, such provinces as Kunar and Nangarhar were reported to be particularly affected: in the result, the teacher-student ratios were reported to reach regularly a proportion of one to 180 and even one to 250.<sup>397</sup>

Government schools typically request a number of documents, such as identification cards and official transfer letters from previous schooling institutions, acquisition of which could be an obstacle for enrolment for IDPs and returnees.<sup>398</sup> UNHCR reported in 2018 that IDPs and returnees were deprived of education and other essential services because of lacking civil documentation, i.e. *tazkera*.<sup>399</sup> A 2018 survey, conducted by NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, found 26 % of respondents saying that their lack of documentation hindered their access to education. In Herat and Kabul, 33 % of respondents mentioned the lack of *tazkera* impeding schooling for their family members while in Kunduz the figure was 16 %.<sup>400</sup>

The study by MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall found that the key barriers to displaced children's school enrolment were not political or legal but rather financial or related to the lack of appropriate teaching or schooling.<sup>401</sup> In its 2019 report, UNOCHA noted that returnee children were prevented from enrolment because of insufficient or inappropriate documentation and pointed that many students were 'forced to enter in the wrong grade or be taught via an entirely unfamiliar curriculum or language'.<sup>402</sup> Other issues comprised improper infrastructure and a lack of teaching materials.<sup>403</sup>

## 2.6 Health care

### 2.6.1 Basic data

Life expectancy at birth	64 years <sup>404</sup>
Death rate	12.7 deaths/1 000 population (2020 est.)
Maternal mortality rate	638 deaths/100 000 live births (2017 est.)

<sup>394</sup> World Bank and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, Findings from a 2018 Phone Survey of Afghan Returnees and UNHCR data, June 2019, [url](#), pp. 6, 22

<sup>395</sup> Afghanistan, MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall, All in School and Learning: Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children – Afghanistan Country Study, June 2018, [url](#), p. 49

<sup>396</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 52

<sup>397</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>398</sup> HRW, "I Won't Be a Doctor, and One Day You'll Be Sick" - Girls' Access to Education in Afghanistan, October 2017, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>399</sup> UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>400</sup> NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), pp. 37, 39

<sup>401</sup> Afghanistan, MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall, All in School and Learning: Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children – Afghanistan Country Study, June 2018, [url](#), p. 75

<sup>402</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 52

<sup>403</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>404</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan, Life expectancy at birth, total (years), n.d., [url](#)

<b>Infant (under 1) mortality rate</b>	104.3 deaths/1 000 live births
<b>Health expenditures</b>	11.8 % of GDP (2017)
<b>Physicians density</b>	0.28 physicians/1 000 population (2016)
<b>Hospital bed density</b>	0.5 beds/1 000 population (2014)
<b>Unimproved water sources in urban area</b>	21.8 % of population
<b>Unimproved sanitation facilities in urban areas</b>	54.9 % of population (2015 est.)
<b>HIV/AIDS – adult prevalence rate</b>	less than 1 % of population (2018 est.) <sup>405</sup>

Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières - MSF) warned that ‘health statistics from Afghanistan are notoriously unreliable. Constraints in monitoring – caused in particular by the remote control support of health facilities – mean that data from the most insecure areas are often excluded from statistics. This introduces a persistent bias that is likely to contribute to overly positive country averages.’<sup>406</sup> There has been particularly high variation in the estimates of maternal mortality rate and life expectancy.<sup>407</sup>

### Afghanistan health system

In 2001, Afghanistan had ‘a devastated health system and some of the worst health statistics in the world’.<sup>408</sup> Since then, Afghanistan’s health care has been steadily progressing but continues to rely on support from NGOs and the international community.<sup>409</sup> According to a 2019 World Health Organization bulletin, out of the 4 % of the total government budget assigned to the public health ministry, 80 % was funded by donors.<sup>410</sup> In March 2020, MSF reported that there was increasing pressure on countries such as Afghanistan to start financing their own health services, which was related to decreased international funding available for public health.<sup>411</sup>

Since 2002, structural changes were made to improve the health system, starting from the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS), implemented by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), which was followed in 2005 by the Essential Package for Hospital Services (EPHS) as its extension. The BPHS was intended to focus on those health issues where most progress could be made and focused specifically on rural areas and care for women and children.<sup>412</sup> The BPHS and the EPHS also restructured the healthcare facilities in the district of Mirbachakot, which were underfunded, understaffed and had very limited resources.<sup>413</sup> In 2016, the System Enhancement for Health Action (SEHAT) and Sehatmandi programmes were created to support the provision and improvement of BPHS and EPHS.<sup>414</sup> The Implementation Status & Results Report on the Sehatmandi Project published on March 2020 reported that the project is progressing in a positive manner and has good implementation pace, despite facing issues such as severe security challenges.<sup>415</sup>

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) stated in an April 2020 report that healthcare services in Afghanistan were provided by national and international NGOs that were contracted by the Ministry of Public Health in each province to deliver the BPHS. As a result, the reach and quality of health

<sup>405</sup> CIA, The World Factbook, Afghanistan, last updated 10 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>406</sup> MSF, Between Rhetoric and Reality, The Ongoing Struggle to Access Healthcare in Afghanistan, February 2014, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>407</sup> New York Times (The), How the U.S. Government Misleads the Public on Afghanistan, 8 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>408</sup> WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>409</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 168

<sup>410</sup> Blanchet K. et al, Priority setting in a context of insecurity, epidemiological transition and low financial risk protection, Afghanistan, 1 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>411</sup> MSF, Reality check: Afghanistan’s neglected healthcare crisis, March 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>412</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 168

<sup>413</sup> World Bank, Ensuring Accessible Health Care for Rural Afghans, 9 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>414</sup> World Bank, Community Health Care Increases Access to Medical Services in Herat Province, 1 November 2016, [url](#)

<sup>415</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Sehatmandi Project (P160615), 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 1



services differed per province.<sup>416</sup> MSF noted that when assigning such contracts to NGOs, a very significant factor was cost-effectiveness. NGOs would attempt to outbid each other by proposing very low, frequently unrealistic, price per capita. This resulted in numerous public medical facilities not being equipped with enough staff and medical supplies and the patients frequently having to purchase medication and medical equipment for their medical care themselves.<sup>417</sup>

In a 2018 report the World Bank concluded that over 2004–2010 health care services showed major improvements in Afghanistan, while in the period of 2011–2016 improvements continued at a slower pace.<sup>418</sup> The report added that the provinces with high performing health facilities in 2004–2010 were Baghlan, Faryab, Herat, Jawzjan, Khost, Kunar, Laghman, Logar, Nuristan and Paktika, whereas in the period of 2011–2016 health facilities were functioning best in Badakhshan, Balkh, Daykundi, Farah, Faryab, Helmand, Nangarhar, Paktiya, Saripul and Zabul with Faryab being the only high-performing province during both periods.<sup>419</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that in 2018, 3 135 healthcare facilities in total were functioning, ensuring access to healthcare to approximately 87 % of the population within a two-hour distance.<sup>420</sup> The same source noted that there were 134 hospitals in Afghanistan, 26 of them located in Kabul; 18 out of these 26 hospitals in Kabul functioning mostly as referral hospitals.<sup>421</sup> According to ALCS 2016-17, 93 % of the population lived within a range of two hours from a public clinic, 82.4 % lived less than two hours from a district or provincial hospital and 94.8 % were less than two hours away from a pharmacy.<sup>422</sup> A 2019 article by Al Jazeera noted that, due to the fact that the healthcare sector in Afghanistan is stretched thin, the patients who can afford to, opt to travel abroad to India, Pakistan and Turkey in order to receive medical care. According to the same source, Afghans spend approximately USD 300 million annually for medical care abroad.<sup>423</sup>

Despite these improvements, Afghanistan's public health care system, neglected during the years of conflict, continues to face challenges, such as damaged infrastructure, a lack of trained health care providers and under-resourced healthcare facilities. The situation is 'further complicated by a lack of security and pervasive poverty', according to WHO.<sup>424</sup> A 2017 study by Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) found 53 % of health care facilities experiencing structural and maintenance problems and poor hygiene and sanitation conditions were found in 45 % of the facilities.<sup>425</sup> IWA also added that the lack of electricity was another serious deficiency weakening the health sector with 20 % of the facilities having no electricity supply.<sup>426</sup> According to ALCS 2016-17, Afghanistan's health indicators remained poor and the health conditions of the rural population continued to be a matter of serious concern.<sup>427</sup> Public health services were even more overwhelmed due to large population movements inside the country and a significant number of returnees heading towards urban centres. Local medical facilities were largely unable to absorb the additional burden and could not cope with the increasing needs.<sup>428</sup>

In June 2020, ICRC noted that 'the recent rise in violence in Afghanistan, combined with targeted attacks against healthcare facilities, threatens to reduce or prevent access to health services for millions of Afghans that more than ever need health services with the outbreak of Covid19.'<sup>429</sup> The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released a study in June 2020 highlighting the fact that Afghanistan is particularly vulnerable to the Covid-19 outbreak, due to 'its limited health care system and few medical personnel, weak infrastructure, and poor social cohesion after 40 years of

<sup>416</sup> Smith S. S., Service Delivery in Taliban-Influenced Areas of Afghanistan, USIP, April 2020, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>417</sup> MSF, Reality check: Afghanistan's neglected healthcare crisis, March 2020, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>418</sup> World Bank, Progress in the face of insecurity: Improving health outcomes in Afghanistan, 6 March 2018, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>419</sup> World Bank, Progress in the face of insecurity: Improving health outcomes in Afghanistan, 6 March 2018, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>420</sup> WHO, WHO Afghanistan Country Office 2019, updated December 2018, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>421</sup> WHO, WHO Afghanistan Country Office 2019, updated December 2018, [url](#), p.24

<sup>422</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 169

<sup>423</sup> Latifi A., M., Years of war and poverty take toll on Afghanistan's healthcare, Al Jazeera, 25 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>424</sup> WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>425</sup> Integrity Watch Afghanistan, Life Matters: Caring For The Country's Most Precious Resource, August 2017, [url](#), pp. 4, 13

<sup>426</sup> Integrity Watch Afghanistan, Life Matters: Caring For The Country's Most Precious Resource, August 2017, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>427</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 168

<sup>428</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan – First Quarter Report (January to March 2017), May 2017, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>429</sup> ICRC, Afghanistan: Spike in violence against health care amid COVID-19 threatens millions, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

war, along with a large influx of refugees returning from Iran and Pakistan—without proper quarantine and containment measures in place’.<sup>430</sup> On 24 February 2020, Afghanistan’s Ministry of Public Health confirmed the country’s first patient suffering from Covid-19 in the province of Herat.<sup>431</sup> According to Johns Hopkins University, as of 5 July 2020, in Afghanistan there were 32 951 total confirmed Covid-19 cases and 854 deaths.<sup>432</sup>

## 2.6.2 Access and availability

According to a March 2020 MSF Report, the population of Afghanistan is still struggling to get access to healthcare, because of ‘pervasive violence, widespread poverty, and a weak public health system’. In the last six years, there has been no improvement in the population’s access to healthcare while for many people the situation has further worsened.<sup>433</sup> Even though the majority of the population has access to primary health care<sup>434</sup>, large sections of Afghanistan’s rural population still do not have access to essential health care services.<sup>435</sup>

A May 2020 report by AIHRC stated that ‘out of the total number of interviewees (2610 people), 1 401 people (53.7 %) lived more than two kilometers away from health centers, making it difficult for them to access health facilities. On the other hand, 42.8 % lived less than two kilometers away from health centers.’<sup>436</sup> A 2019 fact-finding mission report by the Finnish Immigration Service (FIS) noted that for health care, people were going to their local clinic, which was not always nearby. Normally, they paid a ‘nominal’ fee, unless they had a major health issue, in which case they would have to go to a private hospital. Individuals in need of healthcare would go to public provincial hospitals, some to private ones and some to Pakistan or India. The same source stated that the ‘quality of healthcare is a major issue in Afghanistan.’<sup>437</sup>

Afghanistan’s Ministry of Public Health stated that 60 % of people had access to health services in April 2018, when access was defined as one hour walking distance to the nearest clinic.<sup>438</sup> According to the aforementioned 2019 report by FIS, there were healthcare facilities available in Afghanistan, ‘but they are not good as the hospitals and clinics are severely understaffed and underfunded’. In addition, the majority of the facilities do not have proper diagnostic equipment.<sup>439</sup>

The more complicated procedures and serious illnesses are referred to the three district hospitals, which offer services including general surgery, internal medicine, paediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology, dentistry and treatment of contagious diseases like tuberculosis.<sup>440</sup> Many Afghans seek health care services abroad. According to the Ministry of Public Health, Afghans spent at least USD 300 million on treatment outside the country in the past few years with 90 % of these patients suffering from heart diseases.<sup>441</sup> Despite improvements in public hospitals and in the health sector for treatment of cardiac diseases, Afghanistan faces lack of medical facilities, medical equipment and lack of heart specialists.<sup>442</sup>

<sup>430</sup> UNDP, Pandemic threatens Afghanistan’s health system, economy, and peace process, UNDP study finds, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>431</sup> UN General Assembly Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/753–S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 13, para. 63

<sup>432</sup> Johns Hopkins University & Medicine, Coronavirus Resource Center, COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU), Afghanistan, last updated 5 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>433</sup> MSF, Reality check: Afghanistan’s neglected healthcare crisis, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 1; 3

<sup>434</sup> WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>435</sup> UNICEF, Afghanistan Annual Report 2017, February 2018, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>436</sup> AIHRC, Report Summary: Access to Health and Education Rights in Afghanistan, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>437</sup> Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>438</sup> Tolonews,, 60% of Afghans Now Have Access to Health Services, 4 April 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Worsening Security in Afghanistan Threatens Health Gains, Minister Says, 17 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>439</sup> Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>440</sup> World Bank, Ensuring Accessible Health Care for Rural Afghans, 9 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>441</sup> Tolonews, Afghanistan Imports 40% of Medicine ‘Illegally’, 6 October 2017, [url](#)

<sup>442</sup> Tolonews, 52,000 Patients in a Year; MoPH Says Cardiac Disease on the Rise, 29 September 2018, [url](#)

In April 2019, the Taliban revoked their security guarantees for the ICRC personnel working in areas under their control and banned the WHO's polio vaccination programmes. Both restrictions and issues were respectively resolved and lifted in September 2019.<sup>443</sup>

Due to COVID-19, UNOCHA reported that some health services such as routine vaccinations, the polio programme, antenatal care, mental health and psychosocial support had been either suspended or reduced.<sup>444</sup>

### **The impact of conflict on health care**

Attacks on healthcare have continued in recent years; many hospitals have to close down or suspend the provision of vital medical services. As a result, an even larger section of the population does not have access to basic medical services. Armed conflict also prevents vaccination campaigns, particularly for measles and polio.<sup>445</sup>

UNOCHA reported in December 2019 that in the first eleven months of 2019, approximately 24 000 hours of healthcare delivery were lost and 41 000 consultations were missed because of the forced closure and destruction of healthcare facilities.<sup>446</sup>

According to UNOCHA, medical workers and health facilities are most affected by security incidents and direct violence amongst all aid workers and humanitarian infrastructure in Afghanistan. Health personnel are being harassed, detained, kidnapped and killed.<sup>447</sup> Many people in Afghanistan lack access to health care due to the conflict, and trauma-care is regarded as one of the most critical gaps remaining in Afghanistan's public health care.<sup>448</sup> Medical facilities are increasingly a target of military attacks.<sup>449</sup> In March 2017, Islamic State members, dressed as doctors, attacked the largest military hospital in Kabul and opened fire on staff and patients. More than 30 individuals were killed and more than 50 were wounded.<sup>450</sup>

In 2019, UNAMA verified 75 incidents affecting the field of healthcare. Those included direct attacks or threats of attack against healthcare personnel and facilities as well as incidental damage of healthcare facilities. The majority of those incidents was attributed either to the Taliban or to Anti-Government Elements (AGEs).<sup>451</sup> According to WHO, in 2019 (as of 31 December 2019), there were 119 incidents of attacks on healthcare, including attacks on facilities, personnel, supplies, transport, patients and warehouses. 258 facilities were affected and 84 health care providers were severely affected.<sup>452</sup>

In the period between 28 January 2020 and 23 May 2020, 4 incidents of attacks on healthcare were documented; 2 facilities were damaged, 2 healthcare providers were injured, 1 patient was injured, 13 other persons were affected (5 injured and 7 killed) and 1 ambulance and 1 supply of medicine were also affected.<sup>453</sup> On 12 May 2020, gunmen attacked the Dasht-e Barchi hospital in Kabul, which housed a maternity clinic run by MSF. Pregnant women, mothers and babies were targeted in the attack.<sup>454</sup> According to MSF, 24 people were killed as a result of the attack and at least 20 more people were

<sup>443</sup> HRW, Afghanistan. Events of 2019, 14 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>444</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan- Afghanistan 2018-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 106

<sup>445</sup> MSF, Reality check: Afghanistan's neglected healthcare crisis, March 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>446</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020, December 2019, [url](#), p. 62

<sup>447</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin - Afghanistan, Issue 77 (1 - 30 June 2018), 24 July 2018, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>448</sup> WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>449</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2016, February 2017, [url](#), p. 27; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2017, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 14-16

<sup>450</sup> BBC, IS gunmen dressed as medics kill 30 at Kabul Military Hospital, 8 March 2017, [url](#)

<sup>451</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Annual Report 2019, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>452</sup> WHO, Afghanistan. Attacks on healthcare in 2019 as of 31 December 2019, 31 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>453</sup> WHO, Afghanistan. Attacks on healthcare (January 28, 2020 - May 23, 2020), 23 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>454</sup> New Humanitarian (the), Afghanistan hospital attack a 'war crime', rights groups say, 13 May 2020, [url](#); Guardian (The), Newborns among 40 killed in attacks on Afghan hospital and funeral, 12 May 2020, [url](#); MSF, Afghanistan: Pregnant women and babies attacked in Kabul hospital, 13 May 2020, [url](#); CBC, Newborns among 16 dead in Kabul hospital attack, 12 May 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/kabul-hospital-attack-1.5565708>

injured. Among the fatalities were eleven women – three of which were in the delivery room with their unborn babies, two young boys and a midwife. Among the injured were five women, two new-born babies and three Afghan MSF staff.<sup>455</sup>

The attack has also ‘deprived women and children in Kabul of a fundamental health care service, in a context where access to essential care is already limited. The maternity hospital is located in an area of western Kabul with a population of more than 1.5 million people.’<sup>456</sup> According to different news agencies, no armed group is claiming responsibility of the attacks, including the Taliban.<sup>457</sup>

Following this attack, MSF announced on 15 June 2020 that they would withdraw and cease operating out of the Dasht-e Barchi hospital. This withdrawal would result in the women of the area being left without maternity care services.<sup>458</sup>

### Cost of treatment

Although Article 52 of the Afghan Constitution stipulated that health care should be free of charge, people have to pay for medications, doctor’s fees, laboratory tests and inpatient care in many public facilities.<sup>459</sup> High treatment costs were the main reason treatment was avoided.<sup>460</sup> The payment for medications, laboratory tests, inpatient care, transportation and consultation fees pushed many into debt.<sup>461</sup>

Corruption and hidden costs constitute a significant barrier to the access in healthcare. A 2018 MSF survey at the Herat Regional Hospital documented that 83 % of the participants in the survey were faced with increased difficulty to afford medical care over the past two years. In order to cover medical care, 63 % stated that they borrowed money, 26 % used their savings and 11 % had to sell goods. 89 % of the participants in the survey in Herat stated that they had to postpone receiving medical care due to financial pressure on their household, while almost half of them stated that they had to postpone receiving medical care more than 3 times in the previous 2 years.<sup>462</sup>

According to a 2014 MSF survey, at least 60 % of the people interviewed live on less than USD 1 per day and it is often impossible for them to pay medical costs. More than half of those interviewed in Kabul and Kunduz reported having paid about USD 44 just for medications during a previous illness. When the medications were available at the health facility, patients often could not afford them. 60 % of people interviewed by MSF in Kabul did not get medication because of high costs.<sup>463</sup> In a study among urban poor, Samuel Hall found in 2014 that ‘even with access to public health facilities, the cost of medication is often too high for urban households to follow the treatment prescribed by doctors. For serious illnesses, many urban households will prefer travelling abroad to get treatment, in particular to Pakistan or India, increasing the overall costs of treatment for households.’<sup>464</sup>

Thomas Ruttig noted in a 2017 paper that sometimes second year medical students open a clinic on their own and start caring for people without any control mechanism in place to check the quality of the provided services.<sup>465</sup> Since the ‘good’ clinics in Kabul, including those run by relief organisations,

<sup>455</sup> MSF, Kabul hospital attack: “They came to kill the mothers.”, 14 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>456</sup> MSF, Afghanistan: Pregnant women and babies attacked in Kabul hospital, 13 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>457</sup> HRW, Afghanistan: Attack on Hospital a War Crime, 12 May 2020, [url](#); VOA News, Taliban Respond to Ghani’s Statement with Attack, 14 May 2020, [url](#); CBC, Taliban kill 5, claim retaliation for being blamed in Kabul maternity hospital attack, 14 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>458</sup> MSF, MSF withdraws from Dasht-e-Barchi following attack on patients and staff, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>459</sup> Dörner, F. and Langbein, L., Between Rhetoric and Reality: Access to health care and its limitations, AAN, 2 December 2014, [url](#)

<sup>460</sup> Frost A., et al., An assessment of barriers to accessing the BPHs in Afghanistan, 15 November 2016, [url](#)

<sup>461</sup> MSF, Between rhetoric and reality, The ongoing struggle to access healthcare in Afghanistan, February 2014, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>462</sup> MSF, Reality check: Afghanistan’s neglected healthcare crisis, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 10-13

<sup>463</sup> MSF, Between rhetoric and reality, The ongoing struggle to access healthcare in Afghanistan, February 2014, [url](#), pp. 31-35

<sup>464</sup> Samuel Hall, Urban Poverty Report - A Study of Poverty, Food Insecurity and Resilience in Afghan Cities, 2014, [url](#), p. 85

<sup>465</sup> Ruttig T., Notiz Afghanistan Alltag in Kabul, SEM, 20 July 2017, [url](#), p. 8

cannot keep up with the demand, there is a strong medical tourism. Afghans do not rely on their own doctors, not even for minor medical interventions, and drive to Pakistan instead. The costs for the travel are not that high, at least for the middle class.<sup>466</sup>

The bad reputation of the public health system pushed many towards private health care providers who charged high fees for their services, benefitting from the distrust surrounding the public sector. However, 'many reported overprescribing, misdiagnosing and even malpractice by private practitioners.'<sup>467</sup>

According to MSF, a cost-recovery approach started being implemented in December 2018. This approach included the 'collection of user fees in some secondary and tertiary medical facilities in the country'. This approach will likely further affect and limit access to healthcare, since many people already had to limit the money spent on essential needs in order to cover healthcare costs.<sup>468</sup> In addition, patients frequently need to buy medicine and equipment themselves for their treatment due to the fact that many public medical facilities do not have enough staff and supplies to cover the needs. As a result of that, basic health provision become even less accessible to individuals who cannot cover this extra cost.<sup>469</sup>

### Availability of medicines

The 2019 fact-finding mission report by FIS noted that the healthcare facilities in Afghanistan frequently have issues with getting medication. Medicine quality was also a significant issue. More specifically, both good and bad quality medication were available; those who can afford it can purchase the good quality medication, while those who cannot are limited to the bad quality medication. However, access to medication of good quality cannot be always guaranteed.<sup>470</sup> According to a fact sheet by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), IOM and ZIRF Counselling from 2017 'any kind of medication is available on the Afghanistan markets now, but the costs vary based on quality, company names and manufacturers.'<sup>471</sup>

The AIHRC conducted research in the period between August 2019 and March 2020 in order to collect information on citizens' access to their rights to health and education. Among the respondents, 44.5 % were not satisfied with health care services and centres, with the main reasons for dissatisfaction being the lack of medical equipment at health centres (48.1 %), lack of specialist doctors (24.4 %), lack of female doctors (7.1 %), and improper behaviour of health centres' staff (9.3 %).<sup>472</sup>

The Ministry of Public Health prepared the National Essential Medicines List of Afghanistan containing all the medicines recommended for use in BPHS and EPHS.<sup>473</sup> These essential medicines were a major challenge for the health system, both in terms of quality and quantity.<sup>474</sup>

Availability of medicines and medical equipment is limited due to insecurity, inaccessibility of roads and disruption of electricity or temperature-controlled supply chains. Often there are no life-saving medicines, even in referral hospitals.<sup>475</sup> Required medicine may not be delivered to hospitals on time, creating temporary medicine shortages. In such instances, medicines are only used in emergency cases. The remaining patients must buy them from private pharmacies.<sup>476</sup>

<sup>466</sup> Ruttig T., Notiz Afghanistan Alltag in Kabul, SEM, 20 July 2017, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>467</sup> Dörner F. and Langbein L., Between Rhetoric and Reality: Access to health care and its limitations, AAN, 2 December 2014, [url](#)

<sup>468</sup> MSF, Reality check: Afghanistan's neglected healthcare crisis, March 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>469</sup> MSF, Reality check: Afghanistan's neglected healthcare crisis, March 2020, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>470</sup> Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>471</sup> BAMF, IOM and ZIRF, Country Fact Sheet Afghanistan 2017, 10 January 2017, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>472</sup> AIHRC, Report Summary: Access to Health and Education Rights in Afghanistan, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>473</sup> Afghanistan, MoPH, National Essential Medicines List, 2014, [url](#)

<sup>474</sup> WHO, Afghanistan - Essential medicines and pharmaceutical policies, [2017], [url](#)

<sup>475</sup> WHO, Health Cluster Strategic Response Plan, 2 February 2017, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>476</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, State-run hospitals in Kabul Faced with medicine shortage, 12 August 2015, [url](#)

According to WHO, ‘most of the essential medicines are imported from neighbouring countries, sometimes illegally.’<sup>477</sup> According to a July 2014 article, local authorities had no proper testing equipment, and quality control available in Kabul was a lengthy process that ‘costs the trader a lot, so no one wants to import medicine legally and they resort to smuggling’.<sup>478</sup>

The whole process of importing medicine is vulnerable to corruption with irregularities in the registration of companies responsible for import. It is estimated that around 70 % of pharmaceuticals imported to Afghanistan are produced in neighbouring countries, specifically for the Afghan market. Many of these pharmaceutical suppliers are not allowed to sell their products on their own market, but are allowed to export them to Afghanistan.<sup>479</sup>

According to a January 2015 article in the Guardian, markets were flooded with low-quality and counterfeit medicines. A doctor and provincial council member for Nangarhar quoted in the article clarified: ‘illicit medicine comes in two types [...] The first is completely fake. The second contains a small dose, say 20 %, of the stated medicine, and this type can be most harmful. Too small a quantity of an antibiotic, for example, will not only fail to treat an infection effectively but risks making the bacteria drug-resistant.’<sup>480</sup> The Medicine Importers Union stated that at least 40 % of medicine and medical equipment enter the Afghan market illegally and many of the pharmaceutical products are low quality.<sup>481</sup> In 2017 the Ministry of Health held a campaign against counterfeit and sub-standard medicine, which was imported and sold across the country.<sup>482</sup> WHO reported in 2017 that some Afghans were using traditional medicine for health problems as it was less expensive and easily accessible.<sup>483</sup>

## Kabul

In a study on urban poverty, Samuel Hall found in 2014 that Kabul benefitted from easier access to health facilities than other cities.<sup>484</sup> Kabul was one of the provinces with the highest proportion of women with access to pregnancy services and birth-related healthcare.<sup>485</sup> Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO) noted in a 2016 report that ‘though people have access to public and private health services in Kabul City, poor quality motivates those who can to seek treatment in India and Pakistan [...] Some corruption – in the form of requiring payments for service at public facilities and doctors receiving kickbacks from pharmacies – is reported and there are widespread complaints about having to purchase medicines in the market, rather than receive them for free at the clinic.’<sup>486</sup>

As noted by the 2019 FIS report, large numbers of people arriving in Kabul have resulted in limited access to basic healthcare, particularly for those who cannot afford to go to private hospitals.<sup>487</sup> According to the 2019 Whole of Afghanistan Assessment (WoAA) by UNOCHA and REACH, 33 % of the households in Kabul reported not having access to a healthcare centre – public or private - nearby or in their village in the 3 months before the date of data collection; 72 % reported that their limited access to healthcare was due to the very high cost of services; 70 % stated that it was because of the very high cost of medicine and 23 % cited other reasons.<sup>488</sup>

A total of 47 health facilities in Kabul City were included in the Kabul Urban Health Project which aimed to improve access to health services in the capital.<sup>489</sup> Most of the trauma care in Kabul was provided

<sup>477</sup> WHO, Afghanistan - Essential medicines and pharmaceutical policies, [2017], [url](#)

<sup>478</sup> IWPR, Afghans Complain of Substandard Medicines, 11 July 2014, [url](#)

<sup>479</sup> Daily Outlook Afghanistan, Low quality medicines, 19 October 2016, [url](#)

<sup>480</sup> Guardian (The), Killing, not curing: deadly boom in counterfeit medicine in Afghanistan, 7 January 2015, [url](#)

<sup>481</sup> Tolonews, Afghanistan Imports 40% of Medicine ‘Illegally’, 6 October 2017, [url](#)

<sup>482</sup> AA, Afghan ministry takes step against counterfeit medicine, 29 November 2017, [url](#)

<sup>483</sup> WHO, Afghanistan - Essential medicines and pharmaceutical policies, [2017], [url](#)

<sup>484</sup> Samuel Hall, Urban Poverty Report - A Study of Poverty, Food Security and Resilience in Afghan Cities, 2014, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>485</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 184, 191, 193

<sup>486</sup> APPRO, Afghanistan Rights Monitor: Baseline Report, April 2016, [url](#), pp. 59

<sup>487</sup> Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>488</sup> UNOCHA/REACH, WoAA, Multi Sectoral Needs Assessment 2019, September 2019, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>489</sup> World Bank, Kabul's Renovated Hospital Improves Quality of Healthcare for Thousands, 30 September 2018, [url](#)

by Emergency, an Italian NGO which offered specialised trauma care that was not available in standard government facilities, treating both local patients and those from outside of Kabul.<sup>490</sup>

According to a 2018 MedCOI project request, there was no private mental health care institution in Kabul providing inpatient treatment, but two public institutions offered this kind of treatment for free. Medication might not be available in the hospitals free of charge, but the patient might be asked to pay for it. Unofficial fees could be also charged for treatment. Outpatient treatment was provided by various private specialists who charge a fee ranging from AFN 200 to 500 for a consultation visit. The source noted that ‘in case of suicide attempt the patient can be treated for free in public hospitals’, and ‘there are also many private practices in Kabul City offering this kind of treatment.’<sup>491</sup>

German-funded International Psycho-Social Organisation (IPSO) offered psycho-social assistance for those deported from Germany but also for locals who needed psycho-social help, assisting 400 to 500 people daily. Their services included self-awareness groups, Afghan-life skills training, one-to-one counselling and other types of psychosocial help.<sup>492</sup> A MedCOI source confirmed that there was outpatient treatment, psychiatric counselling, and follow up by a psychiatrist or psychologist available in this institution free of charge.<sup>493</sup> However, the director of an organisation providing support for migrants in Kabul, interviewed by Asylos, noted that IPSO had ‘very limited sources and services’ and might not be able to help someone who had been in a bad mental state for many years.<sup>494</sup>

## Herat

The 2014 Samuel Hall study on urban poverty found that Herat benefitted from easier access to health facilities than other cities such as Mazar-e Sharif or Kandahar where the average distance to a health facility was ‘significantly higher’.<sup>495</sup> Herat Regional Hospital, located in the centre of Herat city, was the main hospital serving four provinces (Herat, Badghis, Ghor, Farah and Nimroz) with specialised tertiary level health services, including the treatment of hundreds of conflict wounded referrals from the area. The hospital received 1 000-1 500 patients per day on average and had the capacity of 650 beds.<sup>496</sup> Jebrael health centre north-west of Herat city was providing basic health services to about 60 000 people in the densely populated area with an average of 300 visitors a day, most of whom visited the immunisation and general outpatient units.<sup>497</sup> According to the provincial director of health, Herat had 65 private health clinics in April 2017. However, Herat residents complained that ‘many private healthcare centers have changed healthcare services into a business’ and also about the low quality of medicines, lack of treatment facilities and doctors’ ability to diagnose diseases properly. As a result, a number of Heratis chose to travel abroad for treatment.<sup>498</sup>

In September 2018, UNOCHA reported that basic and secondary health care facilities in Herat city had become insufficient to cope with the large numbers of IDPs that had come to Herat city because of the drought and conflict in their home districts. The occupancy rates of the Regional Pediatric Hospital, for

<sup>490</sup> WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>491</sup> Project MedCOI, 25 April 2018. MedCOI is an AMIF financed project to obtain medical country of origin information. The project allows 12 European Union member states plus Norway and Switzerland to make use of the services of the ‘MedCOI’ team in the Netherlands and Belgium. The MedCOI team makes enquiries with qualified doctors and other experts working in countries of origin. The information obtained is reviewed by the MedCOI project team before it is forwarded to the relevant COI Service.

<sup>492</sup> Bjelica J. and Ruttig T., Voluntary and Forced Returns to Afghanistan in 2016/17: Trends, statistics and experiences, AAN, 19 May 2017, [url](#)

<sup>493</sup> Project MedCOI; 25 April 2018. MedCOI is an AMIF financed project to obtain medical country of origin information. The project allows 12 European Union member states plus Norway and Switzerland to make use of the services of the ‘MedCOI’ team in the Netherlands and Belgium. The MedCOI team makes enquiries with qualified doctors and other experts working in countries of origin. The information obtained is reviewed by the MedCOI project team before it is forwarded to the relevant COI Service.

<sup>494</sup> Asylos, Afghanistan: Situation of young male ‘Westernised’ returnees to Kabul, August 2017, [url](#), p. 64

<sup>495</sup> Samuel Hall, Urban Poverty Report - A Study of Poverty, Food Security and Resilience in Afghan Cities, 2014, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>496</sup> WHO, Construction of Triage Area in Herat Regional Hospital, Project Proposal, 29 September 2017, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>497</sup> World Bank, Community Health Care Increases Access to Medical Services in Herat Province, 1 November 2016, [url](#)

<sup>498</sup> Tolonews, Herat Residents Criticize ‘Lack of Treatment Facilities’, 7 April 2017, [url](#)

example, have risen to 150 %.<sup>499</sup> According to the 2019 WoAA, 45 % of households in Herat reported not having had access to a healthcare centre – public or private - nearby or in their village in the 3 months before the date of data collection; 63 % reported that the issue limiting their access to healthcare was due to the very high cost of services, 61 % stated that it was because of the very high cost of medicine and 34 % cited inability to reach the healthcare centres, for instance due to lack of transport.<sup>500</sup>

According to a MedCOI request, in Herat there was a public hospital providing both outpatient and inpatient treatment by a psychiatrist or psychologist, and it was available free of charge with the possibility of free medication if available. There was also a private hospital providing these treatments. The private facility charged AFN 250 to 450 for a consultation visit and AFN 1 500 to 6 000 per night for inpatient treatment. The source mentioned that for a person with low financial means, the cost for inpatient treatment would be below AFN 2 500 per night.<sup>501</sup>

Media sources reported that there was only one ‘high-security psychiatric facility’ in Afghanistan, located in Herat and run by the Red Crescent. The Red Crescent Secure Psychiatric Institution was meant for patients considered to be the ‘most dangerous’ and who were said to be often chained and sedated. Many of the 300 patients have to stay in the facility permanently, because there were no adequate outpatient mental health services available.<sup>502</sup>

At the end of March 2020, the Guardian reported that in the main Covid-19 hospital in Herat, supplies were scarce despite the province had received 400 million afghanis (USD 5.20 million) from the central government to tackle the pandemic. In the same hospital, there were reportedly only ten doctors, one specialist and twenty nurses.<sup>503</sup>

### Mazar-e Sharif

The System Enhancement for Health Action in Transition (SEHAT) program aiming to expand the scope, quality and coverage of health services, set up 814 health posts in Balkh province. The health services at the 90 health facilities operating in the province were implemented by the NGO Bakhtar Development Network contracted by MoPH.<sup>504</sup> According to the German development agency GIZ, the Abu Ali Sinha Balkhi Regional Hospital in Mazar-e Sharif served as the central hospital for Balkh province and was the referral hospital for the northern region, receiving all the accident and emergency cases and acting as a major general hospital for the clinics in the surrounding districts.<sup>505</sup>

There were approximately 10-15 hospitals in Mazar-e Sharif, most of them private, and 30-50 health clinics, as of 2018.<sup>506</sup> An ICRC orthopaedic centre located in Mazar-e Sharif has served patients for almost three decades, with 19 000 people served in 2017. The centre was forced to temporarily close for two months when a patient shot dead an ICRC staff member in the end of 2017.<sup>507</sup>

According to a 2016 article by the Guardian, Afghanistan’s first private neuro-psychiatric clinic, Alemi hospital, was located in the outskirts of Mazar-e Sharif. In 2016 the hospital saw up to 120 patients a

<sup>499</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan Drought Response, Situation Report No. 2 (as of 16 September 2018), 20 September 2018, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>500</sup> UNOCHA/REACH, WoAA, Multi Sectoral Needs Assessment 2019, September 2019, [url](#), p. 141

<sup>501</sup> Project MedCOI; 5 June 2018. MedCOI is an AMIF financed project to obtain medical country of origin information. The project allows 12 European Union member states plus Norway and Switzerland to make use of the services of the ‘MedCOI’ team in the Netherlands and Belgium. The MedCOI team makes enquiries with qualified doctors and other experts working in countries of origin. The information obtained is reviewed by the MedCOI project team before it is forwarded to the relevant COI Service

<sup>502</sup> BBC, Inside Afghanistan's only high security mental institution, 8 February 2018, [url](#) [online video]; NPR, Afghanistan's Lone Psychiatric Hospital Reveals Mental Health Crisis Fueled By War, 14 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>503</sup> Guardian (The), 'We're not ready': coronavirus looms over the fragile Afghan health system, 30 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>504</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Residents Benefit from Improved Quality Healthcare in Balkh Province, 23 April 2017, [url](#)

<sup>505</sup> FFO and GIZ, Securing Basic Medical Care, March 2014, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>506</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Fact-Finding Mission Report Afghanistan, [source: Representative of an international NGO], April 2018, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>507</sup> New York Times (The), He Killed a Red Cross Worker: ‘I Will Go to Hell for What I Did’, 7 April 2018, [url](#)



day, six days a week, some of them travelling long distances to reach the hospital.<sup>508</sup> In Mazar-e Sharif, according to a MedCOI request, there were two facilities providing mental health service. It was mentioned that Alemi hospital had ‘relatively better staff and service’, but also that the facility was able to provide treatment only with medication and ‘its expertise and abilities are not sufficient in psychotherapy’. Moreover, the facility ‘lacks qualified therapists and capacity for taking decision about the approaches of the treatment’.<sup>509</sup> Another article about Alemi hospital also stated that the facility was capable to assist 80 to 120 patients a day.<sup>510</sup>

Balkh was among the provinces of Afghanistan with the highest proportion of at least one ante-natal care visit during pregnancy.<sup>511</sup>

## 2.6.3 Mental health care

According to Human Rights Watch 2020 report, a large number of Afghans suffer from psychological disabilities/mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), conditions that can frequently be directly linked with the prolonged conflict.<sup>512</sup> Although, it is difficult to quantify the number of people suffering from psychological trauma due to low reporting and diagnosis, UNOCHA stated that, however, ‘the likelihood of significant portions of the population suffering mental health issues as a result of conflict is thought to be very high. With extremely low availability of psychosocial support services and repeated exposure to traumatic shocks, recovery opportunities are likely to be minimal, with people instead resorting to negative coping mechanisms.’<sup>513</sup>

There are no accurate figures available on the prevalence of mental disorders in Afghanistan, but according to estimates by WHO, more than a million Afghans suffer from depressive disorders and over 1.2 million suffer from anxiety disorders.<sup>514</sup> According to another estimate some 42 to 66 % of Afghans are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, it is uncommon to have a formal diagnosis of PTSD, because some of the symptoms related to it are not considered abnormal as many people are suffering from them in Afghanistan.<sup>515</sup> According to the 2016 study by Samuel Hall ‘the alarming mental health situation of the Afghan youth should not be considered as a secondary individual health issue anymore, but as an actual threat to any possible social, economic and political development in the country.’ The majority (70 %) of young Kabulis have experienced traumatic events (one or more shocks that include criminal or terrorist-related issues and not only personal traumas). The study also found that returnees and IDPs found themselves deprived from basic healthcare compared to those with no migration background.<sup>516</sup>

Afghanistan’s national mental health strategy estimated that half of all Afghans have a mental health problem, but as of February 2016 there was only one public mental health hospital in Afghanistan, located in Kabul.<sup>517</sup> According to a 2019 Foreign Policy article, in Afghanistan, mental health facilities are scarce and mental health was not part of the resources provided by international aid, unlike

<sup>508</sup> Guardian (The), ‘My Liver is Bleeding’: Life inside an Afghan Psychiatric Hospital - in Pictures, 5 February 2016, [url](#)

<sup>509</sup> Project MedCOI; 24 June 2017. MedCOI is an AMIF financed project to obtain medical country of origin information. The project allows 12 European Union member states plus Norway and Switzerland to make use of the services of the ‘MedCOI’ team in the Netherlands and Belgium. The MedCOI team makes enquiries with qualified doctors and other experts working in countries of origin. The information obtained is reviewed by the MedCOI project team before it is forwarded to the relevant COI Service

<sup>510</sup> de Rond M. and Rakita M., Why there is no PTSD in Afghanistan, Medium, 28 November 2016, [url](#)

<sup>511</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 184

<sup>512</sup> HRW, “Disability Is Not Weakness”. Discrimination and Barriers Facing Women and Girls with Disabilities in Afghanistan, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>513</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020, December 2019, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>514</sup> WHO, Depression a leading cause of ill health and disability among Afghans – fighting stigma is key to recovery, 9 April 2017, [url](#)

<sup>515</sup> de Rond M. and Rakita M., Why there is no PTSD in Afghanistan, Medium, 28 November 2016, [url](#)

<sup>516</sup> Samuel Hall, Urban displaced youth in Kabul – Part 1. Mental Health Also Matters, 2016, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>517</sup> Guardian (The), ‘My Liver is Bleeding’: Life inside an Afghan Psychiatric Hospital - in Pictures, 5 February 2016, [url](#)

vaccines and medicine.<sup>518</sup> As of 2018, there was reportedly only one high-security psychiatric facility in Afghanistan, ‘where many of the patients are often chained and sedated’.<sup>519</sup>

The Public Health Minister stated in 2017 that the ministry ‘has recently trained over 700 professional psychological counsellors and 101 specialised mental health doctors’. It is also mentioned that the trained professionals are working in government-run health centres or for various health NGOs.<sup>520</sup> Furthermore the minister, quoted in an article by IWPR (Institute for War and Peace Reporting), noted that there are 300 dedicated mental health clinics in Afghanistan and psychological services are available at some 1 500 health centres in total. Also, another 200 specialist centres have been planned by the government.<sup>521</sup> According to another article by IWPR ‘the ministry had set up clinics across the 34 provinces of the country to treat psychological problems’, but ‘there was only one dedicated mental health hospital in Kabul.’<sup>522</sup>

However, according to a scholar with field experience in Afghanistan interviewed by Asylos ‘mental health care in Afghanistan is virtually non-existent’ with one public mental health hospital operating in Kabul and a private one in Mazar-e Sharif.<sup>523</sup> The 2016 Samuel Hall study reported that Afghanistan suffers from the lack of trained professionals (psychiatrists, social workers, psychologists), sufficient infrastructure and awareness about mental health issues with ‘only one tertiary health facility (Kabul Mental Health Hospital), approximately three trained psychiatrists and ten psychologists “covering” a population of more than 30 million people’.<sup>524</sup>

According to a 2018 MedCOI request, ‘people usually don’t want to keep their mental patients in a public mental health care hospital because of the harsh and careless interaction with the patients.’ Instead, people ‘who can afford it often choose private health care or travel abroad to Pakistan or India to get better treatment. This does not happen only for mental health care, but for other kinds of treatments as well.’<sup>525</sup>

#### 2.6.4 Access to health care for women

Women faced specific obstacles when accessing health services; these obstacles included their own lack of knowledge of health problems and practices due to low literacy rates, restrictions on their movement and limited access to money.<sup>526</sup> UNOCHA noted that, ‘prohibitions on men providing medical treatment to women’, compromise women’s access to health care, adding that merely 15 % of nurses and 2 % of doctors are female.<sup>527</sup> In addition, UNOCHA stated that women and girls faced ‘additional specific obstacles in obtaining the healthcare they require to meet their different needs’. Different factors such as the volatile security situation and cultural and traditional practices perceiving that women should remain at home affect women’s access to healthcare and result in morbidity and mortality that could be avoided. According to the same source, in 2019 only 15 % of nurses and 2 % of medical doctors were female, which poses a risk for women.<sup>528</sup>

<sup>518</sup> Azad S., Endless Conflict in Afghanistan Is Driving a Mental Health Crisis, FP (Foreign Policy), 27 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>519</sup> NPR, Afghanistan's Lone Psychiatric Hospital Reveals Mental Health Crisis Fueled By War, 14 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>520</sup> WHO, Depression a leading cause of ill health and disability among Afghans – fighting stigma is key to recovery, 9 April 2017, [url](#)

<sup>521</sup> IWPR, Depression Rampant Among Afghan Women, 12 February 2017, [url](#)

<sup>522</sup> IWPR, Afghan Women Hit by Mental Health Crisis, 12 May 2016, [url](#)

<sup>523</sup> Asylos, Afghanistan: Situation of young male ‘Westernised’ returnees to Kabul, August 2017, [url](#), p. 111

<sup>524</sup> Samuel Hall, Urban displaced youth in Kabul – Part 1. Mental Health Also Matters, 2016, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>525</sup> Project MedCOI; 25 April 2018. MedCOI is an AMIF financed project to obtain medical country of origin information. The project allows 12 European Union member states plus Norway and Switzerland to make use of the services of the ‘MedCOI’ team in the Netherlands and Belgium. The MedCOI team makes enquiries with qualified doctors and other experts working in countries of origin. The information obtained is reviewed by the MedCOI project team before it is forwarded to the relevant COI Service

<sup>526</sup> Dörner F. and Langbein L., Between Rhetoric and Reality: Access to health care and its limitations, AAN, 2 December 2014, [url](#)

<sup>527</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview (2019), 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>528</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020, December 2019, [url](#), p. 24

The May 2020 AIHRC report stated that 46.2 % of women interviewed did not go to a hospital or a health centre during pregnancy and did not see a specialist; 15.6 % of the women and children interviewed had not received vaccines; 56.7 % of the total participants stated that the women in their families did not follow the minimum three-year interval between births and got pregnant sooner than that; 11.6 % of women interviewed continued giving birth at home without a doctor or midwife.<sup>529</sup>

A 2018 NRC and Samuel Hall study noted that mobile clinics had a special role in providing medical care to women. Mobile clinics had significantly more female patients than male, mostly due to the restricted access women had to other types of health services.<sup>530</sup>

Before the implementation of the BPHS in 2003, Afghanistan had the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world. According to estimations by the UN, the maternal mortality rate was 1 100 per 100 000 live births in 2000 and has fallen by 64 % to 396 per 100 000 live births by 2015. One of the leading contributing factors to this high mortality rate was that only 14.3 % of births were attended by a skilled professional with only 12.8 % of births occurring at a health facility.<sup>531</sup>

According to ALCS 2016-17, progress was made in maternal and child health, much of it due to enhanced ante-natal care and increased deliverance in specialised institutions with skilled attendants.<sup>532</sup> However, almost half of all births in Afghanistan still took place at home without a skilled health practitioner<sup>533</sup>; significant differences were also observed between rural, urban and Kuchi women regarding terms of birth attendance. In urban areas, the majority of women giving birth are assisted by a skilled provider, whereas less than half of rural deliveries are supported by a skilled birth attendant<sup>534</sup>; 82.7 % of urban births are institutional deliveries, compared to 43.4 % of rural births.<sup>535</sup> In Nooristan, Paktika, Badakhshan, Nimroz and Daykundi more than half of pregnant women did not receive any ante-natal care, but in Kabul, Kandahar, Bamyán, Balkh and Kapisa more than 80 % of women had check-ups during pregnancy.<sup>536</sup>

### 2.6.5 Access to health care for IDPs and returnees

IDPs and returnees might sometimes be deprived of health care and other essential services as a result of lacking documentation in the form of a *tazkera* (see [1.3 Access to Tazkera](#)).<sup>537</sup>

A 2019 report by the Mixed Migration Centre noted that most Afghan returnees linked an absence of funds with numerous challenges, including inability to access healthcare. Several female returnees stated that they either did not have access to prenatal health care or access to a doctor to examine their children.<sup>538</sup> As of 2018, Afghanistan's overwhelmed health facilities have struggled to absorb the masses of IDPs and returnees congregating in urban centres and their outskirts.<sup>539</sup> A 2018 NRC and Samuel Hall study noted that 24 % of respondents lacked access to health services. Health issues were widely reported with a third of households having at least one member with a chronic illness.<sup>540</sup>

UNHCR reported that in 2018 access to healthcare for returnees slightly improved compared to the previous year, with 27 % of 2018 returnees unable to access healthcare, compared to 31 % in 2017. The most common reason of lack of access to healthcare was cost (77 %), followed by quality of available healthcare (11 %). Female-headed households appeared to have slightly more access to healthcare than male-headed households (21 % of female-headed households reported inability to

<sup>529</sup> AIHRC, Report Summary: Access to Health and Education Rights in Afghanistan, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>530</sup> NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 35

<sup>531</sup> Frost A., et al., An assessment of barriers to accessing the BPHs in Afghanistan, 15 November 2016, [url](#)

<sup>532</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 168

<sup>533</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 167

<sup>534</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 190

<sup>535</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 192

<sup>536</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 184

<sup>537</sup> UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>538</sup> MMC, Distant Dreams. Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees, January 2019, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>539</sup> WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>540</sup> NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 35

access healthcare compared to 27 % of male-headed households). In areas controlled by AGEs, 30 % of returnees were unable to access healthcare.<sup>541</sup> In 2018, there was an increase in the IDPs that did not have access to healthcare, from 42 % in 2017 to 47 % in 2018; with the main reasons cost (79 %), followed by quality concerns (17 %); 41 % of IDPs in AGEs controlled areas reported inability to access healthcare and 49 % reported the same in government-controlled areas. There was no notable difference in access to healthcare between IDPs residing in urban and rural areas.<sup>542</sup>

Approximately 98 % of IDP households were within 1 hour-distance of a healthcare facility and pharmacies constituted the most convenient sources of healthcare, with 85 % residing within an hour of a pharmacy. IDPs reported residing closer to other types of healthcare facilities: 80 % within 1 hour of a public clinic (56 % within an hour of a private clinic) and 65 % within an hour of a public hospital.<sup>543</sup>

## 2.6.6 Access to health care for people living with disabilities

Human Rights Watch noted that Afghanistan has one of the highest numbers of people with disabilities per capital globally. At least one in every five households had an adult or a child suffering from serious psychological, physical, sensory or intellectual disability.<sup>544</sup> UNOCHA noted that, while it was difficult to find precise data, in 2018 approximately 10-11 % of the population suffered from a physical disability.<sup>545</sup> As of 2020, more than one million of Afghanistan's population had an amputated limb and suffered from mobility, visual or hearing disabilities.<sup>546</sup>

As of 2019, prosthetics and rehabilitation services in Afghanistan were not 'readily available in public health facilities'<sup>547</sup>, and the main providers of prosthetic limbs and rehabilitation were aid groups. For instance, Kabul's main centre in charge of outfitting individuals with prosthetic limbs is run by the ICRC, which, on an annual basis, is said to meet more than half of Afghanistan's demand for artificial limbs.<sup>548</sup>

The Asia Foundation noted that approximately 20 % of the adult respondents reported never using inpatient or outpatient healthcare. 40 % had used healthcare the previous year, 16 % in the past 1-2 years and 13 % in the past 2-3 years. Among those individuals who sought care in the past 3 years, one third of the respondents said they had accessed healthcare mostly at a private practice while one fifth of the respondents stated that they accessed healthcare at a public hospital. The source reported that these trends were similar across the different disability levels.<sup>549</sup> Approximately 40.4 % of adults suffering from severe disability did not receive inpatient healthcare when they needed it. One third of the responders stated that the reason why they did not receive the inpatient care needed was that the patient could not afford the cost of the visit; while one third could not access the care needed due to either lack of transport or inability to afford transport.<sup>550</sup>

The 2019 AIHRC Report highlighted two main issues limiting the access to healthcare for persons with disabilities: firstly, the distance from their homes to the health centres as well as the poor condition of the roads and of the vehicles. Secondly, the absence of ramps and other facilities in the hospitals, which hindered their access to the facilities.<sup>551</sup> While funding by donors has resulted in improvements of the roads and other infrastructure, there has been limited planning for the needs of people with disabilities. Large urban areas are serviced by both public and private bus transportation;

<sup>541</sup> UNHCR, Socio-economic survey and post-distribution monitoring, 3 July 2019, [url](#), pp. 33, 15

<sup>542</sup> UNHCR, Socio-economic survey and post-distribution monitoring, 3 July 2019, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>543</sup> UNHCR, Socio-economic survey and post-distribution monitoring, 3 July 2019, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>544</sup> HRW, "Disability Is Not Weakness". Discrimination and Barriers Facing Women and Girls with Disabilities in Afghanistan, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>545</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020, December 2019, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>546</sup> HRW (Human Rights Watch), "Disability Is Not Weakness". Discrimination and Barriers Facing Women and Girls with Disabilities in Afghanistan, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>547</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020, December 2019, [url](#), p. 61

<sup>548</sup> New Humanitarian (the), As casualties soar, Afghanistan struggles to treat civilians maimed by conflict, 4 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>549</sup> Asia Foundation, Model Disability Survey of Afghanistan 2019, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 73

<sup>550</sup> Asia Foundation (the), Model Disability Survey of Afghanistan 2019, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 75

<sup>551</sup> AIHRC (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission), Human Rights Challenges of Persons with Disabilities. 1398, 26 November 2019, [url](#), p. 15

however, there are no modified services or accessible vehicles for persons with disabilities. The majority of public buildings do not have ramps, elevators or accessible bathrooms. In addition, persons with disabilities are faced with challenges in education, employment and healthcare. According to Human Rights Watch, a lot of persons with disabilities do not have the national identification card (*tazkera*), which is mandatory in order to have access to many government services for instance (See Section [1.3 Access to Tazkera](#)). Due to the long distance to the district and to the absence of help, a lot of persons with disabilities cannot obtain the id card.<sup>552</sup>

Human Rights Watch stated that ‘violent changes of power, long periods of contested government, endemic poverty, and widespread lawlessness, insecurity, and hostilities have undermined even minimal efforts by successive governments to conceive, adopt, or enforce policies to address the needs of persons with disabilities, even as this population has continued to increase.’<sup>553</sup>

According to news agency Tolonews ‘discrimination is the most significant and damaging barrier in Afghanistan for persons with disabilities.’<sup>554</sup> People with disabilities in Afghanistan frequently have to overcome stigmatisation and attitudinal barriers in order to survive. Women with disabilities face further discrimination, due both to their gender and disability.<sup>555</sup> According to Human Rights Watch ‘Afghan women and girls with disabilities face particular barriers to their rights, as gender discrimination and discrimination against persons with disabilities intersect. Too often, they describe social isolation, being humiliated in public or within their own families, being considered a source of shame for the family, and being denied access to public spaces and community or family social events. Afghan women with disabilities are often seen as unfit for marriage and a burden on their families.’<sup>556</sup> Similarly, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), reported in a March 2020 document that disabled women had limited access to healthcare.<sup>557</sup>

Children with disabilities are reported to be marginalised, and largely dependent on their families in order to access basic rights; some children are reportedly ‘shuttered away in homes, many excluded from schools, denied healthcare, and in extreme cases, abandoned’.<sup>558</sup>

A 2004 research paper on Afghans perception on disabilities compiled on behalf of UNICEF and UNOPS/CDAP noted that Afghan society differentiates between a person who became disabled because of an accident, such as mine, car accident, disease etc. (*Malul*), and a person who is disabled at birth (*Mayub*). The *Mayub* is very often associated with birth-related mental and sensorial disabilities. While for both categories there is perceived link between religion and disability, the *Mayub* disabilities in particular are said to be less understood and therefore considered to be ‘related to God’s will’.<sup>559</sup> In addition, the research paper noted that ‘*mayubiat*, are seen as punishment of God on parents or the fault of the mother because she has done something wrong during pregnancy.’<sup>560</sup>

<sup>552</sup> HRW, “Disability Is Not Weakness”. Discrimination and Barriers Facing Women and Girls with Disabilities in Afghanistan, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>553</sup> HRW, “Disability Is Not Weakness”. Discrimination and Barriers Facing Women and Girls with Disabilities in Afghanistan, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>554</sup> Tolonews, Changing Perceptions About Disability In Afghanistan, 5 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>555</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020, December 2019, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>556</sup> HRW, “Disability Is Not Weakness”. Discrimination and Barriers Facing Women and Girls with Disabilities in Afghanistan, 28 April 2020, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>557</sup> UN CEDAW, Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Afghanistan, CEDAW/C/AFG/CO/3, 10 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>558</sup> Tolonews, Changing Perceptions About Disability In Afghanistan, 5 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>559</sup> Altai Consulting, Afghan Perceptions on Disability, October 2004, [url](#), pp. 16- 19

<sup>560</sup> Altai Consulting, Afghan Perceptions on Disability, October 2004, [url](#), pp. 28-29

## 2.7 Housing and living conditions

### 2.7.1 Urbanisation

The latest report by NSIA estimates the total population of the country for 2020-2021 at around 32.9 million, of which around 8 million (24.4 %) live in urban areas, around 23.4 million (71 %) are inhabitants of rural areas, and 1.5 million (4.6 %) pursue a nomadic way of living.<sup>561</sup> The CIA World Factbook estimated the Afghan population at around 36.6 million, as of July 2020.<sup>562</sup> Long-term estimates predicted that the urban population would constitute nearly 40 % in 2050 and 50 % in 2060. Kabul was defined as the centre of the growth, with the rest of the urban population concentrated mostly in four other city regions: Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, Kandahar, and Jalalabad.<sup>563</sup> According to the deputy minister of municipalities, hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees returning to the country struggled to find housing in the cities where they settled.<sup>564</sup>

According to ALCS figures for 2016-17, the large majority (72 %) of Afghanistan's urban population lives in slums or inadequate housing; an average urban household size was estimated at 7.3 persons.<sup>565</sup> The survey described housing conditions as 'overall poor' with almost 44 % of the population living in overcrowded housing with an average of 3.2 persons per room.<sup>566</sup> The slum population living in the cities was estimated at five million people or 72.4 % of the total urban population.<sup>567</sup>

Most housing in Afghanistan consists of irregular, detached, or semi-detached houses or regular detached houses. A large proportion consists of hillside dwellings. Blocks of flats or apartments are almost entirely situated in Kabul City.<sup>568</sup> The majority of Afghans generally live in very poor housing conditions and have minimal access to housing financing. The formal housing sector is unable to supply affordable housing to meet the need of the growing number of urban low-income and poor households.<sup>569</sup>

### 2.7.2 Land and property laws

The Afghan Ministry for Urban Development differentiates between informal settlements occupied by landless squatters on public land that is habitable and those built on land owned privately.<sup>570</sup> Article 1900 of Afghanistan's Civil Rights specifies that 'property is a right that is subject to the will and control of the person under the right' and allocates the right to use and exploit the property only to its owner. Still, as stated by the Afghan deputy minister of municipalities in October 2019, more than 70 % of homes in urban areas were informal or lacked a title deed.<sup>571</sup> Similarly, the BTI 2020 report noted that almost 80 % of households did not have formal documentation to prove their ownership over the land.<sup>572</sup> According to preliminary findings of a survey of a half million properties in the eight provincial capitals, conducted by the state in 2019, less than 15 % of properties had a formal title deed. Around 42 % were found to have informal or customary documents and around 43 % lacked any documentation.<sup>573</sup>

<sup>561</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. iii

<sup>562</sup> CIA World Factbook, Afghanistan, Population, July 2020 estimates, [url](#)

<sup>563</sup> Kammeier, H. D., Issa, Z., Urban Governance in Afghanistan: Assessing the New Urban Development Programme and Its Implementation, AREU, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 4, 15-16

<sup>564</sup> Reuters, Afghanistan struggles to find housing for returning refugees, 21 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>565</sup> Afghanistan NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. XXXIII, 26

<sup>566</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 207

<sup>567</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 214

<sup>568</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 210-214; Afghanistan, State of Afghan Cities 2015, Volume One, 2015, [url](#), pp. 86-87

<sup>569</sup> UN Habitat, MUDH, Afghanistan Housing Profile, 11 October 2017, [url](#), pp. XIV - XV

<sup>570</sup> Guardian (The), Pressure builds in 'powderkeg' Kabul as refugees return home, 15 March 2018, [url](#)

<sup>571</sup> Reuters, Afghanistan struggles to find housing for returning refugees, 21 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>572</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Afghanistan, 2020, 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>573</sup> Khalil A.B. and Farajid, N., Fixing Afghanistan's Security of Tenure Crisis, The Diplomat, 20 September 2019, [url](#)

Following a new Presidential Decree<sup>574</sup> on land allocation enacted in 2018<sup>575</sup>, the Afghan government made a plan to issue ‘one million “Occupancy Certificates”’ for informal settlers. As explained by the Afghan deputy minister of municipalities to Reuters in October 2019, the aim of the move was to ‘formalize informal settlements, which are largely on government land’ and to give the informal settlers the right ‘to occupy the plot without eviction for five years’, after which a full ownership could be granted on the condition of meeting certain criteria. However, according to the official, ‘the government has low financial and management capacity to implement the plan, so the pace is slow.’<sup>576</sup>

As noted in BTI 2020 report, the legal framework for land recognition was based on customary law and related issues were decided in accordance with both the *sharia* and the general civil codes.<sup>577</sup> Land ownership in Afghanistan is based both on state laws and ‘informal systems of local consensus’. The formal and informal systems recognise different owners for the same plot of land and people often lack title deeds and documentation to prove ownership.<sup>578</sup> In a situation, in which there existed no formal protection of private ownership, land-grabbing became very frequent. Thus, BTI 2020 report mentioned that 1 297 000 acres of land were illegally appropriated by the land mafia, which ‘is connected to powerful individuals and groups within the state structure’.<sup>579</sup>

Article 14 of the Afghan Constitution of 2004 obliges the state to ‘improve economic, social and living conditions of farmers, herders and settlers as well as the nomads’ livelihood’ and to ‘adopt necessary measures for provision of housing and distribution of public estates to deserving citizens’.<sup>580</sup> However, the allocation of settlement areas for the nomads was not successful in a number of locations, e.g. in Bari Kaw in Deh Sabz, and Dasht-e Zarghoun in Logar Province.<sup>581</sup>

According to AAN research, the Taleban ‘have given away, taxed and leased state land in a bid to both assert their authority and raise revenue’ in the provinces of Helmand (since 2010), Uruzgan (since 2015), and Takhar (since 2017). It was reported that, despite the efforts, the government was not able to prevent the distribution of state land in Helmand.<sup>582</sup>

The restoration of land rights and property ownership has been considered a major challenge for the reintegration of returning refugees<sup>583</sup>, and in 2020, UNOCHA stated that housing and land and property issues remained a challenge.<sup>584</sup> Divorced women and widows were reported to face difficulties in claiming their rights over land and properties, even if these rights are recognised by the Afghan Constitution, the Civil Code, and the *sharia*, according to women’s rights groups.<sup>585</sup>

### 2.7.3 Housing and living conditions in Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e Sharif

#### Kabul

Designed for about a million people, Kabul was reported to accommodate more than five million people, settled in the capital and around it in a non-regulated way. IDPs, who arrived in the capital because of the conflict, violence, poverty, and lack of economic opportunities in other Afghan

<sup>574</sup> Presidential Decree 305 of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the Identification and Allocation of Suitable Land for the Re-integration and Construction of Affordable Housing for Returnees, Internally Displaced Persons and Families of Martyrs of the Country’s Security and Defence Forces. The decree replaced Presidential Decree 104 (2005).

<sup>575</sup> UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>576</sup> Reuters, Afghanistan struggles to find housing for returning refugees, 21 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>577</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Afghanistan, 2020, 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>578</sup> Muzhary F.R., One Land, Two Rules (10): Three case studies on Taleban sales of state land, AAN, 15 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>579</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Afghanistan, 2020, 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>580</sup> Afghanistan, Constitution of Afghanistan, (Ratified) 26 January 2004, [url](#)

<sup>581</sup> Giustozzi A., Nomad-settler conflict in Afghanistan today, October 2019, AREU, [url](#), p. 9. For the list of the settlements established as of May 2019, see the same source p. 10.

<sup>582</sup> Muzhary F.R., One Land, Two Rules (10): Three case studies on Taleban sales of state land, AAN, 15 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>583</sup> Bjelica J., Afghanistan’s Returning Refugees: Why Are So Many Still Landless?, AAN, 29 March 2016, [url](#)

<sup>584</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>585</sup> Reuters, After four decades of war, Afghan widows battle for homes, 22 January 2020, [url](#)

provinces, were reported to live frequently ‘in vulnerable conditions, sometimes in veritable shantytown across the city’.<sup>586</sup>

The growth of the capital increased problems such as inadequate housing and sanitation, land grabbing and lack of ownership documents, poverty, traffic, pollution, and criminality.<sup>587</sup> In 2018, an estimated 70 % of Kabul’s population was reported to live in informal settlements defined as ‘areas of housing either constructed on land to which the occupants have no legal claim, and/or areas of housing units that do not comply with planning and building regulations’.<sup>588</sup> The density of inhabitants in informal areas could be more than double that of formal areas.<sup>589</sup> The city’s informal settlements were reported to offer ‘crucial low-cost housing to the majority of residents’.<sup>590</sup> In 2017, Fabrizio Foschini noted that while informal settlements prevented a major homelessness crisis, the unmanaged growth worsened existing problems, such as lack of sewerage system and inefficient disposal of waste. Moreover, poorly constructed houses in places with limited accessibility aggravated the hardship of returnees, economic migrants, and IDPs inhabiting these locations.<sup>591</sup>

According to ALCS 2016-2017, Kabul was the only location, in which renting was a common practice: around 65 % of Kabul’s households were reported to rent their dwellings and around 28 % rented the units where they lived.<sup>592</sup> In 2017, the price of formal housing in Kabul was around USD 35 000 – 500 000, while the average monthly household income in Kabul and the central region was estimated at USD 208.<sup>593</sup>

## Herat

Most buildings in Herat were built after 2001; furthermore, a number of residential enclaves (*shahrak*) was built around the city. The urban density was reported as very high as of 2015 and the settlements pattern was quite regular although most buildings did not conform to a master plan. There were cases of land-grabbing in Herat city by officials and other powerful individuals that operated with impunity.<sup>594</sup> In 2016, an estimated 5 % of the city’s population was reported to live in soft structures or tents.<sup>595</sup>

The north-western provinces of Afghanistan were particularly affected by the drought conditions of 2017-2018<sup>596</sup> and Herat and Badghis provinces were the destination for over 60 000 people who became displaced<sup>597</sup> and resided in overcrowded camps in and around Herat city. According to NRC assessment, 7 400 displaced families resided in 174 sites on the outskirts of Herat city on the road to Badghis. They were reported suffering from malnutrition and none of the children in the displacement sites attended school.<sup>598</sup> UNOCHA reported on sanitation gaps in September 2018 as a result of the arrival of large numbers of drought and conflict-affected IDPs.<sup>599</sup>

<sup>586</sup> Foschini F., Kabul’s Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The roots of today’s underworld, 11 February 2020, last updated on 9 March 2020, [url](#), see also New York Times (The), They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime? 8 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>587</sup> Foschini F., Kabul Unpacked – A geographical guide to a metropolis in the making, AAN Thematic Report 01/2019, AAN, [url](#), January 2019, p. 1

<sup>588</sup> Collier P. et al., Policy Options for Kabul’s Informal Settlements, IGC, January 2018, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>589</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>590</sup> Collier P. et al., Policy Options for Kabul’s Informal Settlements, IGC, January 2018, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>591</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>592</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 207-209

<sup>593</sup> Collier P. et al., Policy Options for Kabul’s Informal Settlements, IGC, January 2018, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>594</sup> Leslie J., Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, USIP, 2015, [url](#), pp. 8-10

<sup>595</sup> APPRO, Afghanistan Rights Monitor: Baseline Report, April 2016, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>596</sup> Bjelica J., Less Rain and Snowfall in Afghanistan: High Level Of Food Assistance Needed Until Early 2019, AAN, 30 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>597</sup> NRC, Millions of Afghans Face Risks of Drought Related Displacement, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>598</sup> Bjelica J., Less Rain and Snowfall in Afghanistan: High Level Of Food Assistance Needed Until Early 2019, AAN, 30 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>599</sup> UNOCHA, Afghanistan Drought Response, Situation Report No. 2 (as of 16 September 2018), 20 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2



## Mazar-e Sharif

According to a 2015 survey, 66.5 % of inhabitants of Mazar-e Sharif owned their houses, while 24.5 % rented their accommodation. More than half of the houses in the city were constructed from mud or soil with wood logs, the rest from lime with bricks and metal, cement, or other materials. Most were reported to have earth (70 %) or cement (26 %) floor.<sup>600</sup>

### 2.7.3 Access to water, sanitation and electricity

The 2020 BTI report found that most Afghans lacked a safe water supply, adequate sanitation, and hygiene, and the vast majority of the Afghan population had limited access to electricity, especially in rural areas.<sup>601</sup> According to UNOCHA only 67 % of the population had access to at least basic (improved) drinking water services as of 2019, with huge disparities between urban (96 %) and rural (57 %) population groups. Making a reference to a Joint Monitoring Programme led by UNICEF and WHO (2019), UNOCHA noted that only 43 % of the population had access to basic sanitation facilities: 57 % of urban dwellers and 38 % of rural inhabitants.<sup>602</sup> According to the UNICEF report of 2018, only 12 % of Afghanistan's population had access to sanitary toilets.<sup>603</sup>

## Kabul

The increase in water consumption and decrease of the quality of groundwater caused a deficiency of water in the city.<sup>604</sup> In 2017, the Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Corporation (AUWSSC) estimated that only 32 % of Kabul's population had access to running water and only 10 % of residents received potable water.<sup>605</sup> The city's inadequate water system forced those people who could not afford it to drill their own wells.<sup>606</sup> Many poor residents of Kabul, who lived in the suburbs and on the rocky hills of the city, depended on public taps situated often far from their homes and young children, and often girls, were engaged in the job of fetching the water. According to AUWSSC, there were around 72 private companies illegally supplying water to thousands of families across Kabul City in 2018.<sup>607</sup>

Besides problems in the water supply, the provision of other basic services, e.g. sanitation and electricity, to the growing informal settlements that emerged on the centrally located hills of Kabul was reported to be difficult.<sup>608</sup> In April 2019, the representatives of UNHCR and the NRC told the Finnish Immigration Service that many houses in Kabul lacked water or sanitation; similarly, access to proper hygienic standards was limited. To access clean water, residents of Kabul had to drill their wells or purchase bottled water.<sup>609</sup>

Antonio Foschini noted in 2017 that Kabul remained one of the world's few national capitals without a central sewerage system, which caused human pollution and health problems, compounded by the large increase in its population and by other types of pollution, mainly vehicle traffic.<sup>610</sup> Instead, a sewage system, individual septic tanks, which were often located close to water wells, were used. The leakage of sewage into groundwater was reported as a main cause of water contamination in the city.<sup>611</sup> Furthermore, municipal waste management in Kabul was reported to be underdeveloped or not existent.<sup>612</sup>

<sup>600</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey Balkh, 5 January 2015, [url](#), pp. 79-83

<sup>601</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Afghanistan, 2020, 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>602</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), pp. 14-15

<sup>603</sup> UNICEF, Afghanistan Annual Report 2017, February 2018, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>604</sup> Kazemi S.R., The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>605</sup> Amin M. and Adeh, E.H., Water Crisis in Kabul Could Be Severe if Not Addressed, SAIS Review, 22 August 2017, [url](#)

<sup>606</sup> Reuters, Afghan Capital's Thirsty Residents Dig Deep to Combat Drought, Overuse, 28 February 2017, [url](#)

<sup>607</sup> Kazemi S.R., The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>608</sup> Collier P. et al., Policy Options for Kabul's Informal Settlements, IGC, January 2018, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>609</sup> Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019, Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 10 October 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>610</sup> Foschini F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>611</sup> Kazemi S.R., The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>612</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Afghanistan, 2020, 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

## Herat

Of the urban population in Herat, 81 % was reported to have access to improved water sources, 90.7 % used electricity as a source for lighting and 92 % had an improved sanitation facility.<sup>613</sup> APPRO found in April 2016 that 80 % of the residents in Herat City have access to grid power, 70 % to water, and 30 % to sewage services.<sup>614</sup> Salma Hydro Power Project, which was started in 2016, was expected to improve access to electricity and water in Herat and its surroundings.<sup>615</sup>

The majority of residents in Herat City drew their drinking water from pipes or wells.<sup>616</sup> The city was reported to lack a central sewage system and the leakage of sewage into groundwater was considered as a main cause of water contamination in the city.<sup>617</sup>

## Mazar-e Sharif

According to the state statistics published in 2015, most inhabitants of the city had access to improved sources of drinking water (76 %), usually piped or from the wells. Around 92 % of households were reported to have improved sanitation facilities.<sup>618</sup>

### 2.7.4 Housing and living conditions for IDPs and returnees

According to a joint survey of the World Bank and UNHCR, returnee households were normally large and most households had children upon their return to Afghanistan: the median returnee household consisted of 9.6 members with more than 50 % being in the age group 0-16.<sup>619</sup>

ALCS 2016-17 found that a greater share of migrants lived in urban areas, compared to those who never moved (46.2 % against 19.2 %).<sup>620</sup> According to the 2018 report of UNHCR, IDPs and returnees chose to move to urban or semi-urban areas, in which they frequently lived in rented or shared accommodation or in collective shelters.<sup>621</sup> Renting homes was a practice used by 58 % of 2016-17 returnees and 69 % of IDPs, while 22 % of returnees and 20 % of IDPs reported living in other arrangements, e.g. staying with extended family, squatting, or living in an informal settlement. Owning homes was less frequent, compared to the general population, explained by the UNHCR to be related to the lengthy period of their displacement, the high percentage of returnees born outside Afghanistan, and the fact that 38 % of former refugees did not settle in their province of origin upon return. Returnees were, however, more likely to own their homes compared to IDPs: around 20 % of 2016-17 returnees report owning their homes compared to 11 % of IDPs. Furthermore, returnees and IDPs in rural Afghanistan were more likely to own their homes compared to returnees and IDPs in urban areas.<sup>622</sup>

In 2019, the WoA Assessment found IDP households to be, on average, significantly more indebted than they were in 2018, with households in drought-affected regions the worst affected.<sup>623</sup> UNOCHA reported in 2019 that IDPs 'are increasingly exposed to weak tenure and forced evictions.' As revealed in the 2019 WoA Assessment, forcibly displaced people might be prevented from returning to their homes even after the end of the conflict. In the assessment, 52 % of IDP households indicated that they lived 'in their current shelter without any written documentation.' 'A lack of clarity on the extent of respective rights and responsibilities of landowners, beneficiaries and other stakeholders'

<sup>613</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Final Report of Herat Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey, 7 March 2017, [url](#), pp. 74, 76, 88

<sup>614</sup> APPRO, Afghanistan Rights Monitor: Baseline Report, April 2016, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>615</sup> Afghanistan Times, Modi, Ghani inaugurate long-awaited Salma Dam project, 4 June 2016, [url](#)

<sup>616</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Final Report of Herat Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey, 7 March 2017, [url](#), p. 77

<sup>617</sup> Kazemi S.R., The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>618</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey Balkh, 5 January 2015, [url](#), pp. 70, 84

<sup>619</sup> World Bank and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, Findings from a 2018 Phone Survey of Afghan Returnees and UNHCR data, June 2019, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>620</sup> Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 43-44

<sup>621</sup> UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>622</sup> UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>623</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 16

contributed 'to the success or failure of emergency shelter responses and limits provision of transitional shelter'.<sup>624</sup>

Based on the 2019 WoA Assessment data, UNOCHA reported that displaced households named shelter as one of their top three priority needs: 65 % of displaced households indicated they did not live in a permanent shelter (10 % lived in tents, 19 % in makeshift shelters and 36 % in mud/brick shelters) and 45 % stated that their shelter was damaged in the past six months because of the conflict or natural disaster. Among the households who reported damage of their shelters, 80 % reported that they were unable to make necessary repairs. 'The burden of shelter repair was particularly high for non-displaced, natural disaster-affected households, with 41 % reporting shelter repair costs as the primary reason for taking on debt.'<sup>625</sup>

Water and sanitation were found to be a serious issue in all the settlements surveyed by UNHCR. A large number of families had no access to latrines and many relied on communal water points with issues of congestion and water quality.<sup>626</sup> MSF reported in July 2019 on inadequate water supply and limited access to food, healthcare, and basic services (i.e. sanitation) in shelters on the outskirts of Herat city, which accommodated IDPs from the provinces of Herat, Faryab, Badghis, and Ghor. The reduction in water supply was reported to cause a situation in which people were 'begging for water in the neighbourhood in order to drink and wash'.<sup>627</sup>

Women in IDP camps reported facing high levels of domestic violence<sup>628</sup>, and according to UNOCHA:

'A lack of appropriate shelter and safe water exposes vulnerable households, including women, children and older people, to the elements, lack of privacy and dignity, and overcrowding (sometimes with 4-5 households sharing a shelter). Furthermore, the lack of adequate weatherproof insulation, particularly in high altitude areas, limits people's capacity to cope with Afghanistan's harsh winters contributing to increased incidence of, and under-5 child mortality from, acute respiratory infection.'<sup>629</sup>

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<sup>624</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>625</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>626</sup> UNHCR, Profile and Response Plan of Protracted IDP Settlements in Herat, October 2016, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>627</sup> MSA, Living conditions deteriorate for displaced people in Herat, 24 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>628</sup> USDOS, Afghanistan 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>629</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 25

## 3. Internal mobility

### 3.1 International and domestic flight connections

Lifos writes that according to an overview of Afghan air traffic, there are an estimated 25 active airports in the country, while only a number of those were open for domestic commercial air traffic as of 2019.<sup>630</sup> Afghanistan's four international airports are located in Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif and Kandahar.<sup>631</sup> Lifos noted that flight schedules can change often and information about destinations and departures is not always updated on the websites of airlines. Delays or cancellations at short notice are common and may be caused by weather conditions, natural disasters, technical problems or security-related incidents, while for some destinations, flights are even suspended for months. However, from Kabul to Herat, Mazar-e Sharif and Kandahar regular flights have 'more or less consistently existed over a longer period of time, whereas departures to smaller destinations, such as Bamyan, has varied over time'.<sup>632</sup>

As of 2019, Kam Air, a privately owned airline and Ariana Afghan Airlines are the two commercial Afghan companies operating flights within Afghanistan.<sup>633</sup> According to the New York Times, Kam Air operated 90 % of domestic flights in Afghanistan before the Taliban attacked the Intercontinental Hotel in January 2018 in Kabul, killing nine members of Kam Air's international staff among others. After the attack more than 50 other foreign Kam Air workers left the country, forcing the airline to suspend many of its flights.<sup>634</sup> Kam Air connects Afghan cities which are often unreliable or dangerous to reach by road.<sup>635</sup> According to Kam Air's website, domestic flights to several destinations are available as of June 2020, while two more internal flight connections are planned.<sup>636</sup> Another Afghan airline, Safi Airways, founded in 2006, flew international and domestic routes, before, due to outstanding tax and debt issues, the airline was grounded in September 2016.<sup>637</sup> Safi Airways provided 74 flights weekly to international and domestic destinations.<sup>638</sup> According to Safi Airways' website the airline was the countries' second largest passenger carrier.<sup>639</sup>

The civil aviation authority reported that 'the aviation industry in their country [Afghanistan] has lost more than [US] \$20 million [approximately EUR 18.2 million<sup>640</sup>] since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, which forced Afghan airlines to cut flights from early March and ultimately prompted them to cease all flights by the end of the month [March 2020]'.<sup>641</sup>

Due to Covid-19, the national carrier Kam Air, as well as international airlines suspended their flight services to and from the capital, Kabul. By 23 June 2020, there were no commercial flights which could be used by travellers to leave Kabul.<sup>642</sup> As of 23 June 2020, the US Embassy in Afghanistan reported that 'the Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority announced some airlines (Emirates, Turkish, Ariana and Kam) have resumed services [...]'; as of 8 July 2020, the same source announced that 'the Government

<sup>630</sup> Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg, I Afghanistan (version 3.1), 2 July 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>631</sup> Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg, I Afghanistan (version 3.1), 2 July 2019, [url](#), p. 4; SIGAR, Afghanistan's Civilian Aviation: Capacity has improved but challenges remain, including reliance on donor support for operations, July 2019, [url](#), p. 5-6

<sup>632</sup> Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg I Afghanistan (version 3.1), 2 July 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>633</sup> Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg I Afghanistan (version 3.1), 2 July 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>634</sup> New York Times (The), Grounded and Gutted, Main Afghan Airline Struggles after Taliban Attack, 26 January 2018, [url](#)

<sup>635</sup> Reuters, Afghan airline struggles after foreign staff killed in hotel raid, 24 January 2018, [url](#)

<sup>636</sup> Kam Air, route map, domestic routes, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>637</sup> Safi Airways, About Safi Airways, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>638</sup> National (The), Biggest private airline in Afghanistan grounded over non-payment, 6 September 2016, [url](#)

<sup>639</sup> Safi Airways, About Safi Airways, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>640</sup> According to the currency converter: EC, Exchange rate, n.d. [url](#)

<sup>641</sup> RFE/RL/Gandhara, Coronavirus Pandemic Hits Afghan Airlines Hard, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>642</sup> US Embassy in Afghanistan, COVID-19 Information, as of 23 June 2020, [url](#)

of Afghanistan has re-opened its border with Iran, which had been closed briefly to all air and ground travel.<sup>643</sup>

The media reported that due to economic losses as a result of Covid-19 lockdown, Kam Air<sup>644</sup> and Ariana Afghan Airlines might not be in a position to resume flights once the lockdowns are lifted. The routes indicated below refer to routes existing as of 8 July 2020 but which are not all (fully) served during imposed lockdown measures.<sup>645</sup>

### Kabul

Kabul International Airport, officially named as Hamid Karzai International Airport in 2014 and locally also known as Khwaja Rawash Airport, is Afghanistan's main international airport.<sup>646</sup> At the time of drafting and finalising this report, the flight connections were subject to changes due to the Covid-19 measures. Based on online flight schedules accessed through a tracking site, the following connections were available from Kabul as of 8 July 2020.<sup>647</sup>

Internationally:

- Ankara (Ariana Afghan Airlines)
- Baku (Silk Way Airlines)
- Delhi (Kam Air, Air India, Ariana Afghan Airlines)
- Dubai (Fly Dubai)
- Islamabad (Kam Air)
- Istanbul, Ankara (Turkish Airlines)
- Jeddah (Ariana Afghan Airlines, Kam Air)
- Mashhad (Kam Air)
- Riyadh (Kam Air)
- Sharjah (Air Arabia)
- Tashkent (Kam Air)

Domestically:

- Ariana Afghan Airlines operates domestic flights from Kabul to:
  - Herat
  - Kandahar
  - Mazar-e Sharif
  - Urumqi
- Kam Air operates domestic flights from Kabul to:
  - Bamiyan
  - Bost
  - Dammam
  - Faizabad
  - Herat
  - Kandahar
  - Maimana
  - Mazar-e Sharif
  - Tarinkot
  - Zaranj
- While further domestic flights<sup>648</sup> are indicated on Kam Air's website from Kabul to:

<sup>643</sup> US Embassy in Afghanistan, COVID-19 Information, as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>644</sup> Reuters Afghan airlines at risk of collapse, taking women's jobs with them, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>645</sup> Flightradar 24, Kabul International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#); Flightradar 24, Herat International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#); Flightradar 24, Mazar-e Sharif International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>646</sup> Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg, I Afghanistan (version 3.1), 2 July 2019, [url](#), p. 4; Hamid Karzai International Airport, n.d., [url](#); LCA, Afghanistan Kabul (Hamid Karzai) International Airport, 5 January 2018, [url](#); ACAA, International Airfields, 10 January 2018, [url](#)

<sup>647</sup> Flightradar 24, Kabul International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>648</sup> Kam Air, route map, domestic routes, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

- Shanghai
- Madina
- Najaf
- Shanghai

Kam Air states on its website that routes connecting Kabul to Kunduz as well as Kabul to Sharana are planned.<sup>649</sup>

### Herat

Herat International Airport is one of Afghanistan's four international airports.<sup>650</sup> At the time of drafting and finalising this report, the flight connections were subject to changes due to the Covid-19 measures. Based on online flight schedules accessed through a tracking site, the following connections were available from Herat as of 8 July 2020.<sup>651</sup>

Internationally:

- These destinations are served from/ to Herat:
  - no international destinations are served as of 8 July 2020<sup>652</sup>

Domestically:

- Ariana Afghan Airlines operates domestic flights from Herat to:
  - Kabul<sup>653</sup>
- Kam Air operates domestic flights from Herat to:
  - Kabul<sup>654</sup>
  - Chaghcharan<sup>655</sup>
  - Farah<sup>656</sup>
  - Kabul<sup>657</sup>
  - Zaranj<sup>658</sup>
  - Mazar-e Sharif<sup>659</sup>

### Mazar-e Sharif

Mazar-e Sharif International Airport, locally known as Mawlana Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi International Airport, is one of Afghanistan's four international airports.<sup>660</sup> In January 2019, an air corridor connecting Mazar-e Sharif and Europe via Turkey was opened for cargo flights.<sup>661</sup> At the time of drafting and finalising this report, the flight connections were subject to changes due to the Covid-

<sup>649</sup> Kam Air, route map, domestic routes, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>650</sup> SIGAR, Afghanistan's Civilian Aviation: Capacity has improved but challenges remain, including reliance on donor support for operations, July 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>651</sup> Flightradar 24, Herat International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>652</sup> ch-aviation, Herat, Afghanistan set for scheduled int'l pax service, 3 October 2017, [url](#); Flightradar 24, Herat International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>653</sup> Flightradar 24, Herat International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>654</sup> Flightradar 24, Herat International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>655</sup> ch-aviation, Herat, Afghanistan set for scheduled int'l pax service, 3 October 2017, [url](#); Flightradar 24, Herat International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#); Kam Air, route map, domestic routes, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>656</sup> ch-aviation, Herat, Afghanistan set for scheduled int'l pax service, 3 October 2017, [url](#); Flightradar 24, Herat International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#); Kam Air, route map, domestic routes, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>657</sup> Flightradar 24, Herat International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>658</sup> ch-aviation, Herat, Afghanistan set for scheduled int'l pax service, 3 October 2017, [url](#); Kam Air, route map, domestic routes, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>659</sup> Kam Air, route map, domestic routes, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>660</sup> Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan (version 3.0), 26 September 2018, available at [url](#), p. 8

<sup>661</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, Mazar-i-Sharif-Turkey-Europe air corridor formally opens, 9 January 2019, [url](#)

19 measures. Based on online flight schedules accessed through a tracking site, the following connections were available from Mazar-e Sharif as of 8 July 2020.<sup>662</sup>

Internationally:

- These destinations are served from/ to Mazar-e Sharif:
  - Istanbul (Turkish Airline)<sup>663</sup>
  - Mashhas (Kam Air)<sup>664</sup>

Domestically:

- Ariana Afghan Airlines operates domestic flights from Mazar-e Sharif to:
  - Kabul
- Kam Air operates domestic flights from Mazar-e Sharif to:
  - Kabul
  - Herat<sup>665</sup>
  - Zaranji (via Herat)<sup>666</sup>

## 3.2 Travel restrictions and documents required for travel

According to the Constitution, individuals enjoy freedom of movement and Afghans enjoy the constitutional right to foreign travel, emigration as well as repatriation.<sup>667</sup> Although there are no legal restrictions in place, in practice the ongoing conflict within the country as well as mass displacement often make travelling unsafe.<sup>668</sup> During 2019, in general, the government did not restrict the right to freedom of movement within the borders of the country. According to USDOS, ‘the greatest barrier to movement in some parts of the country remained the lack of security. Taxi, truck, and bus drivers reported security forces and insurgents sometimes operated illegal checkpoints and extorted money and goods from travelers. The Taliban regularly blocked highways completely or imposed illegal taxes on those who attempted to travel.’<sup>669</sup> (See Section [3.4 Roadway Security](#)). According to the Bertelsmann Stiftung, Afghanistan is short of ‘a basic public transportation system’.<sup>670</sup>

The main identification document in Afghanistan is called *tazkera* (see Section [1.3. Access to the Tazkera](#)). A *tazkera* is ‘necessary’ in order to access a range of public services as well as to obtain other identity documents (i.e. passports and driving licences).<sup>671</sup>

The Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) observed that ‘appropriate identification is generally sufficient to permit passage through government-run checkpoints. Officers may demand bribes due to corruption, poor pay, and lack of discipline within rural police and army forces.’<sup>672</sup> A representative at the AAN contacted by the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) in 2016 did not mention any ‘systematic requirement for documents to travel within Afghanistan’.<sup>673</sup>

<sup>662</sup> Flightradar 24, Mazar-e Sharif International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>663</sup> Flightradar 24, Mazar-e Sharif International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#); Turkish Airline, Mazar-e Sharif, Afghanistan, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>664</sup> Flightradar 24, Mazar-e Sharif International Airport, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>665</sup> Kam Air, route map, domestic routes, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>666</sup> Kam Air, route map, domestic routes, n.d., as of 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>667</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 - Afghanistan, 10 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>668</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2020– Afghanistan, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>669</sup> USDoS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 - Afghanistan, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>670</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Afghanistan, 2020, 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>671</sup> NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>672</sup> USDOS, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, Afghanistan 2020 Crime & Safety Report, 25 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>673</sup> Canada, IRB, Afghanistan: Documents Required to Travel within Afghanistan, Documents Required to Pass Checkpoints (2013-January 2015), 3 February 2016, [url](#)

Due to the worldwide outbreak of the Covid-19 virus, Afghanistan has imposed lockdown measures to prevent the spread of the virus. According to the US embassy in Kabul as of 30 May 2020, ‘Kabul city, Herat, Farah, Jalalabad (Nangarhar), Asadabad (Kunar), and Zaranj (Nimroz) are on lockdown.’<sup>674</sup>

### 3.3 Freedom of movement for women

Social restrictions constrain women’s ability to travel on their own.<sup>675</sup> According to social customs, women’s freedom of movement is limited by the requirement of male consent or male protection.<sup>676</sup> Women who do travel without male protection (also referred to as a *chaperone* or *mahram*<sup>677</sup>) run a greater risk of being discriminated against or harassed when they leave the house.<sup>678</sup> Male protection may come in form of ‘the husband or immediate male relatives whom the woman may not marry under sharia law, i.e. father, brother, paternal and maternal uncles and cousins whom she may not marry’.<sup>679</sup> According to The Netherlands’ 2019 Country of Origin Report on Afghanistan, ‘this pressure’ to have male protection is more prominent in rural areas and areas under the control of the Taliban and other AGEs.<sup>680</sup> For instance, in the city of Kandahar women are rarely seen alone in public, while this is more common in Mazar-e Sharif and Kabul. According to Foschini, as of November 2018, women could travel alone on routes connecting some major cities to the surrounding districts, using public transportation like other commuters. This happened around Kabul (especially in the Shomali plateau north of the city), along the Herat-Islam Qalah highway, and on the main highways leading to and from Mazar-e Sharif.<sup>681</sup>

Nonetheless, the 2019 report by The Netherlands noted that in practice:

‘it is often risky for women to travel alone - not just in the countryside, but also in large cities such as Kabul [...] as a result of the prevailing culture and associated social pressure, women are often accompanied by a mahram [...] the idea behind this is that the mahram can support the woman should she experience problems. [...] Single women move around outside the home in groups, a single mother can go into the street without being bothered if she is accompanied by a son. Boys from the age of seven can play this role of chaperone.’<sup>682</sup>

There are no legal obstacles for women to drive cars in Afghanistan but only a few women were behind the wheel by 2018.<sup>683</sup> Kabul is one of the cities where women are increasingly seen driving cars as well as in the cities of Balkh and Herat.<sup>684</sup> Officially, no legal barriers are in place that would prohibit women from using public transport.<sup>685</sup> But in practice, ‘there are few facilities that allow women to travel alone by public transport without the risk of being harassed by men. However, there are buses on which

<sup>674</sup> US Embassy in Afghanistan, COVID-19 Information, as of 30 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>675</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2020– Afghanistan, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>676</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 - Afghanistan, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>677</sup> Chaperone is a male relative that accompanies a woman when she leaves the house or travels; the term *mahram* is also commonly used. Corboz, J., Bacha posh in Afghanistan: factors associated with raising a girl as a boy, 17 June 2019, available at: [url](#)

<sup>678</sup> Netherlands, Department for Country of Origin Information Reports, Country of Origin Report Afghanistan, March 2019, [url](#), p.91

<sup>679</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of civilians in armed conflict, Annual Report 2017, February 2018, available at [url](#), pp. 9-10; Netherlands, Department for Country of Origin Information Reports, Country of Origin Report Afghanistan, March 2019, [url](#), p.89

<sup>680</sup> Netherlands, Department for Country of Origin Information Reports, Country of Origin Report Afghanistan, March 2019, [url](#), p.89

<sup>681</sup> Foschini F., Email, 9 November 2018. Fabrizio Foschini made this addition during the review of this report.

<sup>682</sup> Netherlands, Department for Country of Origin Information Reports, Country of Origin Report Afghanistan, March 2019, [url](#), pp .90-91

<sup>683</sup> Huffington Post, Despite The Backlash, Women Take The Wheel In Afghanistan, 31 August 2017, [url](#)

<sup>684</sup> Tolonews, Number of Woman Drivers on the Rise in Kabul, 28 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>685</sup> Netherlands, Department for Country of Origin Information Reports, Country of Origin Report Afghanistan, March 2019, [url](#), p.89



women can take a seat in a separate section. Some employers arrange their own transport for female employees.’<sup>686</sup>

A 2020 article by the Diplomat noted that those who believe that women should only work at home stated security reasons as their main concern. Due to the fact, that for years, women could not to leave their homes without a male guardian, women were not able to pursue studies.<sup>687</sup> According to The Netherlands’ 2019 Country of Origin Report on Afghanistan:

‘Access to education and healthcare remains a major challenge for women and girls [...] many Afghans object to education for women if it forces women to travel from home [...] Afghan women have less access to healthcare than men. The social pressure to be accompanied by a mahram also forms an obstacle preventing women from going to health centres [...] under traditional prevailing culture, especially in rural areas, it is not acceptable for a woman to visit a male doctor for medical treatment.’<sup>688</sup>

Mentally and/or physically challenged women in Afghanistan face several obstacles, for example, ‘physical rehabilitation is not available in all provinces, and because patients have to travel long distances to get services, many forego them altogether.’<sup>689</sup> See [Section 2.6.4 Access to healthcare for women](#).

Under the Taliban rule (1996-2001), women were barred from public sphere, from education and employment<sup>690</sup>, as well as being denied access to freedom of movement<sup>691</sup>; with political developments and a peace agreement signed between the US and the Taliban on 29 February 2020<sup>692</sup>, some observers raised concerns that some of the women’ rights achieved since then could be at risk.<sup>693</sup>

### 3.4 Roadway security

In 2019, the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan has caused mass displacement and made travel unsafe in many parts of the country.<sup>694</sup> During 2019, conflict-related incidents have continued to have an impact on civilians while travelling on roads or carrying out their daily routines<sup>695</sup>, and the lack of security remained the greatest barrier for movement in some parts of the country. Taxi, truck, and bus drivers reported that illegal checkpoints were sometimes operated by security forces and insurgent groups, who extorted money and goods from travellers.<sup>696</sup>

UNAMA stated that during 2019, threats on major roads and highways, including abductions carried out by Taliban, served as restriction of freedom of movement for Afghan people and exacerbate a climate of fear.<sup>697</sup> The USDOS also noted that ‘the Taliban regularly blocked highways completely or imposed illegal taxes on those who attempted to travel. In August [2019] the Taliban captured Dasht-e-Archi District, Kunduz Province and Pul-i-Khumri District, Baghlan Province, blocking roads leading to the Kabul highway for more than two weeks.’<sup>698</sup> In October 2019, a bomb detonated, resulting in an explosion near Kandahar airport for which the Taliban claimed responsibility. No civilians were

<sup>686</sup> Netherlands, Department for Country of Origin Information Reports , Country of Origin Report Afghanistan, March 2019, [url](#), p.89

<sup>687</sup> Diplomat (The), Afghanistan’s Women Are the Key to a Lasting Peace, 7 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>688</sup> Netherlands, Department for Country of Origin Information Reports , Country of Origin Report Afghanistan, March 2019, [url](#), p.89-90

<sup>689</sup> HRW, Disability Is not a Weakness, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>690</sup> BBC, Afghan peace talks: The woman who negotiated with the Taliban, 27 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>691</sup> HRW, A crucial moment for women’s rights in Afghanistan, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>692</sup> BBC, Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18-year war, 29 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>693</sup> HRW, A crucial moment for women’s rights in Afghanistan, 5 March 2020, [url](#); Diplomat (The), The US-Taliban Deal Ignores Human Rights and Women, 6 March 2020, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Women in Afghanistan fear a return to oppression as they are left out of peace talks with Taliban, 18 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>694</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2020– Afghanistan, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>695</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>696</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 - Afghanistan, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>697</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>698</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 - Afghanistan, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

injured.<sup>699</sup> In November 2019, a suicide car bomb exploded near the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul killing 12 civilian casualties, including three children, and wounding 20 others.<sup>700</sup> On 7 June 2020, Tolonews reported a ‘dramatic surge in security threats’ on the country’s main highways connecting Afghanistan’s capital Kabul to other provinces. Reportedly, this is due to widespread fighting between the ANSF and AGEs over the control of the main country’s highways; insecurity has significantly increased on the highways including: the Kabul-Logar-Paktia, Kabul-Baghlan, Baghlan-Kunduz, Pul-e Khumri-Samangan, Kabul- Jalalabad and Kabul- Kandahar highways.<sup>701</sup>

As of April 2020, the Herat-Islam Qala, a key highway connecting the city of Herat with the border town of Islam Qala reportedly remain unsafe due to the presence of militants and armed robbers.<sup>702</sup> On 31 July 2019, a bus hit an IED on the highway between Kandahar and Herat, killing at least 34 civilians and wounding other 17.<sup>703</sup> Local media reported that cases of extortion at checkpoints established by Taliban as well as government forces became frequent on Kandahar-Kabul, Kandahar-Herat, and Kabul-Torkham highways; cases of extortion were reported also, for instance, on the highway connecting Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province, and Dar-e Suf district, Samangan province, and Baghlan-Balkh highway.<sup>704</sup>

In May 2020 a Sar-e Pul provincial council member mentioned the Taliban running checkpoints in various villages of Zari district, on the road towards Mazar-e Sharif.<sup>705</sup> There were reports of increased insecurity along the Mazar-Shiberghan highway in August 2019.<sup>706</sup> The Taliban reportedly often established checkpoints along the highway, making travelling for government employees difficult.<sup>707</sup> Security incidents along the Mazar-Shiberghan highway were reported in March<sup>708</sup>, April<sup>709</sup> and October 2019<sup>710</sup> and continued to be reported in 2020<sup>711</sup>, including during the week of reduction in violence at the end of February 2020 agreed between the Taliban and the United States.<sup>712</sup> Protesters blocked the Mazar-Shiberghan highway in June 2019 after to children were killed and two civilians were injured in a security operation on that highway.<sup>713</sup>

<sup>699</sup> Gulf News, Explosion near Kandahar Airport in Afghanistan, 27 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>700</sup> Washington Post (The), 12 killed in Kabul suicide blast, including children, 13 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>701</sup> Tolonews, Fierce widespread fighting surges to control highways, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>702</sup> Tolonews, Herat’s Key Highway Remains Unsafe: Officials, 25 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>703</sup> Al Jazeera, Dozens of civilians killed as the bus hit a roadside bomb, 31 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>704</sup> Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>705</sup> Ruttig, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balkhab District: Are the Taleban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

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<sup>708</sup> New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>709</sup> New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 5-11, 11 April 2019, [url](#); Xinhua, Gov’t forces kill 7 militants in N. Afghanistan, 30 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>710</sup> New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>711</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 highway police personnel killed in Balkh assault, 1 January 2020, [url](#)

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## Annex II: Terms of Reference

- Overview of the three cities and situation of vulnerable groups
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- Socio-economic indicators
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- Mobility and internal travel
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