

# Afghanistan

## *Taliban's impact on the population*



Ministry of Immigration  
and Integration

The Danish  
Immigration Service

This report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

The report is a synthesis of information gathered from different sources, and it brings together condensed information in a relevant manner for the reader's COI needs and it organises information together thematically to form a coherent whole of the topic in question, instead of listing or quoting information source by source.

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## Executive summary

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The conditions for vulnerable groups in Afghanistan, women in particular, have been impacted by the Taliban takeover, e.g. strict rules for covering their bodies and their freedom of movement.

Regarding the state's ability and willingness to provide protection for women, the legal framework put in place to protect women's rights has eroded after the Taliban assumed power, since sharia law now constitutes the only legal framework in Afghanistan.

The Taliban has issued guidelines for reporting in Afghanistan, which has limited the journalistic space, and there have been reports of violations against journalists, as well as human rights defenders.

The number of conflict related security incidents have remained somewhat low compared to before the Taliban's takeover with the notable exception of the month of Ramadan (March and April 2022) with several explosions in Hazara and Shia communities causing several casualties. Many of which the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) has accepted the responsibility for, generating questions among Afghans, on whether the Taliban government is capable and willing to protect all Afghans against ISKP, including the minorities.

On the other hand, the crime level has gone up since mid-August. The rise in crime in Afghanistan has especially affected Kabul and other big cities, where financially motivated enrichment crimes such as robberies and kidnappings have spiked since August 2021.

Even though a large number of Afghans affiliated with the former government were evacuated abroad, many employees of the former government remain in the country. This includes former Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), government personnel, police officers as well as their families, who have been subjected to different forms of violations, including killings, arrests, house searches etc.

The Taliban generally has a well-developed intelligence network throughout the country, especially in the rural parts of Afghanistan, where they have had a strong presence as an insurgency. On the other hand, their intelligence network is less developed in areas where they had little or no presence prior to August 2021.

The information regarding the prevalence of Afghans who have returned from Europe since August 2021, including Afghans who were evacuated from Afghanistan is highly limited, since return programmes are no longer in place in the country.

# Table of contents

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<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Map of Afghanistan</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>1. Background</b> .....	<b>8</b>
1.1. Access to information in Afghanistan.....	8
1.2. Taliban governance .....	9
1.3. An unfolding humanitarian crisis.....	10
1.3.1. Health care sector under pressure .....	10
<b>2. Insecurity and crime levels</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>3. Targeted individuals</b> .....	<b>14</b>
3.1. Afghans with links to the former government .....	14
3.1.1. Armed forces .....	15
3.1.2. Civil servants.....	17
3.2. Employees or former employees of international companies, foreign troops, NGOs, or foreign embassies in Afghanistan .....	18
3.2.1. Employees of foreign troops .....	18
3.2.2. NGOs, international organisations and foreign embassies .....	18
3.3. Journalists.....	19
3.4. Human rights defenders.....	21
<b>4. Family members to targeted individuals</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>5. Monitoring and intelligence gathering</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>6. Vulnerable groups</b> .....	<b>25</b>
6.1. Women .....	25
6.1.1. Freedom of movement.....	25
6.1.2. Women without a male support network.....	26
6.1.3. Women’s access to job markets.....	26
6.1.4. Women who defy the Taliban .....	27
6.1.5. Gender-based violence (GBV).....	27
6.2. Ethnic and religious minorities, including converts.....	28
6.2.1. Shia .....	29

6.2.2.	Sikhs, Jews, Salafis, Christians and converts.....	29
6.2.3.	Other ethnic minorities .....	30
6.3.	LGBT.....	31
6.3.1.	Change in the situation for LGBT since August 2021.....	31
6.3.2.	Treatment of LGBT people by families and local communities.....	32
6.3.3.	Accessibility of health care for LGBT people .....	32
6.4.	Musicians, well-educated and members of the intelligentsia.....	32
<b>7.</b>	<b>Rule of law.....</b>	<b>34</b>
7.1.	Honour-related conflicts.....	34
7.2.	People with a personal conflict with members of the Taliban.....	35
7.3.	Women’s access to seek redress .....	35
7.3.1.	Shelters and safe houses .....	36
7.4.	Situation for children.....	36
7.5.	Minorities’ access to seek redress.....	37
7.6.	LGBT people’s access to seek redress .....	37
<b>8.</b>	<b>Conditions for Afghans returned to Afghanistan .....</b>	<b>38</b>
	<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>39</b>
	Written sources .....	39
	<b>Annex 1: Terms of Reference (ToR), 3 March 2022 .....</b>	<b>48</b>
	<b>Annex 2: Meeting minutes .....</b>	<b>49</b>
	Skype meeting with an international organisation .....	49
	Skype meeting with an international humanitarian organisation.....	55
	Meeting with IOM.....	64
	Meeting with a representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan.....	68
	DACAAR, Skype meeting, 18 March 2022.....	73
	Meeting with Amina Khan .....	77
	Minutes from Interview with Lynne O’Donnell .....	81
	Minutes from Interview with male human rights defender.....	85
	Written answers by a UN national staff in Afghanistan .....	87
	Online meeting with a member of civil society in Afghanistan .....	89
	A well-informed journalist with years of experience covering Afghanistan .....	91

## Introduction

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This present report is a product of a Danish Immigration Service (DIS) mission to Islamabad, Pakistan from 28 March to 5 April 2022. The purpose of the mission was to collect updated information on the situation for the civilian population in Afghanistan since the Taliban assumed power in August 2021. The report distinguishes between ‘targeted individuals’ and ‘vulnerable groups’. Targeted individuals include government officials, journalists, human rights defenders, Afghans employed by foreign forces and international organisations as well as former members of the Afghan security forces. Vulnerable groups include women and girls, ethnic, religious and sexual minorities and members of the intelligentsia in Afghanistan. Moreover, the report covers the Rule of Law as well as crime levels and the conditions for returnees.

The report at hand is an update of several sections in the reports by DIS: [Afghanistan: Recent events](#) which was published in December 2021 and [Afghanistan: Recent developments in the security situation, impact on civilians and targeted individuals](#) published in September 2021.

The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the mission were drawn up by DIS after consultation with the defined target users of the report, in particular the Secretariat of the Danish Refugee Appeals Board and the Asylum Division of DIS as well as a Danish advisory group on COI.<sup>1</sup> ToR is included in Annex 1 of this report.

In the process of compiling this report, the delegation interviewed 13 sources comprising non-governmental organisations (NGOs), journalists, think-tanks, human rights defenders and international organisations. The sources interviewed were selected by the delegation based on their expertise, merit and experience relevant to the mission. Multiple sourcing is implemented to ensure that the collected data is precise and balanced. The objective is to present a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to ToR at the time of publication. The sources consulted are listed in Annex 2. In addition to the information gathered from the interviews, the report is also based on available reports as well as articles of relevance for ToR.

The interviews were conducted in either English or Danish. Some interviews were conducted during meetings in Islamabad, while others were conducted via Skype.

Prior to the interviews, all interlocutors were thoroughly informed about the purpose of the mission and the fact that their statements would be included in a report made publicly available. The interlocutors were asked how they wished to be introduced and quoted, and all sources are introduced and quoted according to their own wishes. All but four sources preferred anonymity.

All meeting minutes were forwarded to the interlocutors for their approval and amendment, allowing them the opportunity to offer corrections or make comments on their statements. All but two sources responded and approved their statements. The two sources in question were informed that in case the delegation did not receive a response to its request for approval within a specific deadline, the delegation would consider the meeting minutes approved. The meeting minutes are thus included in the report. The statements of

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<sup>1</sup> The group consists of the Danish Refugee Council, Amnesty International in Denmark, the Danish Institute for Human Rights, Dignity, representatives of Danish European Mission and Open Doors, the National Commissioner of Police and the Danish Bar and Law Society (representing asylum lawyers).

two additional sources are not included in the report, since both sources chose to withdraw the information given.

The report is a synthesis of the sources' statements. Care has been taken to present the views of the interlocutors as accurately and transparently as possible. For the sake of reader-friendliness, transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the minutes of the interviews in Annex 2 have been numbered in a consecutive order, used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes.

The quotation marks (") are not used in the report whenever the text is a copy of the meeting minutes, however, a reference is made in the footnotes to the paragraphs where the text is cited from.

During the interview, the source may have highlighted issues that are not addressed in the ToR. As these issues could be relevant to refugee status determination, they are included in the meeting summary in Annex 2, but not in the report.

Attention should be called to the volatile and unstable situation in Afghanistan and the fact that the information provided may quickly become outdated. Therefore, the issues addressed in this report should be monitored regularly and the information be brought up to date accordingly. The rapid change in the control and security situation across the country in recent months can also have led to underreporting and the reporting of false information regarding security incidents and targeted attacks against the civilian population, especially in the remote parts of Afghanistan.

The report has been externally peer reviewed by the Norwegian COI-unit, Landinfo, in accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology.<sup>2</sup> The research and editing of this report was finalised on 10 June 2022.

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<sup>2</sup> EASO, *EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology*, June 2019, [url](#)

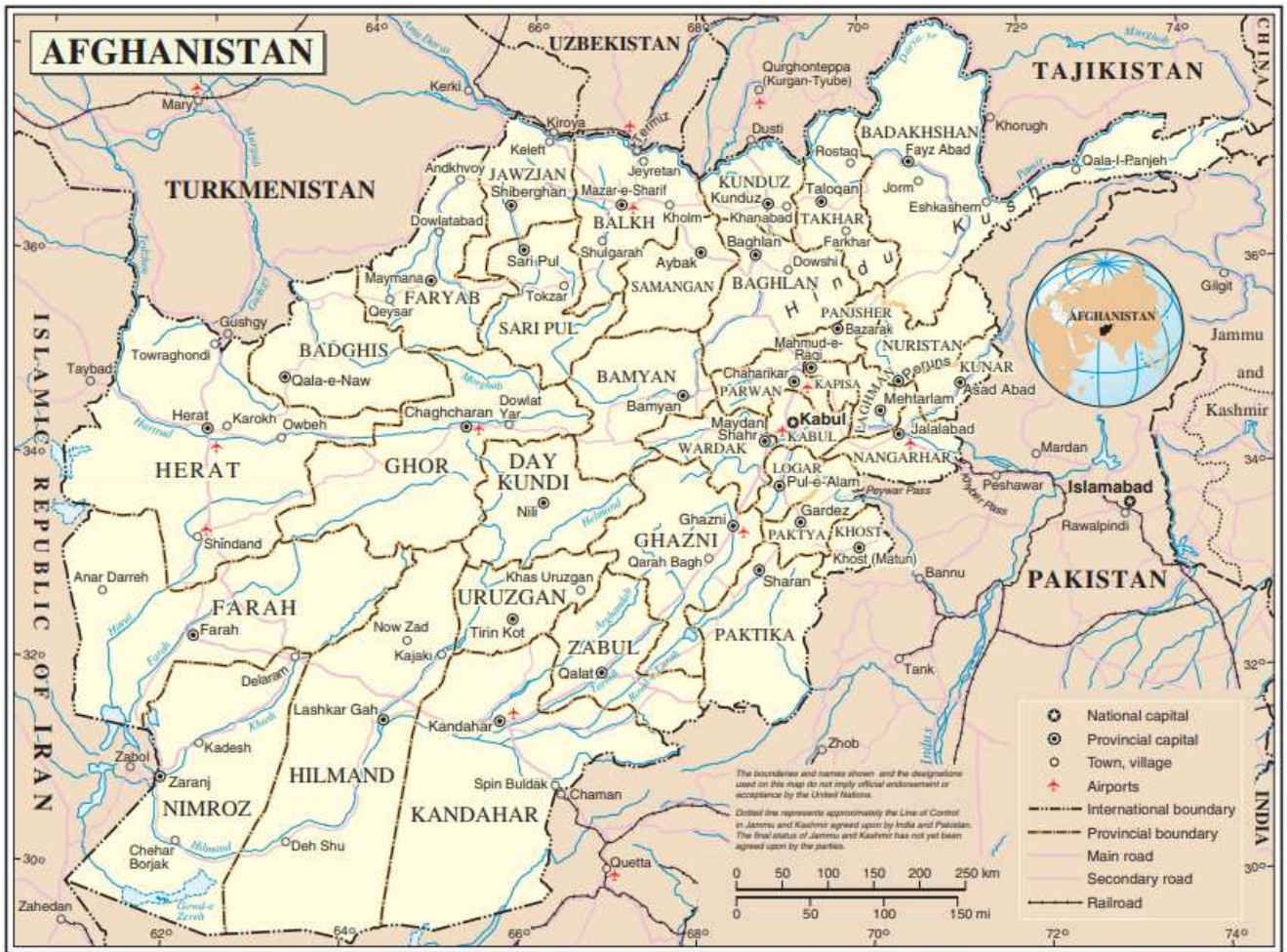
## Abbreviations

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AAN	Afghanistan Analysts Network
AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ANDSF	Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces
COI	Country of Origin Information
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EUAA	European Union Asylum Agency
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IFJ	International Federation of Journalists
ISKP	Islamic State of Khorasan Province
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NDS	National Directorate of Security
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WHO	World Health Organisation



# Map of Afghanistan



Map No. 3958 Rev. 7 UNITED NATIONS June 2011

Department of Field Support Cartographic Section

Map 1: Afghanistan, Map No. 3958 Rev. 7, June 2011, UNITED NATIONS<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> UN, Afghanistan, Map No. 3958 Rev. 7, June 2011, [url](#)

# 1. Background

## 1.1. Access to information in Afghanistan

The flow of information in Afghanistan has been affected by the Taliban assuming power, and local Afghan media have experienced a ‘collapse’ since August 2021.<sup>4</sup> Many Afghan news outlets have closed since the Taliban takeover, in part because many Afghan journalists have fled the country and in part because of the economic crisis in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> For more in this, [see section 3.3. Journalists](#). According to International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the number of operating newspapers in Afghanistan shrunk from 114 to 20 between August 2021 and February 2022.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, five sources consulted for this report noted that the Taliban has clamped down on independent journalism and targeted Afghan journalists who criticized the new authorities in the country.<sup>7</sup> There have also been cases of local Taliban leaders trying to censor local news reports by reviewing journalistic pieces before publication.<sup>8</sup>

The remaining Afghan news outlets have had to adapt their content to the new conditions and limitations in terms of what can be reported. This has had an effect on both the volume of reporting coming out of Afghanistan – especially the peripheral parts of the country – as well as the content of the reporting.<sup>9</sup>

In the wake of the Taliban conquest of the country, many international news outlets have retracted their staff, and they now cover Afghanistan without permanent presence in the country.<sup>10</sup> International news outlets have also been subject to censorship by the Taliban leadership since assuming power. In March 2022, Deutsche Welle (DW) had a political talk show cancelled, the BBC had their news bulletins in Pashto, Persian and Uzbek taken off air and the Voice of America (VOA) blocked from broadcasting in Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup>

Because of this tightening of media control and the decline of media outlets in Afghanistan, many have resorted to social media platforms as their sources of information. The flow of information from social media is much harder to fact check and verify, and so the risk of spreading misinformation rises when one becomes too reliant on social media.<sup>12</sup>

As such, these depictions of the tightening of the journalistic space in Afghanistan largely mirrors the trends in the flow of information reported by DIS in December 2021.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>4</sup> IFJ (International Federation of Journalists), *New report reveals catastrophic scale of media collapse in Afghanistan*, 3 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> IFJ (International Federation of Journalists), *New report reveals catastrophic scale of media collapse in Afghanistan*, 3 February 2022, [url](#); A well-informed journalist: 27

<sup>6</sup> IFJ (International Federation of Journalists), *New report reveals catastrophic scale of media collapse in Afghanistan*, 3 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 19; A human rights defender: 4; A well-informed journalist: 11, 27; Lynne O’Donnell: 7; Amina Khan: 7

<sup>8</sup> A well-informed journalist: 11; DIS (Danish Immigration Service), *Afghanistan: Recent events*, December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; HRW (Human Rights Watch), *Afghanistan: Taliban Threatening Provincial Media; Journalists Detained, Beaten; Media Outlets Closed*, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> DIS (Danish Immigration Service), *Afghanistan: Recent events*, December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; A well-informed journalist: 27

<sup>10</sup> Landinfo, *Afghanistan Talibans regime – situasjonen etter maktovertakelsen*, 9 March 2022, [url](#), p. 7; DIS (Danish Immigration Service), *Afghanistan: Recent events*, December 2021, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>11</sup> Lynne O’Donnell: 7; DW (Deutsche Welle), *Taliban hits DW, BBC with broadcast bans in Afghanistan*, 17 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> A well-informed journalist: 27

<sup>13</sup> DIS (Danish Immigration Service), *Afghanistan: Recent events*, December 2021, [url](#), pp. 8-9

## 1.2. Taliban governance

The administrative procedures have changed since mid-August 2021.<sup>14</sup> According to DACAAR, many of the personnel in the new Taliban administration are without previous experience nor knowledge and are in top positions.<sup>15</sup> This lack of experience within the administration often results in varying rules and conditions throughout the country, because different people interpret the rules differently. As such, the specific conditions in a given location often depends on personal relationship with the local authority rather than a set of rules.<sup>16</sup> The representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan shared this assessment, and further explained, that it is often unclear which entity constitutes the relevant authority, and that individuals sometimes have more authority than institutions. : A powerful individual can have more authority and impact on setting the local rules than the responsible ministry. Moreover, it is often unclear what role in local society a given person of authority occupies; In some parts, a local warlord would be in charge, in other parts members of an Elder Council set the local rules.<sup>17</sup>

According to the representative of an international organisation, the fact that authority and power on local level are often coupled with specific individuals rather than institutions, result in varying sets of rules imposed on the public throughout the country.<sup>18</sup> IOM also pointed out, local leaders can issue new instructions from week to week resulting in requirements changing at the local level.<sup>19</sup>

According to the United States Department of State (USDOS), the Taliban have sought to identify people of 'bad character' within the administration. On 25 December 2021, a Taliban spokesperson stated that nearly 2,000 individuals were dismissed from service; those charged with corruption and theft were referred to the legal authorities. Similar measures have been taken on provincial and local level, but USDOS advised that '[l]ittle information was available regarding how individuals were identified, investigations were conducted, or what their outcomes were'.<sup>20</sup>

This loose relationship with rules and administration is not limited to management level. It is often very unclear to the public to what extent new rules and edicts are enforced, and it often hinges on the individual Taliban soldier and his personal views whether certain rules are enforced or not.<sup>21</sup>

According to Amina Khan, the organisational structure and the lack of control over the low-ranking members is one of the biggest challenges of the Taliban leadership now. Their organisational structure was set up for fighting an insurgency, and now they have to perform a completely different task.<sup>22</sup>

A well-informed journalist opined, this varying degree of law enforcement extends beyond the rules and edicts. Thus the individual Taliban soldier might enforce his personal view on women regardless of whether it is consistent with a rule. The same source stated that this sort of behavior further adds to the complexity

<sup>14</sup> DACAAR: 3, 4; A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 4; IOM: 15

<sup>15</sup> DACAAR: 3, 4

<sup>16</sup> DACAAR: 3, 4

<sup>17</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 4

<sup>18</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 4, 6, 27

<sup>19</sup> IOM: 15

<sup>20</sup> United States Department of State, *2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan*, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>21</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 27; A well-informed journalist: 24; International humanitarian organisation: 22

<sup>22</sup> Amina Khan: 12

of the situation in Afghanistan at the moment, and it is very difficult to draw any general conclusion from one or even a few specific cases. This not only applies to the situation of women in Afghanistan, but to all matters in society.<sup>23</sup> In this connection, an Afghan analyst quoted by Landinfo stated that the government has limited control over the Taliban foot soldiers and commanders and that the allegiance of the foot soldiers often lies with local strongmen and commanders rather than with the central government.<sup>24</sup>

### 1.3. An unfolding humanitarian crisis

In January 2022, The United Nations stated that Afghanistan currently faces a multitude of crises: A growing humanitarian emergency, a massive economic contraction as well as the crippling of its banking and financial systems.<sup>25</sup> In March 2022, UNFPA stated that the situation had deteriorated in recent months, in part due to the political power shift as well as the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and drought across much of Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup>

These crises have resulted in more than half of Afghanistan's population facing acute food insecurity and 95 % of Afghans are not eating enough food on a daily basis.<sup>27</sup> As a result, acute malnutrition amongst the population is above the emergency threshold in 25 of 34 provinces.<sup>28</sup> If current trends are not curbed, 97 % of Afghans could face living conditions below the World Bank-designated international poverty line of \$1.90 a day by mid-2022.<sup>29</sup>

The deteriorating economy have resulted in 82 % of Afghan families losing wages since August 2021, and many public employees, including health workers, have reportedly not been paid since the Taliban assumed power.<sup>30</sup> Concurrent with the recession in Afghanistan, prices of basic food staples such as flour and oil have doubled since August 2021, and economic hardship have sparked a rise in people adopting negative coping mechanisms across Afghanistan. Examples of this include the selling of internal organs and children as a way of generating income, and a countrywide increase in drug abuse.<sup>31</sup> For more on conditions for children, see [section 4.4. Child protection issues](#).

#### 1.3.1. Health care sector under pressure

Afghanistan's health care sector has also been severely affected by the economic collapse. In January 2022, only 17 % of the country's more than 2,300 health clinics were functional, and the sector is lacking

<sup>23</sup> A well-informed journalist: 24

<sup>24</sup> Landinfo, *Afghanistan Taliban regime – situasjonen etter maktovertakelsen*, 9 March 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>25</sup> United Nations General Assembly Security Council, *The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security*, 28 January 2022, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>26</sup> UNFPA, *UNFPA Afghanistan Humanitarian Appeal 2022*, March 2022, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>27</sup> Al Jazeera, In Afghanistan, 'people selling babies, young girls to survive', 31 March 2022, [url](#); WFP (World Food Programme), *Afghanistan Emergency*, 13 April 2022, [url](#); World Bank, *Afghanistan Update: Towards Economic Stabilization and Recovery*, [url](#), p. i

<sup>28</sup> WFP (World Food Programme), *Afghanistan Emergency*, 13 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> International Rescue Committee (IRC), *Six months on from change in power, IRC warns starvation could kill more Afghans than last twenty years of war as 97 per cent of population faces poverty*, 15 February 2022, [url](#); The New Yorker, *Afghanistan has become the World's largest humanitarian crisis*, 5 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>30</sup> HRW (Human Rights Watch), *Afghanistan: Economic Roots of the Humanitarian Crisis*, 1 March 2022, [url](#); The New Yorker, *Afghanistan has become the World's largest humanitarian crisis*, 5 January 2022, [url](#); The Wall Street Journal, *'No Father Wants to Sell His Son's Kidney.'* *Afghans Pushed to Desperate Measures to Survive*, 19 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> The Wall Street Journal, *'No Father Wants to Sell His Son's Kidney.'* *Afghans Pushed to Desperate Measures to Survive*, 19 April 2022, [url](#); International humanitarian organisation

personnel.<sup>32</sup> Since August 2021, much of the economic funding from the international donors for the health care sector have stopped.<sup>33</sup> Lacking the necessary funding to operate on full capacity, the health care infrastructure in Afghanistan has been suffering from an unstable flow of both water and electricity as well as insufficient medicines and equipment.<sup>34</sup>

The humanitarian crisis in the country has further put pressure on an already pressured health care sector as increasingly more patients are in need of treatment.<sup>35</sup> According to Save the Children cited in a New York Times article, the number of children suffering from malnutrition have doubled since mid-August 2021, and the health care clinics around the country are further pressured by outbreaks of diarrhea, polio, malaria, dengue fever and a fourth wave of COVID-19.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The New Yorker, Afghanistan has become the World’s largest humanitarian crisis, 5 January 2022, [url](#); Landinfo, *Afghanistan Talibans regime – situasjonen etter maktovertakelsen*, 9 March 2022, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>33</sup> The New York Times, *Afghanistan’s Health Care System Is Collapsing Under Stress*, 14 February 2022, [url](#); Landinfo, *Afghanistan Talibans regime – situasjonen etter maktovertakelsen*, 9 March 2022, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>34</sup> The New York Times, *Afghanistan’s Health Care System Is Collapsing Under Stress*, 14 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>35</sup> Landinfo, *Afghanistan Talibans regime – situasjonen etter maktovertakelsen*, 9 March 2022, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>36</sup> The New York Times, *Afghanistan’s Health Care System Is Collapsing Under Stress*, 14 February 2022, [url](#)

## 2. Insecurity and crime levels

Since the Taliban assumed power in mid-August 2021, the overall security situation in Afghanistan has changed as conflict related security incidents such as armed clashes, air strikes and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have decreased significantly.<sup>37</sup> As reported by DIS in December 2021, this has made many areas safer, especially the rural parts of Afghanistan, which has made cross-country travel possible.<sup>38</sup> One source consulted for this report in late March 2022 echoed this, and elaborated that Afghanistan has witnessed significantly fewer security incidents since August 2021 compared to before the Taliban takeover, and added that the overall security level has remained somewhat stable.<sup>39</sup> However, since this source was consulted, there has been several incidents of attacks by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) against Shia-Muslim communities in particular, across Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup> For more in this, [see section 6.2. Ethnic and Religious Minorities](#).

While the number of conflict related security incidents have remained somewhat low relative to before the Taliban conquered Afghanistan, the crime level has gone up since mid-August.<sup>41</sup> There is no publicly available statistics on crime in Afghanistan<sup>42</sup>, but four sources consulted for this report stated that the crime levels in Afghanistan have risen concurrently with the deepening of the humanitarian and economic crisis in the country.<sup>43</sup> The rise of crime in Afghanistan has especially affected Kabul and other big cities, where financially motivated enrichment crimes such as robberies and kidnappings, but also petty crimes such as theft, have spiked since August 2021.<sup>44</sup> Local business owners and their children had been common kidnapping targets.<sup>45</sup> Other examples include the kidnapping of a doctor and a former member of national security forces in Kunduz.<sup>46</sup>

According to a representative of an international organisation, the authorities in Afghanistan are having issues solving criminal incidents and the representative has assessed that the crime level likely is underreported and many kidnapping cases are resolved internally between the parties. The issue of solving

<sup>37</sup> United Nations General Assembly Security Council, *The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security*, 28 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 4-5

<sup>38</sup> DIS (Danish Immigration Service), *Afghanistan: Recent events*, December 2021, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>39</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 1.

<sup>40</sup> The New York Times, *With Spate of Attacks, ISIS Begins Bloody New Chapter in Afghanistan*, 1 May 2022, [url](#); The New York Times, *Explosion at Afghan Mosque Kills at Least 10*, 21 April 2022, [url](#); The Wall Street Journal, *Kabul School Blasts Kill Six as Afghanistan Violence Continues*, 19 April 2021, [url](#); The New York Times, *Blasts at Schools in Shiite Area of Kabul Kill at Least 6*, 19 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>41</sup> International humanitarian organisation: 44; DACAAR: 17; Tolo News, *Young Man Killed by Unknown Attackers in Western Kabul*, 26 February 2022, [url](#); BAMF, *Briefing Notes Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration*, 31 January 2022, [url](#); Afghan Voice Agency, *Kunduz Residents Complain of Assassinations and Kidnappings Amid Rising Poverty*, 5 December 2021, [url](#); Foreign Policy, *Afghan Crime Wave Adds to Taliban Dystopia*, 29 October 2021, [url](#); Tolo News, *Kabul Residents Urge Govt to Tackle Crime*, 26 November 2021, [url](#); Hasht-e-Subh Daily, *Crime Rates in Afghanistan Remain High*, 22 May 2022, [url](#); Protection Cluster, *Afghanistan Protection Analysis Update – Q4*, February 2022, [url](#); A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 2; An international organisation: 32

<sup>42</sup> DIS (Danish Immigration Service), *Afghanistan: Recent events*, December 2021, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>43</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 44; DACAAR: 17, 18; A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 2, 3; An international organisation: 32.

<sup>44</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 44; DACAAR: 17, 18; A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 2, 3; An international organisation: 32.

<sup>45</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 2

<sup>46</sup> Afghan Voice Agency, *Kunduz Residents Complain of Assassinations and Kidnappings Amid Rising Poverty*, 5 December 2021, [url](#)

crime cases reflects the Taliban's little or no experience in conducting police work. As a result, Taliban members have sometime resorted to a deterrence strategy in order to try to contain the crime levels. As an example of this, the source pointed to the public display of the bodies of two alleged kidnappers in Herat City.<sup>47</sup>

In this connection, Amina Khan, Director of Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI), Islamabad proved an outlier in relation to the other sources consulted. She advised that while petty crimes had risen since the Taliban takeover, serious crimes such as kidnapping had declined as the Taliban’s reputation for harsh punishments had deterred the public.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 3

<sup>48</sup> Amina Khan: 17

## 3. Targeted individuals

### 3.1. Afghans with links to the former government

Since the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan on 15 August 2021, their leadership has announced a general amnesty for former government officials and members of the Afghan National Security Defence Forces (ANSDF). On several occasions, the Taliban ministers called on Taliban fighters to respect the general amnesty and to refrain from harming former government officials.<sup>49</sup>

During the weeks that followed Taliban’s takeover, 124,000 people were evacuated abroad.<sup>50</sup> According to numbers in The New York Times, 80,000 people out of the total number of evacuees were Afghans.<sup>51</sup> Left behind were, according to The New York Times, tens of thousands of Afghans, including former members of the security forces<sup>52</sup>, some of whom left their homes to hide from the Taliban.<sup>53</sup>

An international organisation claimed that the amnesty was in some cases used to identify targets.<sup>54</sup> The UN has received credible allegations regarding the killing of more than 130 former ANSDF personnel, government personnel or their family members. Of them, around 100 were extrajudicial killings attributed to the Taliban or their affiliates.<sup>55</sup> The reported killings occurred in the period from 24 August 2021 to February 2022, but it is not clear exactly when these killings took place or whether there is a trend going up or down in the killings.<sup>57</sup>

There has been revenge attacks and revenge killings of former government employees since August 2021, but not in the same scale as when the Taliban was overthrown in 2001.<sup>58</sup> Some attacks were caused by personal revenge rather than by systematic targeting.<sup>59</sup>

In terms of degree of persecution of employees of the former government, sources had different views: The UN expressed concerns regarding the Taliban’s ongoing practices of arrests, incommunicado detentions and alleged torture and ill-treatment of individuals suspected of being affiliated with the former government and ANSDF.<sup>60</sup>

An international humanitarian organisation opined that the targeting depends on the targeted individual’s employer, their position as well as on other types of background affiliation. An individual, who worked for

<sup>49</sup> HRC – UN Human Rights Council (formerly UN Commission on Human Rights): *Situation of human rights in Afghanistan*; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/49/24], 4 March 2022, [url](#), section 25; HRW, *No Forgiveness for People Like You*, November 30, 2021, [url](#); DIS, *Afghanistan – Recent events*, December 2021, [url](#), pp 22-25

<sup>50</sup> SIGAR Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *QUARTERLY REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS*, 30 October 2021, [url](#), p.39

<sup>51</sup> The New York Times, *U.S. Struggles With Afghan Evacuees Weeded Out, and Now in Limbo*, 3 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>52</sup> The New York Times, *U.S. War in Afghanistan Ends as Final Evacuation Flights Depart*, 30 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>53</sup> USDOS – US Department of State: *2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan*, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>54</sup> An international organisation: 19

<sup>55</sup> Different sources gave different numbers of government employees, including security forces that were killed or forcibly disappeared. Whether or not these sources are pointing to the same cases or not is unclear

<sup>56</sup> HRC – UN Human Rights Council (formerly UN Commission on Human Rights): *Situation of human rights in Afghanistan*; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/49/24], 4 March 2022, [url](#), section 25

<sup>57</sup> An international organisation: 19

<sup>58</sup> A well-informed journalist: 1, 3, 5, 7

<sup>59</sup> An international organisation: 21; Amina Khan: 1; An international humanitarian organisation: 35

<sup>60</sup> HRC – UN Human Rights Council (formerly UN Commission on Human Rights): *Situation of human rights in Afghanistan*; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/49/24], 4 March 2022, [url](#), section 31



the US military, would be more vulnerable compared to Afghans who worked for other government forces. In case someone was very vocal on social media against the Taliban and if they worked for an embassy, then this person would be at risk as well.<sup>61</sup>

Two sources stated that there has not been a large scale of systematic targeting people associated with the former government.<sup>62</sup> In opposition to this, Lynne O’Donnell, author and columnist at Foreign Policy, noted that people who worked in any capacity for the former government are targeted, i.e. being detained, kept in secret prisons, beaten, tortured and in some cases killed in Afghanistan today.<sup>63</sup> Amina Khan viewed the incidents of targeting that have occurred because of personal grudges and previous disputes.<sup>64</sup> This assessment was shared by the well-informed journalist, who added that one’s previous occupation could be used against the person in question if they have a dispute with a Taliban-member.<sup>65</sup>

The well-informed journalist also stated that Taliban made systematic effort to obtain information, especially on the population of Kabul regarding professional positions and affiliations.<sup>66</sup>

In February 2022, a citywide house search campaign,<sup>67</sup> led by the Taliban, took place in Kabul. The authorities were looking for weapons and went from house to house.<sup>68</sup> The search instigated fear in people in Kabul who had worked for the previous administration.<sup>69</sup>

During the house search campaign, people associated with the former government, who were in possession of vehicles and houses, received varying treatment by the Taliban.<sup>70</sup> The well-informed journalist noted that some of the people associated with the former government were arrested for a couple of days, while others were taken in for questioning and released afterwards.<sup>71</sup> Other sources stated that some former government employees were held incommunicado.<sup>72</sup>

### 3.1.1. Armed forces

#### Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF)

Former members of ANDSF, including pilots from the former air force and police officers, have been subject to a wide range of treatment from the Taliban, including arrests, house searches, and detention as well as being shot and killed. Most of these attacks against former security forces were concentrated in Kabul and the south and southeastern parts of Afghanistan.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>61</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 33

<sup>62</sup> A well-informed journalist: 2; Amina Khan: 1

<sup>63</sup> Lynne O’Donnell: 3

<sup>64</sup> Amina Khan: 1

<sup>65</sup> A well-informed journalist: 8

<sup>66</sup> A well-informed journalist: 2

<sup>67</sup> HRW, *In Afghanistan, Burning Our Past to Protect Our Future*, March 1, 2022, [url](#); Jurist, *Afghanistan dispatch: Taliban house-to-house searches raise privacy concerns, fear in those still trying to leave*, 27 February 2022, [url](#); A well-informed journalist: 2; Lynne O’Donnell: 3

<sup>68</sup> HRW, *In Afghanistan, Burning Our Past to Protect Our Future*, March 1, 2022, [url](#); Jurist, *Afghanistan dispatch: Taliban house-to-house searches raise privacy concerns, fear in those still trying to leave*, 27 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>69</sup> A well-informed journalist: 2; An international organisation: 20

<sup>70</sup> A well-informed journalist: 2

<sup>71</sup> A well-informed journalist: 2

<sup>72</sup> HRW, *“No Forgiveness for People Like You” Executions and Enforced Disappearances in Afghanistan under the Taliban*, 30 November 2021, [url](#); Lynne O’Donnell: 3

<sup>73</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 13

Different sources gave different numbers of government employees, including security forces that were killed or forcibly disappeared. It is unclear whether or not these sources are pointing to the same cases or not. Amnesty International (AI) reported that 100 former members of the security forces were killed or forcibly disappeared by the Taliban between mid-August and the end of December.<sup>74</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW) documented executions and enforced disappearances of 47 former members of the ANSDF – military personnel, police, intelligence service members, and paramilitary militia – who either had surrendered to or were apprehended by Taliban forces between 15 August and 31 October 2021. Taliban leaders denied that these killings reflected an official policy and claimed that many were attributed to personal disputes.<sup>75</sup> The DIS also reported on these incidents in December 2021.<sup>76</sup>

The UN gave an example on the killings, which took place on 4 November 2021, in Balkh province where seven members of the Taliban entered a private residence, shot, and killed two women and two men. Both women and one of the men were former ANSDF employees.<sup>77</sup> Another example was presented by Amnesty International, in which the Taliban conducted door-to-door searches in the village of Urmaz in Panjshir to identify persons suspected of working for the pre-August 15 government. Taliban fighters executed at least six civilian men, with eyewitnesses saying that most had previously served in the ANSDF.<sup>78</sup>

In May 2022, fighting in the centre and south of Panjshir Province increased. The National Resistance Front (NRF), partly made up of civilians and former ANSDF employees, is fighting the Taliban leading to casualties on both sides, including civilians.<sup>79</sup> For more on this, see [Section 6.2.4 Other Ethnic Minorities](#).

A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan assessed those individuals most at risk of being targeted are the remaining members of ANSDF. It is however unclear whether they are targeted solely for belonging to the security forces or because of personal reasons.<sup>80</sup> The source added that he knew of a great deal of incidents in which Afghans, including interpreters, were arrested or killed without an apparent motivation or legal ground.<sup>81</sup> A well-informed journalist opined that the Taliban’s targeting and treatment of the ANSDF depends on the person’s deeds rather than his rank.<sup>82</sup>

In most cases, the mid and low level officers were targeted, and this distinction might be due to the fact that former low-level officers accepted bribes, or the fact that it simply is easier to target people in lower ranks, because it does not cause a stir, compared to targeting people in senior positions would.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>74</sup> AI – Amnesty International: Amnesty International Report 2021/22; *The State of the World’s Human Rights; Afghanistan 2021*, 29 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>75</sup> HRW, *No Forgiveness for People Like You*, November 30, 2021, [url](#)

<sup>76</sup> Denmark, DIS, *Afghanistan – Recent events*, December 2021, [url](#), pp 24-25

<sup>77</sup> HRC – UN Human Rights Council (formerly UN Commission on Human Rights): *Situation of human rights in Afghanistan*; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/49/24], 4 March 2022, [url](#), section 25

<sup>78</sup> AI – Amnesty International, *Afghanistan: Government collapse marked by ‘repeated war crimes and relentless bloodshed’*, 15 December 2021, [url](#)

Afghanistan: Government collapse marked by ‘repeated war crimes and relentless bloodshed’ – new report

<sup>79</sup> Radio Free Europe (RFE), *New Reports Of Fighting In Afghanistan’s Panjshir Trigger Fresh Claims Of Taliban War Crimes*, 13 May 2022, [url](#); BBC, *Afghan resistance attack Taliban, sparking reprisals in Panjshir*, 16 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>80</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 13

<sup>81</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 13

<sup>82</sup> A well-informed journalist: 4

<sup>83</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 13

### National Directorate of Security (NDS) and police

The Taliban has targeted people associated with the NDS.<sup>84</sup> Some of these NDS units, were trained by the CIA during the last five years of the former government, are mainly subjected to persecution because these units have committed severe human rights violations against many Taliban members in the past.<sup>85</sup> No one has the full overview of how many NDS members have been targeted, but to Amina Khan’s knowledge, the Taliban has mostly persecuted people in mid and high level positions, many of whom have been outspoken critics of the Taliban.<sup>86</sup>

The Ministry of the Interior under the Taliban rule called former police officers to return; however, returns were slow due to fear of retaliation and lack of salary payments.<sup>87</sup> In spite of this, many former officers of the Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan Local Police (ALP) are still working, but they do not wear uniforms because they are not receiving salaries.<sup>88</sup>

As an example on targeting, a former police officer was assassinated in front of her family members at her home in Ghor.<sup>89</sup> Another example on targeting of former police officers, a source noted that a police woman went missing days after the Taliban takeover in Mazar-e Sharif.<sup>90</sup> In a third example, Taliban fighters executed two senior police officials – Haji Mullah Achakzai, the security director of Badghis Province, and Ghulam Sakhi Akbari, the security director of Farah Province.<sup>91</sup>

#### 3.1.2. Civil servants

Many civil servants employed by the previous government have returned to their former positions, including local governments in the provinces below a certain rank.<sup>92</sup> Around 80 % of the civil servants employed by the previous government have returned to work. However, members of the Taliban occupy the higher leadership positions.<sup>93</sup> Some cases of high-level officials, such as the deputy finance minister, have been allowed to return to former positions.<sup>94</sup> Women are barred from working in the public domain except in the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and at the airport in Kabul, where some women conduct security searches and passport check for female travelers.<sup>95</sup>

Many civil servants were wary of returning to their positions immediately after August 2021 because of the uncertainty of how the Taliban would govern.<sup>96</sup> Members of the Taliban have targeted a number of civil

<sup>84</sup> A well-informed journalist: 4; Amina Khan: 3

<sup>85</sup> A well-informed journalist: 4

<sup>86</sup> Amina Khan: 3

<sup>87</sup> USDOS – US Department of State: *2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan*, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>88</sup> Amina Khan: 2

<sup>89</sup> BBC Persian, طالبان متهم به قتل یک پلیس زن در مقابل اعضای خانواده‌اش شدند, 5 September 2021, [url](#), [The Taliban have been accused of killing "a pregnant female police officer"]; The Guardian, ‘Tomorrow they will kill me’: Afghan female police officers live in fear of Taliban reprisals, 10 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>90</sup> Lynne O’Donnell: 3, 4

<sup>91</sup> BBC, *Amid violent reprisals, Afghans fear the Taliban's 'amnesty' was empty*, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>92</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 14; A well-informed journalist: 1; An international humanitarian organisation: 34; Amina Khan: 2

<sup>93</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 14; A well-informed journalist: 1

<sup>94</sup> Amina Khan: 2

<sup>95</sup> A well-informed journalist: 23

<sup>96</sup> Amina Khan: 2

servants employed by the former government. This was due to a personal dispute rather than their previous positions.<sup>97</sup>

## 3.2. Employees or former employees of international companies, foreign troops, NGOs, or foreign embassies in Afghanistan

### 3.2.1. *Employees of foreign troops*

The extent to which former Afghan employees of foreign troops have been subject to persecution depends on several factors. A factor potentially leading to persecution is if employees of foreign troops have previously been engaged in combat with the Taliban.<sup>98</sup>

Another factor is the extent to which the surrounding community and the Taliban are aware of the previous function of the employee.<sup>99</sup> A well-informed journalist noted that there has been cases of local villagers sharing information with the Taliban on interpreters employed by foreign divisions, who had behaved poorly towards the local community. The Taliban are often woven into the local communities in Afghanistan, and therefore have excellent intelligence on who has worked for foreign troops.<sup>100</sup>

A third factor mentioned by the sources is individual circumstances such as the job, the employer and family background.<sup>101</sup> Previous occupation could be used against individuals in a personal vendetta.<sup>102</sup> Likewise, if they had family affiliations, who had problems with the Taliban, that would make them more vulnerable.<sup>103</sup>

Two sources assessed that people employed at military facilities in low-level positions, who were not associated with active combat, would not be persecuted solely based on their previous jobs.<sup>104</sup> Another source, however, opined that former employees of foreign troops constitute a risk profile.<sup>105</sup>

An international humanitarian organisation assessed that, people are less targeted in the rural areas. People who are high profiled or senior positioned would be in more danger - and these profiles tend to live in urban environments.<sup>106</sup>

### 3.2.2. *NGOs, international organisations and foreign embassies*

According to the Taliban’s official line, people who worked for the embassies, international organisations and NGOs will not face persecution. If a person in one of these groups were harassed or assaulted, it was due to a number of factors related to personal or family background rather than their former employer.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> A well-informed journalist: 3

<sup>98</sup> An international organisation: 21; A well-informed journalist: 5; An international humanitarian organisation: 36

<sup>99</sup> An international organisation: 21

<sup>100</sup> A well-informed journalist: 6

<sup>101</sup> An international organisation: 21; A well-informed journalist: 5

<sup>102</sup> A well-informed journalist: 7; An international organisation: 21

<sup>103</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 36

<sup>104</sup> A well-informed journalist: 8; An international humanitarian organisation: 36

<sup>105</sup> An international organisation: 21

<sup>106</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 37

<sup>107</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 35

Local Afghans, who work for NGOs and international organisations, are often treated roughly at checkpoints because they are perceived as linked to foreigners.<sup>108</sup>

### NGOs

An international humanitarian organisation assessed that a former employee of an international NGO, would not be especially targeted.<sup>109</sup> However, there have been examples of assaults on NGO employees handing out aid.<sup>110</sup> A well-informed journalist noted that the Taliban are often a part of the local communities and therefore know NGO affiliated employees.<sup>111</sup>

An international organisation highlighted that those who were operating safe houses had to relocate the safe houses.<sup>112</sup>

During the house search campaign in mid-March 2022, the local NGO employees received a harsh treatment by the Taliban.<sup>113</sup> These encounters vary to a high degree depending on the Talib in charge of that specific house search.<sup>114</sup>

### Employees of foreign embassies

Most of the former employees at the foreign embassies were evacuated in August and September 2021,<sup>115</sup> making it difficult to give any qualified assessments of these people’s risk profiles in Afghanistan today.<sup>116</sup> An international humanitarian organisation assessed that an Afghan would be more vulnerable if he was employed at a foreign embassy with troops on the ground in active combat with the Taliban.<sup>117</sup> For the vast majority of embassy workers, the Taliban did not see them as a threat.<sup>118</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan assessed that the Taliban would know of the identity of low-rank employees at foreign embassies, such as gardeners and electricians. The Taliban are well entrenched within the local communities, especially in rural settings.<sup>119</sup>

## 3.3. Journalists

According to a UN report, the space for independent media and civil society has changed since 15 August 2021. During the former government, freedom of expression had expanded; but on 19 September 2021, the Taliban issued guidelines on media operations for all print, audio and video media outlets. These include advice to the media: not to publish issues contrary to Islam or Sharia, to strictly avoid disrespecting national and influential figures, as well as national and personal privacy etc. The enforcement of these rules

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<sup>108</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 12

<sup>109</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 41

<sup>110</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 16

<sup>111</sup> A well-informed journalist: 14

<sup>112</sup> An international organisation: 22

<sup>113</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 15; DACAAR: 18

<sup>114</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 16

<sup>115</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 38; A well-informed journalist: 9

<sup>116</sup> A well-informed journalist: 9

<sup>117</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 38

<sup>118</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 38

<sup>119</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 12

varies across the country, especially at the provincial level.<sup>120</sup> For more information, please refer to [section 1 Access to information in Afghanistan](#).

A well-informed journalist opined that the Taliban’s approach to journalists and journalism at large mirrors other totalitarian governments across the world;<sup>121</sup> there are allegations of extrajudicial killings of journalists that have taken place.<sup>122</sup> The Afghan Journalist Safety Committee as cited in by Amnesty International announced that at least 12 journalists have been killed and 230 assaulted in the 12 months to November 2021.<sup>123</sup> However, it should be noted that the source did not make a distinction between the periods before and after the 15 August 2021. A human rights defender said that a journalist, he knew, wrote critically on Facebook and the Taliban executed him in the Helmand province around January 2022.<sup>124</sup>

Journalists had been detained after expressing critique of the Taliban,<sup>125</sup> and a source counted 24 incidents between August 2021 and March 2022, in each of them which at least one journalist was detained.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, journalists were subject to ill-treatment during detention,<sup>127</sup> abduction and physical punishment because of their reporting since August 2021.<sup>128</sup> Because of this, journalists feared for their safety and some have fled the country, while others are in hiding.<sup>129</sup>

In a recent example, given by a well-informed journalist, the Taliban picked up two journalists, because they wrote a story on the Taliban banning international TV shows. To the source’s knowledge, the journalists detained have all been released after a couple of days in detention.<sup>130</sup> Another example of the issues journalists have been harassed with is their coverage of protests against the Taliban, particularly those led by women.<sup>131</sup>

The well-informed journalist assessed that the Taliban will not target a journalist solely based on their former employer. The Taliban has visited the offices of the media organisations to check the employees, taxation and registration of cars.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> HRC – UN Human Rights Council (formerly UN Commission on Human Rights): *Situation of human rights in Afghanistan*; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/49/24], 4 March 2022, [url](#), section 40-41

<sup>121</sup> A well-informed journalist: 11

<sup>122</sup> USDOS – US Department of State: *2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan*, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>123</sup> AI – Amnesty International: *Amnesty International Report 2021/22; The State of the World's Human Rights; Afghanistan 2021*, 29 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>124</sup> A human rights defender: 4

<sup>125</sup> A well-informed journalist: 11; An international organisation: 27; A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 19; Lynne O’Donnell: 7-8; Amina Khan: 7; USDOS – US Department of State: *2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan*, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>126</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 19

<sup>127</sup> A well-informed journalist: 11; A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 19

<sup>128</sup> Amina Khan: 7

<sup>129</sup> An international organisation: 27; Lynne O’Donnell: 7-8; USDOS – US Department of State: *2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan*, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>130</sup> A well-informed journalist: 11

<sup>131</sup> USDOS – US Department of State: *2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan*, 12 April 2022, [url](#); ACLED – Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (Author), APW - Afghan Peace Watch (Author): *Tracking disorder during Taliban rule in Afghanistan*; A Joint ACLED and APW Report, April 2022, [url](#), p.2

<sup>132</sup> A well-informed journalist: 13

### 3.4. Human rights defenders

There are reports of human rights abuses and atrocities against human rights defenders,<sup>133</sup> such as killings, enforced disappearances, incommunicado detention, attacks, harassments, threats<sup>134</sup> and arrests by the Taliban.<sup>135</sup> Since 15 August 2021, ten civil society activists have been killed; five of whose deaths were attributed to the Taliban. Another 36 have been arrested, beaten or threatened by the Taliban.<sup>136</sup> Unknown actors carried out numerous targeted killings of civil society advocates.<sup>137</sup>

Due to the climate of uncertainty and fear created by the Taliban, many activists and human rights defenders have left the country.<sup>138</sup>

Several female-led protests resulted in the arrest of women activists, either on site or subsequently after the protest.<sup>139</sup> These arrests are an attempt by the Taliban to suppress the protests and likely to send a message to other potential voices of protests that dissent will not be tolerated.<sup>140</sup> Many women do not publicly talk about their time in detention, due to the high risk of being the centre of ill-meant assumptions, such as rape, which is perceived shameful for woman.<sup>141</sup> Lawyers defending women’s rights profiles have gone into hiding.<sup>142</sup>

An international organisation pointed to two different types of response met by protesters from the Taliban: There are isolated responses in which protestors are dispersed with some level of violence; and there are more coordinated responses.<sup>143</sup> For instance the arrest of 29 women and their family members that took place in February 2022 due to their association with women’s protests and the targeting of a prominent academic.<sup>144</sup>

A human rights defender informed the delegation that he had received life-threatening threats from people he does not know on Twitter, Facebook and via phone calls. He added that the threats he received on the ground by individual Talibs do not reflect policies of the ministries.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> USDOS – US Department of State: *2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan*, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>134</sup> HRC – UN Human Rights Council (formerly UN Commission on Human Rights): *Situation of human rights in Afghanistan*; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/49/24], 4 March 2022, [url](#), section 52-53

<sup>135</sup> HRC – UN Human Rights Council (formerly UN Commission on Human Rights): *Situation of human rights in Afghanistan*; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/49/24], 4 March 2022, [url](#), section 52-53; Amina Khan: 6

<sup>136</sup> HRC – UN Human Rights Council (formerly UN Commission on Human Rights): *Situation of human rights in Afghanistan*; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/49/24], 4 March 2022, [url](#), section 52-53

<sup>137</sup> USDOS – US Department of State: *2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan*, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>138</sup> USDOS – US Department of State: *2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan*, 12 April 2022, [url](#); Amina Khan: 6

<sup>139</sup> An international organisation: 23; Lynne O’Donnell: 10

<sup>140</sup> An international organisation: 23

<sup>141</sup> Lynne O’Donnell: 10

<sup>142</sup> An international organisation: 22

<sup>143</sup> An international organisation: 26

<sup>144</sup> The Guardian, *Taliban have detained 29 women and their families in Kabul, says US envoy*, 12 February 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, *Taliban releases prominent Afghan professor from custody: Family*, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>145</sup> A human rights defender: 1-3

## 4. Family members to targeted individuals

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The sources consulted for this report differed in their views on the degree to which family members of targeted people were targeted:

The well-informed journalist assessed that family members of people with links to the former government, employees or former employees of international companies, foreign troops, NGOs, foreign embassies in Afghanistan or journalists are generally not a target. However, this very much depends on the profession of the person belonging to one or more of the above-mentioned categories, as well as whether this person had a prior personal dispute with a member of the Taliban, the character of the dispute and whether it can be resolved by the village elders.<sup>146</sup>

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and Afghan Peace Watch (APW) assessed that the families of former government officials and security forces have faced abuse. In one case, the brother of a senior security officer was killed when the Taliban could not reach the officer in question. The officer had reportedly fought on the frontlines against Taliban forces in past years.<sup>147</sup>

An international humanitarian organisation assumed that family members of former NDS employees would be interrogated about their whereabouts. Whether or not the family members are at risk themselves, is not entirely clear to the source.<sup>148</sup> According to Amina Khan, the Taliban has not targeted the family members of NDS officials.<sup>149</sup>

A former employee at the Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoI) who has left Afghanistan told Lynne O’Donnell that the Taliban gunmen keep visiting his home and his parents’ home in Kabul. They kept looking for him, and have even shot at his doors and windows with guns.<sup>150</sup> The source added that when the Taliban is looking for members of the former security forces, they use their weapons against relatives who might still be there or against neighbours. There are cases of extrajudicial killings occurring.<sup>151</sup>

A human rights defender informed the delegation that even though he is very active, the Taliban has not attacked him nor his family members and elaborated that he is of an influential family in a conservative part of Afghanistan.<sup>152</sup>

When asked if family members of Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) affiliates are persecuted, an international humanitarian organisation replied that he did not know for sure, but he believed that the family members would have a legitimate reason to be concerned.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> The well-informed journalist: 16

<sup>147</sup> ACLED and APW, *Tracking Disorder during Taliban Rule in Afghanistan*, April 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>148</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 42

<sup>149</sup> Amina Khan: 4

<sup>150</sup> Lynne O’Donnell: 12

<sup>151</sup> Lynne O’Donnell: 3

<sup>152</sup> A human rights defender: 1-3

<sup>153</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 43



## 5. Monitoring and intelligence gathering

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Several sources consulted for this report stated that the Taliban generally has well-developed intelligence networks throughout the country, and especially in the rural parts of Afghanistan, where they had a strong presence as an insurgency.<sup>154</sup>

The representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan advised that the Taliban’s ways of monitoring the population and gathering intelligence is different from that of the former government. Where the former government relied on foreign technology as a means of gathering intelligence, the Taliban utilises their deep roots in the local communities throughout Afghanistan.<sup>155</sup> The well-informed journalist echoed this assessment and elaborated that the Taliban are very good at knowing what goes on at the local level, because they have been woven into the local population throughout the last 20 years. Local Taliban members are taking part in the conversations in the towns and at the local mosques, which gives them a solid sense of what people within the given local community are doing. In other words, they are of the villages and know how villages and local communities throughout Afghanistan function. This way of obtaining intelligence within a local community also means that the Taliban is better skilled to gather intelligence in the Pashtun dominated areas and the areas, where they had a lot of presence as an insurgency.<sup>156</sup>

On the other hand, these intelligence networks are less developed in other parts of the country where the Taliban had little or no presence prior to August 2021.<sup>157</sup> Thus, in larger cities, the Taliban are installing checkpoints. According to Khan, the leadership developed this policy and it serves two purposes: First, this way of questioning the local population serves as a means to extract information concerning local activities. Secondly, it is meant to show the Afghans that the Taliban should not be feared.<sup>158</sup> The representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan stated that the Taliban uses these checkpoints in cities to scan phones of perceived problematic content.<sup>159</sup>

The Taliban also has a strong presence on social media platforms, and they are increasingly utilising these platforms as a means of engaging with the public.<sup>160</sup> However, it is unclear to what extent the Taliban actually monitors activities on social media and uses the information against the population in Afghanistan.<sup>161</sup> One source assessed that the Taliban likely have some idea of the information flows on social networks, and they are increasingly utilizing these means of communication themselves. However, the source assessed that the posts one writes and shares on social media platforms are unlikely to have consequences unless they lead to someone’s death or imprisonment.<sup>162</sup> Amina Khan stated that the Taliban

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<sup>154</sup> A well-informed journalist: 14, 15; Amina Khan: 8, 9; An international humanitarian organisation: 39; A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 11

<sup>155</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 11, 12

<sup>156</sup> A well-informed journalist: 14

<sup>157</sup> A well-informed journalist: 14

<sup>158</sup> Amina Khan: 8

<sup>159</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 10

<sup>160</sup> Amina Khan: 10; A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 10; A well-informed journalist: 15

<sup>161</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 10

<sup>162</sup> A well-informed journalist: 15

has a strong presence on Twitter especially and they monitor the activities in Afghan circles, and engage in discussions in a non-confrontational manner with people they disagree with.<sup>163</sup>

However, there have been reports of the Taliban arresting and even killing Afghans because of their activities in social media.<sup>164</sup>

The Taliban banned TikTok on 21 April 2022. According to a spokesperson as cited by the BBC, the ban was necessary to ‘prevent the younger generation from being misled’.<sup>165</sup>

Two sources referred to reports of the Taliban gaining access to the National Directorate of Security’s (NDS) headquarters as well as biometric data systems after their takeover, but it is unclear to what extent they are able to utilize the databases.<sup>166</sup> The internet has been cut off for NDS’ database and some of the archives were burned or hidden, which means that the Taliban does not have the full information available.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Amina Khan: 10

<sup>164</sup> France 24, *Taliban arrest Afghan professor after social media criticism*, 9 January 2022, [url](#); Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *‘Tortured From Head To Toe’: Taliban Accused Of Killing Afghan Man Over Critical Facebook Post*, 3 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>165</sup> BBC, *Afghanistan: Taliban orders TikTok, PUBG ban for ‘misleading’ youths*, 22 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>166</sup> An international organisation: 33; An international humanitarian organisation: 39, 40; HRW, *New Evidence that Biometric Data Systems Imperil Afghans*, 30 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>167</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 40

## 6. Vulnerable groups

### 6.1. Women

#### 6.1.1. Freedom of movement

Freedom of movement for women in Afghanistan has been restricted to a varying degree, depending on regional customs.<sup>168</sup> An international organisation further elaborated that women’s freedom of movement is context specific.<sup>169</sup> A policy introduced by the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice in December 2021 prevented women from traveling more than 72 km without a *mahram*<sup>170, 171</sup> including air travel.<sup>172</sup> During March 2022, an international organisation received information regarding how women without a *mahram* had been denied the right to cross land borders to Pakistan and Iran. Some of them were allowed to pass,<sup>173</sup> while others had been returned, with the request for a legitimate *mahram* to accompany them.<sup>174</sup>

Three sources elaborated that in many provinces, the need for a *mahram* is not new and was already part of the local custom in conservative areas of Afghanistan, but it is a new phenomenon in cities like Kabul.<sup>175</sup> According to Amina Khan, there are mixed signals regarding what women can and cannot do in the city. On the one hand, many beauty shops are still open, but on the other hand, women can no longer attend cafés without a *mahram*. The Taliban has also restricted access to parks and theme parks, so that women and men cannot attend these public spaces on the same day.<sup>176</sup>

A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan stated that these profound changes and mixed signals have created insecurity and uncertainty in different regions with a deterrent effect on women. Thus, women tend to dress more conservatively to be on the safe side, because the rules are unclear. It is often up to the individual Talibs monitoring at the checkpoints whether the woman standing in front of him lives up to the rules or not. Overall, the source assessed that recent events indicate that the conservative voices within Taliban have the upper hand concerning women’s issues - with a reference to the recent gender divisions in parks and universities.<sup>177</sup> This indication was further fortified on 7 May, when a decree from the Taliban’s supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada, ruled that all Afghan women must cover their faces. If a woman defies this edict, her father or closest male relative will be visited, and eventually imprisoned or fired from his job within the government.<sup>178</sup> The three-step rule, in case a woman defies, begins with a) paying a visit to the woman’s address and advising her male relatives; b) summoning

<sup>168</sup> An international organisation: 7; Amina Khan: 14; DACAAR:7; An international humanitarian organisation: 16; A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 27;

<sup>169</sup> An international organisation: 7

<sup>170</sup> Mahram refers to a man's close female relatives. In Islamic law, mahram connotes a state of consanguinity precluding marriage. Oxford Islamic Studies Online, *Mahram*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>171</sup> Al Jazeera, *No long-distance travel for women without male relative: Taliban*, 26 December 2021 [url](#)

<sup>172</sup> An international organisation: 8; A male human rights activist: 5

<sup>173</sup> A male human rights activist: 5

<sup>174</sup> An international organisation: 8

<sup>175</sup> Amina Khan: 14; A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 27

<sup>176</sup> Amina Khan: 14; CBS News, *Taliban denies Afghan women solo air travel, segregates parks by sex and sends home men with short beards*, 29 March 2022 [url](#)

<sup>177</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 27

<sup>178</sup> Reuters, *Taliban order Afghan women to cover faces again*, 7 May 2022 [url](#)

her male relatives to the relevant Taliban office; c) detaining her male relatives for three days followed by a punishment decided by the Taliban.<sup>179</sup> The edict further suggests that women should not leave their homes unless necessary.<sup>180</sup>

### 6.1.2. Women without a male support network

An international humanitarian organisation assessed that conditions in Afghanistan have always been very challenging for lone women without a network.<sup>181</sup> However, the situation for lone women has worsened since August 2021.<sup>182</sup> Some of the reasons indicated for the deterioration by different sources include:

- the de facto government’s lack of support for women shelters<sup>183</sup>
- the fact that two third of the population are affected by the current food insecurity<sup>184</sup>
- the difficulties for female heads of households to fulfil their role as breadwinners due to restriction put by the Taliban<sup>185</sup>

An international humanitarian organisation opined that a single mother would not live on her own, but more likely would move in with male relatives if possible. This applies everywhere in the country and exceptions to this are rare.<sup>186</sup> DACAAR emphasised that because a lone woman without a male support network in Afghanistan is associated with social and cultural stigma, widows often remarry in order to re-enter into a social support structure. As an example, the source stated that when one of his colleagues died in a car crash, his widowed wife married the brother of the deceased so that he could provide for her. Due to the disappearance of private funding for shelters, combined with de facto government’s lack of support, the numbers of female beggars on the streets in Afghanistan have been on the rise.<sup>187</sup>

### 6.1.3. Women’s access to job markets

Women’s access to the job market has overall worsened since August 2021.<sup>188</sup> DACAAR noted that women’s access to the job market vary depending on which province they find themselves in, as it was the case prior to August 2021.<sup>189</sup> An international humanitarian organisation differed on this and advised that in terms of regional differences in women’s ability to work he did not see a difference.<sup>190</sup>

The recent restrictions in freedom of movement have created challenges for women’s access to the job markets.<sup>191</sup> There are more day-to-day inspections concerning traveling in some provinces.<sup>192</sup> Recently,

<sup>179</sup> Afghanistan International, طالبان زنان را تهدید کرد تمام صورت خود را بپوشانند، 7 May 2022 [url](#); [From deprivation of the right to work to imprisonment; the Taliban threatened women to cover their entire faces]

<sup>180</sup> AP News, *Taliban divisions deepen as Afghan women defy veil edict*, 9 May 2022 [url](#)

<sup>181</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 25

<sup>182</sup> DACAAR: 10; An international humanitarian organisation: 25; An international organisation: 9

<sup>183</sup> DACAAR: 10; An international humanitarian organisation: 25

<sup>184</sup> UN News, *Afghanistan: Food insecurity and malnutrition threaten ‘an entire generation’*, 15 March 2022, [url](#); World Food Program (WFP), *WFP Afghanistan: Situation Report*, 4 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>185</sup> An international organisation: 9; Tolo, *Afghan Woman Journalist Working as Street Vendor in Kabul*, 12 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>186</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 26

<sup>187</sup> DACAAR: 10

<sup>188</sup> DACAAR: 9; An international organisation: 6; An international humanitarian organisation: 17

<sup>189</sup> DACAAR: 9; An international humanitarian organisation: 21

<sup>190</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 21

<sup>191</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 16, 19; A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 27; An international organisation: 6

<sup>192</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 16

women have been denied entry to the ministries, and female NGO directors have been denied entry at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for not being accompanied by a *mahram*.<sup>193</sup>

According to an international organisation, female staff of partner organisations, i.e. national NGOs, in certain locations have not been able to work to this day. Moreover, the situation at checkpoints is unreliable; Taliban members manning the checkpoints may require a *mahram* for female NGO employees one day, and turn a blind eye the next day.<sup>194</sup> These regulations from the Taliban have affected and diminished women’s sense of security.<sup>195</sup>

The main type of jobs that are open for women in Afghanistan are teachers, health care workers or at NGOs, even though some teachers and health care workers have not been paid for months.<sup>196</sup> Women can work in the media as well; the Taliban have ordered female Afghan TV presenters to cover their faces while on air.<sup>197</sup> They are banned from working in the government<sup>198</sup>, with the exception of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health.<sup>199</sup> Some of the women who have not yet returned to the public positions are still receiving salaries.<sup>200</sup> Female taxi drivers are allowed to operate in Kabul at the moment, but on 5 May 2022, the Taliban stopped issuing driving licenses to women in Kabul and other provinces.<sup>201</sup> In other sectors, women have not been allowed to return to their former professions.<sup>202</sup>

Women’s access to the job market is also impacted by the international sanctions, because positions funded by large government schemes, e.g. by the World Bank, no longer exist.<sup>203</sup>

#### 6.1.4. Women who defy the Taliban

The Taliban does not have a uniform reaction, when women defy them by not wearing the clothing perceived as correct or refusing to travel with a *mahram*. It depends on the situation and the personality of the Taliban in charge at the given place and time.<sup>204</sup> Women arrested during protests are in some cases released after weeks,<sup>205</sup> but without publicly available details about their experiences or their arrests and disappearances.<sup>206</sup>

#### 6.1.5. Gender-based violence (GBV)

In the assessment of an international humanitarian organisation, rates on GBV has increased since August 2021, and two sources pointed to the deteriorating economy and the socioeconomic situation as possible

<sup>193</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 27

<sup>194</sup> An international organisation: 6; A well-informed journalist 24

<sup>195</sup> An international organisation: 5

<sup>196</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 18, 20; A well-informed journalist: 17

<sup>197</sup> BBC, *Afghanistan’s female TV presenters must cover their faces, say Taliban*, 19 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>198</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 20

<sup>199</sup> A male human rights activist: 5

<sup>200</sup> A male human rights activist: 5

<sup>201</sup> Independent, *Taliban regime stops issuing driving licences to women, reports say*, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>202</sup> Amina Khan: 15

<sup>203</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 18

<sup>204</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 22

<sup>205</sup> BBC, *Afghan woman activist released after arrest in January*, 13 February 2022 [url](#); WION, *Taliban releases 14 women prisoners in Kabul amid global pressure*, 5 February 2022, [url](#); The Guardian, *Taliban have detained 29 women and their families in Kabul, says US envoy*, 12 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>206</sup> HRW, *Afghan Women’s Rights Activists Forcibly Disappeared*, 24 January 2022 [url](#)

reasons.<sup>207</sup> Another related reason is the large number of men who are currently out of work, stuck at homes, using negative coping mechanisms. Moreover, there are many drug abusers among the male returnees from Iran, which has a correlated effect to GBV and households.<sup>208</sup> An international organisation emphasised the fact that the monitoring of GBV, which took place prior to August 2021, is no longer in place.<sup>209</sup> This is due to the restrictive environment created by the Taliban government, and the required cautious approach to collect new information on GBV.<sup>210</sup> In addition to that, men who have formally been convicted of GBV in the past have been released, as prisons were opened and prisoners released following the take-over of Kabul.<sup>211</sup>

An international organisation added that there is a high level of trauma in the country and some women have indicated that their trauma is linked to domestic violence.<sup>212</sup>

When asked to what extent the Taliban will be able to protect women from GBV, an international humanitarian organisation replied that according to the Taliban’s interpretation of the threshold of violence, hitting is allowed, but not too often and not too severely.<sup>213</sup> According to UNAMA, nine out of ten women in Afghanistan experience at least one form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime.<sup>214</sup> According to a research by Amnesty International, the most common cases of GBV involves beating, rape, other forms of physical and sexual violence, and forced marriage. Survivors often need urgent medical treatment.<sup>215</sup>

## 6.2. Ethnic and religious minorities, including converts

It has been reported that religious minorities, including nonbelievers and Muslims with diverging beliefs from the Taliban, were harassed and their houses of worship desecrated.<sup>216</sup> According to an international humanitarian organisation, there are regional differences in the treatment of religious minorities, notably Shia Muslims. In the west and the north of the country where minorities co-exist, it is more peaceful, whereas in the south and the east, religious minorities are definitely treated worse than in Kabul. It is harder to be a Shia in the south and east of the country than other areas, because the regions are more conservative and the Taliban has always had a stronghold.<sup>217</sup>

<sup>207</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 27; An international organisation: 13

<sup>208</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 27

<sup>209</sup> An international organisation: 11

<sup>210</sup> An international organisation: 12

<sup>211</sup> BBC, *Female Afghan judges hunted by the murderers they convicted*, 18 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>212</sup> An international organisation: 14

<sup>213</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 28

<sup>214</sup> UNAMA, *UN calls for solidarity and commitment to end violence against women and girls amidst humanitarian crises*, 25 November 2021 [url](#)

<sup>215</sup> Amnesty International, *Afghanistan: Survivors of gender-based violence abandoned following Taliban takeover – new research*, 6 December 2021 [url](#)

<sup>216</sup> USCIRF – US Commission on International Religious Freedom: United States Commission on International Religious Freedom *2022 Annual Report; USCIRF – Recommended for Countries of Particular Concern (CPC): Afghanistan*, April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>217</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 9

### 6.2.1. Shia

Since the sources were interviewed several attacks have been launched mainly towards the Shia minority in Afghanistan, most of which ISKP has claimed the responsibility for; on 19 April,<sup>218</sup> 21 April,<sup>219</sup> 28 April,<sup>220</sup> 29 April<sup>221</sup> and 1 May<sup>222</sup> - tallying up to more than 100 deaths in attacks over the period of two weeks.<sup>223</sup>

The situation for the Shia community is the same as for the Hazaras.<sup>224</sup> Three sources consulted for this report opined that the Hazara population is not exposed to a systematic and large-scale persecution based on their minority status by the Taliban.<sup>225</sup> An international humanitarian organisation opined that there are attempts to intimidate the Hazaras in order to prevent them from accessing certain livelihood opportunities that existed prior to August 2021 and to impose a culture of fear. It is more about a threat of violence rather than actual violence.<sup>226</sup> In this respect, HRW are highlighting the hundreds of Hazara families’ forcefully evicted from their homes in the provinces of Daykundi, Uruzgan, Kunduz, and Kandahar in September and October 2021.<sup>227</sup> According to two sources, Hazaras and Shias are generally considered as apostates by the Taliban and therefore, probably regarded inferior as human beings.<sup>228</sup> O’Donnell pointed to the large number and Shias who have been targeted and killed in the past by the Taliban. The source knows of high profiled Shias and Hazaras who have left Afghanistan since August 2021, assuming their lives were in danger due to their ethnicity.<sup>229</sup>

As law enforcement, Taliban has attempted to deploy members to protect Shia mosques and to a certain degree to allow Shias to protect themselves with weapon towards ISKP.<sup>230</sup>

### 6.2.2. Sikhs, Jews, Salafis, Christians and converts

Only a very small community of Sikhs are left in Afghanistan today; either because of the discrimination that they have faced from the rest of the society in the past, or because they were evacuated in August 2021.<sup>231</sup> India airlifted in December 2021, 94 Afghan Hindus and Sikhs out of Afghanistan, along with three scriptures saved from defunct temples.<sup>232</sup>

The sources deemed it hard to evaluate whether Sikhs are more persecuted today compared to prior to August 2021. DACAAR believed that living conditions for Jews and Sikhs in Afghanistan have been on a

<sup>218</sup> France 24, *Several killed in twin explosions at Shiite school in Afghan capital*, 19 April 2022 [url](#)

<sup>219</sup> France 24, *IS group claims deadly blast at Shiite mosque amid series of attacks across Afghanistan*, 21 April 2022 [url](#)

<sup>220</sup> Al Jazeera, *Twin blasts kill at least nine in northern Afghanistan*, 28 April 2022 [url](#)

<sup>221</sup> The Guardian, *Blast at Kabul mosque kills more than 50 worshippers*, 29 April 2022 [url](#)

<sup>222</sup> France 24, *Islamic State group claims responsibility for Kabul bus bombing*, 1 May 2022 [url](#)

<sup>223</sup> The New York Times, *With spate of attacks, ISIS begins bloody new chapter in Afghanistan*, 1 May 2022 [url](#)

<sup>224</sup> The consulted sources used the terms Hazaras and Shias interchangeably to describe the same demographic in Afghanistan.

<sup>225</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 8; A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 22; Amina Khan: 11

<sup>226</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 1

<sup>227</sup> HRW, *Afghanistan: Taliban Forcibly Evict Minority Shia*, 22 October 2021 [url](#); HRW (Human Rights Watch), *Afghanistan, Events of 2021*, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>228</sup> DIS (Danish Immigration Service), *Afghanistan: Recent developments in the security situation, impact on civilians and targeted individuals*, September 2021, [url](#), p. 36; Lynne O’Donnell: 17

<sup>229</sup> Lynne O’Donnell: 17

<sup>230</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 22; An international humanitarian organisation: 9; Amina Khan: 11

<sup>231</sup> DACAAR: 16; An international humanitarian organisation: 7; A well-informed journalist: 20

<sup>232</sup> The Tribune, *Afghan Sikhs, Hindus among 104 airlifted, scriptures brought back*, 11 December 2022, [url](#)

downwards trajectory for years now, and this trend has not changed significantly since August.<sup>233</sup> According to USCIRF, by the end of 2021, there appears to be no remaining Jews in Afghanistan.<sup>234</sup>

Because of the activities of ISKP, the Salafist communities have been targeted in the south and eastern provinces, such as Kunar, since the 2021 Taliban takeover.<sup>235</sup>

As for conditions for religious converts from Islam to Christianity, an international humanitarian organisation was aware that in the northeast of the country, there are certain rather secretive faith based organisations and missionaries. The large faith based organisations in Afghanistan do not proselytize, but there are smaller organisations proselytizing.<sup>236</sup> In October 2021, a Taliban official reportedly declared a prominent U.S.-based humanitarian aid organisation an “enemy of the state”. Taliban forces occupied the organisation’s Kabul offices, seized their vehicles, and warned that NDS officials were determined to “punish” the organisation on alleged charges of Christian proselytization. Faced with mounting hostility and threats to arrest staff, the organisation suspended its operations. The organisation’s Kabul offices remained occupied by the Taliban.<sup>237</sup>

According to a well-informed journalist, there is no real Christian community in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a conservative Muslim country, and conversion from Islam to other religions is unacceptable to the ordinary Afghan. This was also the case prior to August 2021. The source has not heard of any cases of conversion from Islam to Christianity.<sup>238</sup>

According to USCIRF, Christians, Ahmadiyya Muslims, Baha’is, and nonbelievers are unable to express their faiths or beliefs openly because they face dire consequences, including death, if discovered by the Taliban or ISIS-K.<sup>239</sup>

### 6.2.3. Other ethnic minorities

According to a representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan, recently, there was a higher level – or perceived higher level – of threat in Kabul towards Tajiks from Panjshir. The focus seemed to be on confiscating weapons in homes linked to the National Resistance Front (NRF) in the north,<sup>240</sup> because Panjshiris are perceived as a hot bed of potential or real resistance.<sup>241</sup> On 7 May, attacks by the Taliban against members of NRF resulted in ongoing combat in Panjshir province.<sup>242</sup> At the time of writing, the

<sup>233</sup> DACAAR: 16

<sup>234</sup> USCIRF – US Commission on International Religious Freedom: United States Commission on International Religious Freedom *2022 Annual Report; USCIRF – Recommended for Countries of Particular Concern (CPC): Afghanistan*, April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>235</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 21

<sup>236</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 10

<sup>237</sup> US Department of State, *Afghanistan 2021 Human Rights report*, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>238</sup> A well-informed journalist: 21

<sup>239</sup> USCIRF – US Commission on International Religious Freedom: United States Commission on International Religious Freedom *2022 Annual Report; USCIRF – Recommended for Countries of Particular Concern (CPC): Afghanistan*, April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>240</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 20

<sup>241</sup> Lynne O’Donnell: 17

<sup>242</sup> Afghanistan International, *جبهه مقاومت و جبهه آزادی از آغاز عملیات مشترک علیه طالبان در ولایت بغلان خبر دادند*, 7 May 2022 [url](#), [The Resistance Front and the Freedom Front announced the launch of a joint operation against the Taliban in Baghlan Province]



combat has caused several casualties on both sides, in addition to civilian deaths and torture<sup>243</sup> in several areas in the Panjshir province.<sup>244</sup>

There are, however, Tajiks and Uzbeks in the northern and northeastern areas, who are not systematically targeted by the Taliban.<sup>245</sup> Since the north has always been perceived as a more liberal part of the country compared to the south and east,<sup>246</sup> the Taliban has put in place provincial governors from other parts of the country, who are more hardliners and have been assigned to exert more control to make the message clear, that these parts of the country need to get in line with the values of the Taliban.<sup>247</sup>

### 6.3. LGBT

#### 6.3.1. Change in the situation for LGBT since August 2021

Life has changed dramatically for LGBT, a UN national staff in Afghanistan explained. Previously, they could have hidden lives; they could secretly party, have relationships, etc. However, due to threats from the Taliban, they are now completely in hiding.<sup>248</sup>

Even though the human rights abuses faced by the LGBT community were severe during the rule of the former government, any hope for improvement under Taliban rule is completely abandoned, one source stated.<sup>249</sup> Beatings, detention and rapes at checkpoints are not uncommon.<sup>250</sup>

Targeted killings of LGBT people by the Taliban have taken place, according to a member of civil society in Afghanistan.<sup>251</sup> The source added that under the previous government, some LGBT people worked as dancers, sex workers or worked in restaurants, which is no longer possible under the Taliban rule. Two sources stated that reporting and collecting information about the LGBT community is currently challenging for organisations.<sup>252</sup>

There are no regional differences concerning the treatment of LGBT people by the Taliban.<sup>253</sup> Often, LGBT people flee from their families and many of them settle in major cities like Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif. Their way of life is perceived unacceptable and in opposition to religion everywhere in Afghanistan.<sup>254</sup>

<sup>243</sup> Afghanistan International, "ادامه مقاومت در پنجشیر؛ طالبان مردم مناطق دره و آبشار را شکنجه و لت و کوب می کنند", 8 May 2022 [url](#); [Continued resistance in Panjshir; Taliban "torture and beat people in valley and waterfall areas"]; Human Rights Watch, *Afghanistan: Taliban Torture Civilians in Panjshir*, 10 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>244</sup> Afghanistan International, "منابع محلی: طالبان ۷ فرد ملکی را در پنجشیر تیرباران کردند", 9 May 2022, [url](#); [Local sources: the Taliban "shoots" seven civilians in Panjshir]

<sup>245</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 4;

<sup>246</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 4

<sup>247</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 4

<sup>248</sup> A UN national staff in Afghanistan: 1

<sup>249</sup> A member of civil society in Afghanistan: 1

<sup>250</sup> HRW, *Afghanistan: Taliban Target LGBT Afghans, Surge in Threats, Rape, Assault, Wrongful Detention*, 26 January 2022 [url](#); A member of civil society in Afghanistan: 1

<sup>251</sup> A member of civil society in Afghanistan: 1

<sup>252</sup> A member of civil society in Afghanistan: 1; A UN national staff in Afghanistan: 1

<sup>253</sup> A member of civil society in Afghanistan: 2; A UN national staff in Afghanistan: 2

<sup>254</sup> A member of civil society in Afghanistan: 2

### 6.3.2. Treatment of LGBT people by families and local communities

It is not simply the Taliban who finds homosexuality unacceptable; it is also the families of the LGBT-person who finds this unacceptable.<sup>255</sup> Few families accept homosexuality, as long as it is not practiced openly.<sup>256</sup> A UN national staff in Afghanistan personally knew of a gay man, who escaped death threats from his family. His own brother had set a reward if anyone should find him.<sup>257</sup> Similar cases occurred under the previous government as well, where families either attempted to kill their son, or succeeded at killing him upon discovery of his sexual orientation.<sup>258</sup>

A member of civil society in Afghanistan stressed the importance of maintaining the family honour in Afghanistan. A son or a daughter having same-sex relation will bring shame on the rest of the family.<sup>259</sup> The source added that relation cut-offs and honour killings of LGBT people have taken place, not merely by close family members, but killings executed by the extended family members such as uncles and cousins. According to two sources, LGBT people have been persecuted by their own family members with close links to the Taliban.<sup>260</sup>

A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan knows of a case, in which three men were attacked, jailed and accused of being gay – after which, the elder men in their community initiated a negotiation process with the Taliban to release them.<sup>261</sup>

### 6.3.3. Accessibility of health care for LGBT people

Two sources consulted on the matter stressed the limitation of services and healthcare facilities since August 2021 for two reasons; lack of funding and the fear of being identified by the Taliban, if LGBT people seek help.<sup>262</sup>

## 6.4. Musicians, well-educated and members of the intelligentsia

A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan stated that there are several examples of individuals belonging to the well-educated class and members of the intelligentsia being targeted since August 2021.<sup>263</sup> Several cases have been covered by news outlets; the case of Faizullah Jalal, a university professor who was arrested<sup>264</sup> and detained at an unknown location for four days, as a consequence of his critical remarks about the Taliban.<sup>265</sup> Zabihullah Mujahid, the de facto government’s spokesperson tweeted after the arrest, that the statements made by Jalal on social media were "trying to instigate people against the system", and that Jalal had been arrested "so that others don't make similar senseless comments...".<sup>266</sup>

<sup>255</sup> A well-informed journalist: 22

<sup>256</sup> A member of civil society in Afghanistan: 3; A UN national staff in Afghanistan: 3

<sup>257</sup> A UN national staff in Afghanistan: 3

<sup>258</sup> A member of civil society in Afghanistan: 3

<sup>259</sup> A member of civil society in Afghanistan: 3

<sup>260</sup> HRW, Afghanistan: *Taliban Target LGBT Afghans, Surge in Threats, Rape, Assault, Wrongful Detention*, 26 January 2022 [url](#); A member of civil society in Afghanistan: 1

<sup>261</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 23

<sup>262</sup> A member of civil society in Afghanistan: 5; A UN national staff in Afghanistan: 5

<sup>263</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 24

<sup>264</sup> DW, *Taliban release prominent Afghan academic Faizullah Jalal*, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>265</sup> The Print, *Taliban warns retired professors of Kabul University to vacate government homes*, 23 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>266</sup> France 24, *Taliban arrest Afghan professor after criticism*, 9 January 2022 [url](#)

Another university professor, Sayed Baqir Mohsini, disappeared for two days on 4 March 2022, after accusing the Taliban of censorship on Facebook.<sup>267</sup>

On 12 February 2022, Etilaatroz wrote of an incident in the residence of Nekouei Khoonavaloud, a university professor and expert on political affairs in Kabul. Etilaatroz cited the professor’s update on Facebook, according to which gunmen with "identification cards" from Taliban entered his home, and battered his daughter and severely injured his wife.<sup>268</sup> Furthermore, on 23 March the Taliban warned the professors at Kabul University to evacuate government homes as soon as possible.<sup>269</sup>

An international humanitarian organisation stated on 31 March that some of those arrested who are part of the well-educated class and members of the intelligentsia were still in detention. Some were awaiting trials in which the charge was promotion of values that are not in line with Sharia values or violation of the principle of the Quran, while others were under house arrest or killed. The intelligentsia of Afghanistan is mainly based in the urban areas, for instance in Kabul, which is where the persecution is taking place.<sup>270</sup>

A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan advised that some musicians have been physically attacked and have had their instruments destroyed,<sup>271</sup> publicly humiliated and have been arrested.<sup>272</sup> These sporadic examples have been seen all across the country, in conservative as well as in more liberal communities and cities.<sup>273</sup> Furthermore, there have been two documented examples of killings as a consequence of playing music at weddings.<sup>274</sup> The Taliban has banned music at weddings and in public. However, according to the Taliban’s spokesperson, killing people for playing music is not allowed.<sup>275</sup>

<sup>267</sup> The Washington Post, *Taliban arrests Canadian aid worker amid widening crackdown on activists and foreigners*, 7 March 2022 [url](#)

<sup>268</sup> Etilaatroz, *حمله ی مسلحانه به خانه ی یک استاد دانشگاه در کابل؛ همسر و دختر کامبخش نکویی زخمی شدند*, 13 February 2022 [url](#); [Armed attack on the home of a university professor in Kabul; Kambakhsh Nekouei’s wife and daughter were injured]

<sup>269</sup> The Print, *Taliban warns retired professors of Kabul University to vacate government homes*, 23 March 2022 [url](#)

<sup>270</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 13

<sup>271</sup> NDTV, *Video: Taliban burn instrument in front of Afghan musician as he cries*, 16 January 2022 [url](#); A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 25

<sup>272</sup> The Print, *Taliban humiliates musicians by hanging instruments around their necks*, 5 March 2022 [url](#); A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 25

<sup>273</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 25

<sup>274</sup> Rooziato, *۳ کشتن ۳ نفر در یک جشن عروسی در افغانستان به جرم پخش موسیقی*, 1 November 2021 [url](#), [Three people killed at a wedding party in Afghanistan for playing music]; Hasht-e Subh Daily, *Taliban bans playing music in public*, 12 March 2022 [url](#)

<sup>275</sup> Rooziato, *۳ کشتن ۳ نفر در یک جشن عروسی در افغانستان به جرم پخش موسیقی*, 1 November 2021 [url](#), [Three people killed at a wedding party in Afghanistan for playing music]

## 7. Rule of law

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Taliban courts across Afghanistan often interpret sharia law inconsistently, and this means that different courts will likely reach different verdicts in similar cases.<sup>276</sup> This assessment was shared by the international organisation who elaborated that the rule of law and the previously existing legislative framework have been undermined, degraded and replaced with an ad-hoc application of sharia law; the Taliban is not a homogenous unit, and they are undisciplined in following any particular policy instruction. This means that it is very difficult to draw any general conclusion regarding the treatment of people who have a personal conflict with members of the Taliban.<sup>277</sup> As such, this depiction of the judicial system under the Taliban largely mirrors the depictions reported by DIS in December 2021.<sup>278</sup>

Moreover, the well-informed journalist assessed that judges within the Taliban’s justice system are to some degree prone to corruption. The source assessed that corruption is perceived by the population as far less likely to occur now because the judges have to refer their verdicts to Islamic law. According to the same source, this further ensures that a person can generally expect a fair trial if they have a conflict with a Taliban member, but this depends on the context of the conflict. The source assessed that Hazaras are likely to be discriminated by the court system, but elaborated that his assessment is based on past treatments of Hazaras rather than on incidents since August 2021.<sup>279</sup>

### 7.1. Honour-related conflicts

Premarital relationships have long been unacceptable to many within Afghan societies. A well-informed journalist advised that premarital relationships are usually dealt with and resolved within the families, rather than involving the authorities. This was the case prior to August 2021 and is still the case. This behaviour is not acceptable to the surrounding society and the families will try to resolve this issue without the interference from outside.<sup>280</sup> As such, there are not many cases bringing premarital relationships before a court in Afghanistan after mid-August.<sup>281</sup> However, the international organisation stated that if two people are in a relationship outside marriage, they risk being accused of committing *zina*<sup>282</sup> since the Taliban government is applying sharia law as the basis for their current justice system.<sup>283</sup> In this connection, a well-informed journalist advised that people have been brought before Taliban-courts, accused of forming premarital relationships.<sup>284</sup> Moreover, the international organisation stated that women are now especially vulnerable should they end up in an honour-related conflict. This is because there is no possibilities for a woman in an honour conflict to seek redress, as the Taliban are not respecting the justice

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<sup>276</sup> Amina Khan: 16

<sup>277</sup> An international organisation: 31; DIS (Danish Immigration Service), *Afghanistan: Recent events*, December 2021, [url](#), pp. 10-14

<sup>278</sup> DIS (Danish Immigration Service), *Afghanistan: Recent events*, December 2021, [url](#), pp. 10-14

<sup>279</sup> A well-informed journalist: 26

<sup>280</sup> A well-informed journalist: 25

<sup>281</sup> A well-informed journalist: 25

<sup>282</sup> Unlawful sexual intercourse; fornication or adultery. A criminal offense in Islamic law. Oxford Islamic Studies Online, *Zina*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>283</sup> An international organisation: 28

<sup>284</sup> A well-informed journalist: 25

system that existed under the previous government. The rule of law has been significantly degraded across the board - especially concerning the issue of women's rights.<sup>285</sup>

## 7.2. People with a personal conflict with members of the Taliban

There have been examples of discrimination against people in a personal conflict with members or affiliates of the Taliban in judicial courts. An example of this took place in Daikundi where Hazaras had land disputes with local Taliban members or people affiliated with the Taliban. The Hazaras were driven away from their land and the court ruling gave a preferential treatment to the Talibs or people linked to the Taliban.<sup>286</sup> In this connection, the representative of DACAAR advised that many land disputes across Afghanistan have resurfaced since the Taliban assumed power. Many of these conflicts have persisted for decades throughout the country and now, after the power-shift, people try to take advantage of this new situation to assert their own agenda in the hope that the Taliban will side with them.<sup>287</sup>

The well-informed journalist further assessed that if a person affiliated with the former government has a personal dispute with a member of the Taliban, this affiliation with the former government would be used against the person in question.<sup>288</sup>

## 7.3. Women's access to seek redress

The legal framework put in place to protect women's rights has eroded after the Taliban assumed power, since sharia law now constitutes the only legal framework in Afghanistan.<sup>289</sup> According to DACAAR, some Afghan women have approached the Taliban courts in order to resolve disputes with their husbands because the Taliban courts are perceived as less corrupt compared to the courts of the previous government. That said two sources assessed that the Taliban courts very rarely side with the women in cases concerning marriage disputes.<sup>290</sup>

The representative of the international humanitarian organisation stated that the Taliban widely regards domestic violence as acceptable, thus, the courts are unlikely to side with women in cases of domestic abuse or gender-based violence.<sup>291</sup> For more on [Gender-based Violence, see section 6.1.5](#).

According to an international organisation, women's shelters and safe houses in Afghanistan have ceased to operate.<sup>292</sup> Another source advised that there are still some shelters operating in Kabul and other provincial capitals.

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<sup>285</sup> An international organisation: 16

<sup>286</sup> A representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan: 8; Hasht-e Subh Daily, *Taliban Not Allowing the Displaced Villagers in Daikundi to Return Home*, 23 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>287</sup> DACAAR: 14; New York Times (The), *In Afghanistan, 'Who Has the Guns Gets the Land'*, 12 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>288</sup> A well-informed journalist: 8, 10

<sup>289</sup> An international organisation: 15; DIS (Danish Immigration Service), *Afghanistan: Recent events*, December 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-14

<sup>290</sup> DACAAR: 12; Amina Khan: 16

<sup>291</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 28

<sup>292</sup> An international organisation: 15; 16

### 7.3.1. Shelters and safe houses

Many women and girl survivors had access to a nationwide network of shelters and services prior to August 2021.<sup>293</sup> Although the system was far from perfect, the access included pro-bono legal representation, medical treatment, and psychosocial support.<sup>294</sup> However, the organisations running safe houses had to close down, and according to an international organisation, prior to August 2021, there was a legal framework and a justice system to deal with these types of complaints, but that is no longer functioning and no longer applies under the new government.<sup>295</sup>

Private shelters still exist in Kabul as well as in the provincial capitals, but they are severely underfunded. In some places, the shelters for women closed down but not everywhere. The closure of some shelters may be related to their leaders leaving the country in addition to the funding shortages.<sup>296</sup>

## 7.4. Situation for children

There are several child protection issues relevant to all children in Afghanistan. An international organisation consulted on this issue pointed to the risk of child recruitment by the Taliban authorities and other armed groups. Furthermore, there is a very high level of child labour that exposes the child to human rights violations, from exploitation to physical harm, etc.<sup>297</sup> Yet, another risk is that due to the current economic climate, a child is also perceived as a ‘commodity’. Children are sold in return for a ‘bride price’<sup>298</sup>. An international humanitarian organisation noted that there has been an 11-15 % increase in early marriages.<sup>299</sup> These challenges will also apply to unaccompanied minors.<sup>300</sup> Cases have appeared of internal organs belonging to children being sold through private distribution to ensure the economic survival of the whole family.<sup>301</sup>

According to a human rights defender with 12 years of experience working with children without a guardian in the civil society across different regions of Afghanistan, the living condition of children without a guardian can be compared to child labour; they are either beggars or street workers.<sup>302</sup> An international humanitarian organisation confirmed this point and added that even though there is an increase in the number of children in Kabul city living on the streets it is still rare for a child to be left completely alone. Social obligations within family networks in Afghanistan is quite strong.<sup>303</sup>

According to an international humanitarian organisation, the same number of orphanages still exist in Afghanistan as to prior to August 2021, although the funding has decreased a good deal. The quality of

<sup>293</sup> Amnesty International, Afghanistan: *Survivors of gender-based violence abandoned following Taliban takeover – new research*, 6 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>294</sup> An international organisation: 15; Amnesty International, Afghanistan: *Survivors of gender-based violence abandoned following Taliban takeover – new research*, 6 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>295</sup> An international organisation: 15

<sup>296</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 29

<sup>297</sup> An international organisation: 29

<sup>298</sup> The Times, *Joy as Fatima, 8, sold by her starving family, is allowed to go to school*, 20 March 2022, [url](#); An international organisation: 29

<sup>299</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 32

<sup>300</sup> An international organisation: 32

<sup>301</sup> The Wall Street Journal, *‘No Father Wants to Sell His Son’s Kidney.’ Afghans Pushed to Desperate Measures to Survive*, 19 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>302</sup> A human rights defender: 7

<sup>303</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 30

these facilities are quite low and there is less food, clothing and hygiene facilities available since August. In case a child is not able to get support from his family, they can go to an orphanage.<sup>304</sup> There are no orphanages in rural areas.<sup>305</sup>

### 7.5. Minorities’ access to seek redress

According to an international humanitarian organisation, the Taliban has not explicitly said that they will protect the minorities. The Taliban considers their judicial system as more efficient, direct, reliable and consistent than the judicial system of the former government. However, the source questioned the reliability of the system. The source confirmed that the Taliban certainly do take care of matters more quickly and transparently than the former administration, where many things were resolved by bribing.<sup>306</sup> The Taliban’s reaction to the recent attacks has been interpreted as indicative of the fact that they have done little to protect the minorities.<sup>307</sup>

Amina Khan has noticed that senior Taliban members have made an effort to reach out to the Shia community in Afghanistan.<sup>308</sup> The Taliban have also welcomed Shia Hazara commanders as well as Tajik and Uzbek in some provinces across the country. Based on these efforts, Khan assessed that the Taliban in 2022 are more willing to engage with Shia Muslims, Hazaras, Tajiks, Uzbeks and so on, than they were in the past.<sup>309</sup> However, despite these efforts from/by the leadership, there are still incidents of ethnic minorities in Afghanistan being harassed and discriminated against by low-ranking members of the Taliban.<sup>310</sup> None of the sources consulted for this report had any information regarding the possibility for protection of Sikhs and Christians.

### 7.6. LGBT people’s access to seek redress

According to two sources, it is not possible for LGBT people to seek protection from the authorities.<sup>311</sup> Not even during the previous administration was protection a possibility, according to a member of the civil society, because the law enforcement was one of the main perpetrators engaged in the abuse against LGBT people, when they sought help and protection.<sup>312</sup> Human Rights Watch published a report in January 2022, describing threats, assaults and gang rapes by the Taliban forces.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 30

<sup>305</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 31

<sup>306</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 5

<sup>307</sup> Vox, *Deadly attacks on Afghan minorities show the Taliban isn’t keeping its promises*, 23 April 2022 [url](#); War on the rocks, *Brutally ineffective: how the Taliban are failing in their new role as counter-insurgents*, 29 November 2022, [url](#); The Print, *Taliban’s promises to protect Afghan minorities falling apart amid a spate of attacks: Report*, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>308</sup> US Department of State, Afghanistan 2021 Human Rights report, [url](#), p. 51; Amina Khan: 11

<sup>309</sup> Amina Khan: 11

<sup>310</sup> Amina Khan: 12

<sup>311</sup> A member of civil society in Afghanistan: 4; A UN national staff in Afghanistan: 4

<sup>312</sup> A member of civil society in Afghanistan: 4

<sup>313</sup> HRW, *Afghanistan: Taliban Target LGBT Afghans, Surge in Threats, Rape, Assault, Wrongful Detention*, 26 January 2022 [url](#)

## 8. Conditions for Afghans returned to Afghanistan

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Two sources consulted for this report did not have any information regarding the prevalence of Afghans who have returned from Europe since August 2021, including Afghans who evacuated from Afghanistan.<sup>314</sup> The representative of DACAAR stated that very few Afghans have returned to Afghanistan from the West since August 2021.<sup>315</sup>

The representative of DACAAR noted that it was not his impression that Afghans returning from the West would be subject to targeting by the Taliban, unless it is a result of a personal dispute or vendetta.<sup>316</sup>

Regarding the Taliban’s ability to monitor and gather intelligence on returning Afghans, the IOM stated that the infrastructure of the Taliban is extremely weak, and thus the Taliban would not be able to track and monitor the returnees.<sup>317</sup> However, on the ground, at village level, the local leaders will know who has returned. However, the information will most likely not reach the Taliban government in Kabul.<sup>318</sup>

IOM stated that the conditions for returnees returning from Pakistan have worsened since August 2021.<sup>319</sup> Due to the economic crisis, it has become increasingly harder to find a source of income as well as accommodation.<sup>320</sup> Furthermore, the sources did not know of any return programs operating in Afghanistan, and thus having a social network who can provide for the returnee has become increasingly important for returnees.<sup>321</sup>

An international humanitarian organisation commented that people who are eager to leave Afghanistan and obtain a visa abroad, are overstating the risks they are facing; the source emphasized this does not apply to everyone trying to leave.<sup>322</sup>

Between May 2021 – April 2022, 2,554,615 Afghans have returned from Pakistan and 1,171,251 from Iran.<sup>323</sup> These returns from neighbouring countries are due to a variety of reasons, including labour migration, personal safety, the risk of deportation and economic hardship abroad.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> IOM: 1, 2; DACAAR: 19

<sup>315</sup> DACAAR: 19

<sup>316</sup> DACAAR: 20

<sup>317</sup> IOM: 21, 22

<sup>318</sup> IOM: 24

<sup>319</sup> IOM: 12, 19

<sup>320</sup> IOM: 8

<sup>321</sup> IOM: 11, 12

<sup>322</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 33

<sup>323</sup> IOM, *Movements in and out of Afghanistan 7 May to 13 May*, 18 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>324</sup> IOM: 4



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## Annex 1: Terms of Reference (ToR), 3 March 2022

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1. Targeted individuals
  - a. Afghans with links to the former government
  - b. Employees or former employees of international companies, foreign troops, NGOs, or foreign embassies in Afghanistan
  - c. Journalists
  - d. Human rights defenders
2. Family members to targeted individuals
3. Monitoring of targeted individuals
4. Vulnerable groups
  - a. Women
    - i. Situation for lone women without a male support network
    - ii. The state’s ability to provide protection against persecution
  - b. Unaccompanied children
  - c. Ethnic minorities
  - d. Religious minorities, including converts
  - e. LGBT
  - f. Westernized people
  - g. Well-educated and members of the intelligentsia
  - h. People with a personal conflict with members of the Taliban
5. Conditions for Afghans returned to Afghanistan after being evacuated
  - a. Afghans convicted of a crime abroad
6. Insecurity and crime levels
7. Honour related conflicts
8. Regional differences

## Annex 2: Meeting minutes

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### Skype meeting with an international organisation

4 April 2022

1. The source pointed to important factors in the current developments in Afghanistan, including the fact that the de facto authorities in Afghanistan have side-lined the parliamentary process and are ruling by decree. Importantly, the statements by the de facto authorities are often made to reassure the vulnerable groups in Afghanistan but are actually often contradicted on the ground. Constraints on reporting in Afghanistan include media organisations and journalists that are being targeted which implies a dearth of data available on country of origin information.
2. The International organisation recognized the relevance of the 2022 UNHCR Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan to many of the topics covered in the call, including on the availability of information, the situation of women and other vulnerable groups and on the actions of the *de facto* authorities.
3. The source considered that there are various risk groups facing heightened risks in Afghanistan, including but not limited to women and girls, those associated with the former government or international community, including former embassy staff, employees of international organisation, former members of the Afghan security forces and Afghans associated with military forces, journalists and media workers, human rights defenders, ethnic and religious minority groups, persons of diverse sexual orientations and/or gender identities and family members and others closely associated with those who are at risk of persecution themselves.
4. During the meeting, the source referred to written material on each topic that have been inserted in the footnotes of the minutes at hand.<sup>325</sup>

#### Conditions for women

##### *Women’s situation*

5. The source had obtained information on women’s situation by speaking to Afghan female staff members of the organisation. There was a time after the change in government where the de facto government took the position that there was a full stop to women working. Later on, there was a relaxation of the rules and it was indicated that female staff working for international organisations could work and subsequently some of the staff started to return, while others were reluctant because they were afraid. These stipulations from the de facto government have affected and diminished women’s sense of security.

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<sup>325</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan*, February 2022, [url](#)

6. Some female staff of partner organisations, i.e. national NGOs, in certain locations are not able to work to this day. In other locations women are able to work, however, they may face problems at checkpoints where the given Taliban members who are manning the checkpoints ask where or who is the *mahram*. An extension of this is that on one day it may be accepted that the female staff do not have a *mahram*, whereas the next day the authorities do not accept women not to be accompanied by a *mahram*.

#### *Women’s freedom of movement*

7. The source stated that women’s freedom of movement is context specific. There is a policy introduced by the Ministry of Vice and Virtue that women could not travel more than 70 km without a *mahram*. There are anecdotal reports of women being denied rides in taxis and public transport.
8. In the last couple of weeks the source had received information about women without a *mahram* who have been denied the right to cross the land border to Pakistan and Iran. Some of them have been turned back and the authorities at the land border had insisted that the women be accompanied by a legitimate *mahram*, because not any man can act as a *mahram* to a given woman. Coupled with this the source had heard that women in the past two weeks have been actively prevented from boarding international flights. Two local carriers are still conducting international flights: Kam Air and Ariana Afghan Airlines.

#### *Single women without a male support network*

9. For female heads of households, it is difficult for them to fulfil their role as breadwinners. Tolo News wrote an article about a female journalist who had been forced to resort to work as a street vendor selling clothes.<sup>326</sup>
10. Two thirds of the population are affected by the current food insecurity, including female-headed households among whom almost a hundred percent were receiving insufficient food for consumption.<sup>327</sup>

#### *Gender-based violence*<sup>328</sup>

11. The source pointed to the fact that the monitoring on gender-based violence which took place prior to August 2021, is no longer taking place because of data protection concerns as well as a concern to do no harm given the current circumstances.
12. Currently, there is a far more cautious approach to collecting information on gender-based violence due to the more restrictive environment given by the de facto government. As noted, sometimes, female staff are not able to come to work and it is not possible for a male enumerator to speak to a

<sup>326</sup> Tolo, Afghan Woman Journalist Working as Street Vendor in Kabul, 12 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>327</sup> UN News, *Afghanistan: Food insecurity and malnutrition threaten ‘an entire generation’*, 15 March 2022, [url](#); World Food Program (WFP), *WFP Afghanistan: Situation Report*, 4 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>328</sup> Protection Cluster, *Afghanistan Protection Analysis Update – Q4*, February 2022, [url](#)

woman during household level assessments. For this reason, in order to be able to reach women and girls and speak to them directly, a focus is being placed on conducting focus group discussions, which can be conducted in more private settings and it will also be permissible for female staff to speak to women and girls.

13. The source assessed that gender-based violence is potentially taking place at a higher level, because of the critical economic situation in the country in which many men have lost their jobs and are staying at home, unable to feed their families.
14. There is a high level of trauma in the country and some women have indicated that their trauma is linked to domestic violence.

*Safe houses and legal redress*

15. The organisations that are running safe houses had to close down.<sup>329</sup> Prior to the takeover by the *de facto* authorities there was a legal framework and a justice system to deal with these types of complaints, but that is no longer functioning and no longer applies under the new government as the rule of law has been undermined. While the previous system was imperfect, it had previously been possible to file a complaint. It remains unclear if that possibility to seek redress still exists, although that appears highly unlikely.

*Possibility to seek redress in instances of women affected by GBV or those persons contravening Islamic norms or laws as interpreted by the Taliban*

16. There is no possibility for a woman in an honour conflict to seek redress; the current *de facto* authorities are not respecting the justice system that existed under the previous government. The rule of law has been significantly degraded across the board but especially when it comes to the issue of women’s rights. The source pointed to the fact that women’s shelters have been closed and people who have been formally convicted of gender-based violence in the past have been released, as prisons were opened and prisoners released following the take-over of Kabul.<sup>330</sup> The source summed up in saying that there would not be any recourse to justice for a woman in an honour-based conflict or a victim of gender-based violence.
17. The source had also received some anecdotal information from families themselves imposing restrictions on their female family members. This could be for two reasons: First, they want to live up to the expectations from the community on the new normative framework, so they are afraid of the harm that could be done to the family if the women do not conform to these expectations. Secondly, some families agree with the new restrictions on women and have taken it as a *carte blanche* to impose further restrictions on the women of the family.

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<sup>329</sup> Amnesty International, Afghanistan: *Survivors of gender-based violence abandoned following Taliban takeover – new research*, 6 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>330</sup> BBC, *Female Afghan judges hunted by the murderers they convicted*, 18 September 2021, [url](#)

18. Under these circumstances, in a country where cultural honour values are important, a woman who is perceived as transgressing social norms and somehow causing shame on a family will be in a very difficult situation.

### Targeted groups

#### *Armed forces*<sup>331</sup>

19. The source referred to information given by the UN Human Rights Council in which more than 130 former Afghan National Defence and Security forces (ANDSF) have been killed after the change of government.<sup>332</sup> The *de facto* government issued a general amnesty for employees who worked for the former government, but the amnesty was in some cases used to identify targets. The reported killings occurred in the period from 24 August 2021 to February 2022, but it is not clear exactly when these killings took place and whether there is a trend in the killings going up or down.
20. In February 2022, a city-wide house search campaign<sup>333</sup> in Kabul led by the *de facto* authorities took place. This was reported by media and by HRW. The authorities were looking for weapons and went from house to house. The reports highlighted the fear of people in Kabul who had worked for the previous administration. The source has received reports that such people, including ANDSF members, are still afraid of being targeted.
21. When asked to what extent former employees of foreign troops are at risk of being persecuted as a result of their previous job, the source confirmed that they constitute a risk profile. The source highlighted that the difference in risk regarding this group depends on the function of each individual and on how aware the surrounding people and the Taliban are of their previous function. It comes down to individual circumstances, including the job, the employer, their family background and whether they had any interaction with the Taliban, noting that under the circumstances, it is also possible for private vendettas to be acted on.

#### *Human Rights NGOs*

22. With regard to persecution of Human Rights defenders working in Afghanistan, the sources pointed to the ‘Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission’ that published a statement in September 2021 on how they were unable to conduct their activities. Another smaller NGO named ‘Human Rights Defenders’ indicated last year that they were no longer able to perform their activities and were going underground. The source did not have precise information on the situation of the employees of these organisations, but highlighted that other people, for instance those who were operating safe houses had to relocate these safe houses. The source added that lawyers who were defending women’s rights went into hiding and had to move from location to

<sup>331</sup> Hasht-e-Subh, US, *NATO’s In-Country Employees Cannot Leave Afghanistan, Says Taliban’s Interior Ministry*, 28 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>332</sup> HRC – UN Human Rights Council (formerly UN Commission on Human Rights): *Situation of human rights in Afghanistan*; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/49/24], 4 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>333</sup> HRW, *In Afghanistan, Burning Our Past to Protect Our Future*, March 1, 2022, [url](#); Jurist, *Afghanistan dispatch: Taliban house-to-house searches raise privacy concerns, fear in those still trying to leave*, 27 February 2022, [url](#)

location as a way to conceal their identities.

### Protesters

23. There was some tolerance vis-à-vis protesters from the de facto government in the initial days after the change of government; however, subsequently there was a change of tactics in that some of the protests were met with some measure of violence. More recently, several female-led protests resulted in women activists being arrested either on site or subsequently after the protest. These arrests are an attempt by the *de facto* government to suppress the protests and likely to send a message to other would-be protesters that dissent will not be tolerated.
24. There is no one size fits all approach taken by the Taliban in Afghanistan; for example the extent to which girls can go to school and whether women should have a *mahram* differs throughout the country and many factors come into play such as the scope of their activism, location and connections.
25. A woman who is not conforming to the conservative perception on how women should behave is somehow perceived as transgressing the Islamic law or Afghan cultural values or a combination of the two. The same benchmark is not applied to men.
26. There are different types of responses to protesters by the de facto government: There are isolated responses in which protestors are dispersed with some level of violence; and there are more coordinated responses, for instance the arrest of 29 women and their family members that took place in February 2022 due to their association with women’s protests and the targeting of a prominent academic.<sup>334</sup> The source also noted that protests took place against the renewed prohibition in March 2022 on secondary school girls attending school.<sup>335</sup>

### Journalists

27. The source had received reports about journalists, including female journalists who are fearing for their safety. The *de facto* government are targeting journalists who criticize them. The de facto government wishes to express control of the narrative and to instil fear in journalists. According to HRW (March 2022) female journalists are facing the most intense repression.<sup>336</sup> A prominent academic was arrested due to his criticism of the de facto government.<sup>337</sup>

### Men who are transgressing Sharia law and honour killings

28. The source noted that it is known from background knowledge that if two people are in a relationship outside marriage, they are open to claims of *zina* and we know that the de facto

<sup>334</sup> The Guardian, *Taliban have detained 29 women and their families in Kabul, says US envoy*, 12 February 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, *Taliban releases prominent Afghan professor from custody: Family*, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>335</sup> The Guardian, *Protesters call for the Taliban to reopen Afghan girls’ schools*, 26 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>336</sup> HRW, *Afghanistan: Taliban Threatening Provincial Media; Journalists Detained, Beaten; Media Outlets Closed*, 7 March 2022, [url](#); International Federation of Journalists, *Afghanistan: 87% of women journalists have suffered discrimination under Taliban rule*, 9 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>337</sup> Al Jazeera, *Prominent Afghan professor arrested for criticising Taliban rule*, 9 January 2022, [url](#)

government is applying sharia law as the basis for their current justice system. The source had no further information on the issue.

### Unaccompanied children

29. There are several child protection issues relevant to all children in Afghanistan. The source pointed to the risk of child recruitment by the *de facto* authorities and other armed groups. There is a very high level of child labour that exposes the child to human rights violations, from exploitation to physical harm etc. The other risk, assessed by the source, is viewed in the perspective of the current economic climate, in the sense that a child is also perceived as a ‘commodity’. Children are sold in return for the “bride price”. These challenges will also apply to unaccompanied minors.

### Hazaras

30. The source did not have much information on the Hazaras but said that there have been reports of forced evictions of the Hazaras, but some of these evictions are also intermingled with other complicated issues related to land rights.

### Personal conflicts

31. The rule of law and the previously existing legislative framework have been undermined and degraded with an ad-hoc application of sharia law taking their place; the *de facto* authorities are not a homogenous unit that is very disciplined in following any particular policy instruction. Thus, within this context, given the economic situation, the crime rate has increased significantly. Against this background, the source found it impossible for them to say what the outcome of a given land conflict would be. The source did not have substantial information about this.

### Crime level

32. The economic situation and the power vacuum have resulted in criminal opportunism in order to find a means to survive. There is now an increased environment for crimes, including robberies and kidnapping for ransom.<sup>338</sup>

### Monitoring

33. The source referred to articles on biometric registration of employees of the former government.<sup>339</sup> Databases left by the former government had registers of biometrics of former government employees and some of the databases also contained information on their relatives. It is however an open question to what extent these databases have been used by the *de facto* government.

<sup>338</sup> Tolo News, *Young Man Killed by Unknown Attackers in Western Kabul*, 26 February 2022, [url](#); BAMF, *Briefing Notes Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration*, 31 January 2022, [url](#); Afghan Voice Agency, *Kunduz Residents Complain of Assassinations and Kidnappings Amid Rising Poverty*, 5 December 2021, [url](#); Foreign Policy, *Afghan Crime Wave Adds to Taliban Dystopia*, 29 October 2021, [url](#); Tolo News, *Kabul Residents Urge Govt to Tackle Crime*, 26 November 2021, [url](#); Hasht-e-Subh Daily, *Crime Rates in Afghanistan Remain High*, 22 January 2022, [url](#); Protection Cluster, *Afghanistan Protection Analysis Update – Q4*, February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>339</sup> HRW, *New Evidence that Biometric Data Systems Imperil Afghans*, 30 March 2022, [url](#)



## Skype meeting with an international humanitarian organisation

31 March 2022

### Ethnic minorities

#### *Hazaras*

1. There is still a large degree of intimidation and fear among the Hazaras. However, the situation is not as severe as it was in the previous Taliban regime in the 90's where there was large-scale persecution. However, there are definitely attempts to intimidate the Hazaras in order to prevent them from accessing certain livelihood opportunities that existed prior to August 2021 and to impose a culture of fear. It is more about a threat of violence rather than actual violence. There have been targeted persecutions as well that were more related to professional affiliations and history in addition to a number of different factors that make Hazaras especially vulnerable. The situation is worse in the provinces where the Hazaras are predominately present (e.g. Bamyan), but it is still concerning elsewhere.
2. It was worse in the 90's because the Taliban then ran an active program of persecutions of ethnic and religious minorities in the country; whereas the current Taliban government has not issued that kind of edicts since August 2021. The Taliban has made efforts to establish a degree of legitimacy that did not exist in the old Taliban regime. It was the impression of the source that the Taliban is aware that if they want international recognition and legitimacy they cannot start a campaign to persecute ethnic minorities, but that does not mean that things are not happening behind the scenes and that they are not doing things to cause fear for people.
3. The driving force behind the persecutions of the Hazaras that have taken place is mostly the Taliban, who is trying to promote a set of values and assert their predominance of the authority of the Pashtun ethnicity. However, at a more social level there has always been discrimination against the Hazaras. They have had difficulties in accessing certain job opportunities and are treated like second-class citizens and this is not a new dynamic in the country. The source did not have enough evidence to say whether the discrimination towards Hazaras has changed since August 2021.

#### *Other ethnic minorities, e.g. Tajiks, Uzbeks etc.*

4. Tajiks and Uzbeks are not systematically targeted by the Taliban. These minorities are mainly present in the northern and northeastern areas. The north has always been perceived as a more liberal part of the country compared to the south and east.

In the north and northeastern areas, the Taliban has put in place provincial governors from other parts of the country. These governors are more hardliners and they have been assigned to exert more control and to make the message clear that these parts of the country need to get in line with the values of the Taliban. The source has not seen reports indicating that people in the north and northeastern areas are treated in a worse way than in the rest of country because of their ethnicity.

*Protection of the minorities*

5. When asked if the Taliban is willing to prosecute crimes committed against the minorities or in other ways willing to protect them, the source replied that to his knowledge, the Taliban has not said explicitly that they will protect the minorities. What they have said is that their judicial system is a lot more reliable and consistent than the judicial system of the former government - and added that crimes are crimes; however, what counts is the Taliban’s definition of a crime. The Taliban perceive their judicial system as direct and efficient, nevertheless, the source questioned the reliability of the system. The source confirmed that the Taliban certainly do take care of matters much more quickly and transparently than the Ghani administration where many things could be resolved if you paid cash under the table.
  
6. Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) has a small footprint in the eastern part of the country and pockets in isolated areas in other parts of the country where they caused serious problems, including active recruitment. However, it is not clear whether they have the manpower to launch a full scale spring offensive like the Taliban did prior to August 2021. There has been large-scale campaigns by the Taliban to attack the ISKP forces and to make sure that they do not pose a large-scale threat in the whole country. In recent months, these campaigns have been largely successful.

It is not clear how successful ISKP has been in recruiting people. There are many rumors saying that they are quite effective in recruiting people and at the same time other sources say that this is overstated and a result of ISKP propaganda.

**Religious minorities**

7. With regard to the Sikhs, after the large-scale evacuation in August 2021 there is only a miniscule number of them left in the country to the extent that it would be hard to analyse whether there are changes in their situation in terms of persecution.
  
8. As for the Shia community, their situation is the same as for the Hazaras in the sense that they are not exposed to a large-scale persecution. That said, their daily lives might be harder and the security situation might be more vulnerable. They would be much more targeted, if ISKP were to grow and launch larger attacks. Their degree of vulnerability has heightened since August 2021, but there has not been a systematic persecution of them based on their minority status.
  
9. When asked if there are any regional differences in how religious minorities are being treated, the source replied that in the south and the east they are definitely treated worse than in Kabul. There are more security protocols in place, e.g. the Shia mosques have additional layers of security, created by themselves. In the west and the north of the country where many minorities co-exist it is a little more peaceful. It is harder to be a Shia in the south and east of the country because these are more conservative regions, where the Taliban has always had a stronghold.

10. As for conditions for religious converts from Islam to other religions, the source was aware that in the northeast of the country there are certain rather secretive faith based organisations and missionaries. There is not much clarity on how they operate. The large faith based organisations in Afghanistan do not proselytize, but there are smaller organisations proselytizing.

#### **LGBT**

11. Obviously, there is a culture of secrecy in the Afghan LGBT community. Afghanistan is a horrible environment in which to identify as LGBT. It is a very challenging dynamic for people even to talk about their sexual preference.

#### **Westernised Afghans**

12. When asked to what extent westernised Afghans are being discriminated in Afghanistan, the source informed that the Taliban two days ago issued an edict saying that any Afghan government workers or people that want to visit government buildings must have a beard and cannot wear western clothes. The Taliban is at a stage where certain protocols are in the process of being introduced. The source still sees men in western clothes around Kabul; outside of Kabul city, the communities are much more conservative and protocols are much more strictly enforced, particularly in the south. The source summed up in saying that people are not yet being persecuted for having westernized attitudes; however, the source saw a pattern heading in that direction. In this respect, the source pointed to the decision on keeping secondary schools for girls closed, and because the international community reacted negatively to that, the Taliban is responding by issuing new directives that are more strict, e.g. the reinforcement of the *mahram* policies. On this basis, the source saw what he perceived as an escalation taking place between the international community and the Taliban.

#### **Well-educated and members of the intelligentsia**

13. The source perceived journalists as being persecuted, in particular those being prominent under the Ghani administration. He added that certain writers and broadcasters were also persecuted. With regard to university professors, it depends where they are and what their affiliations have been in the past. Some journalists have been killed, professors have lost their jobs, and some have been arrested and detained. When asked what happened to those who were arrested, the source replied that some are still detained, some are awaiting trials in which the charge is to promote values that are not in line with Sharia values or violating the principle of the Quran, some are under house arrest and some have been killed; it is a mixed picture.

The intelligentsia of Afghanistan is mainly based in the urban areas, for instance in Kabul, for which reason that is where the persecution is taking place.

#### **People with a personal conflict with members of the Taliban**

14. Land issues have existed prior to August 2021 and there never really was a good way to resolve disputes over land rights in the sense that legislation was never put in place. The source had not heard of changes in this dynamic since August 2021.

When asked what position a civilian claiming land rights has in opposition to a person with links to the Taliban, the source replied by giving two scenarios. First, if it is a dispute between neighbors, in which one of them is a Taliban soldier it would get resolved through a normal traditional legal process. Differently, if someone is going up against a high-ranking Taliban or someone who is well connected, he may be treated in a very different way. The source emphasized that there is no precise overview on how conflict resolutions are managed or applied in Afghanistan.

15. The previous administration had introduced female judges, but after the takeover by Taliban there are no more female judges in Afghanistan. Using the judicial system is a way to enforce and interpret sharia law in line with the Taliban’s values and interpretation of it. The source added that since the handover of power was so sudden the bureaucratic structure of the judicial system has not changed that much, but what has changed is the people enforcing the law and the way they interpret it.

## Women

### *Freedom of movement*

16. Since August 2021, the freedom of women is getting progressively more restrictive. The *mahram* as a requirement is getting more enforced for female NGO workers. Female beneficiaries of aid assistance need to be accompanied by a *mahram*. There are more day-to-day inspections around some traveling in some provinces. Women cannot sit up front in a taxi; if they are sitting on the back seat, they cannot sit next to a male stranger. It is becoming harder and more expensive for women to get around.

### *Women’s access to work*

17. In many places outside Kabul, the burkas have been more strictly enforced. In Kabul there is more international media to report on it. So far, women are allowed to work in most places with the exception of government jobs. Early after the Taliban took power, they made clear that health care workers should go back to work including the female workers. The day-to-day restrictions are visible and it has become challenging for women to live in Afghanistan - and professional women even more so.
18. Women’s access to the job market is impacted by the sanctions. Women who worked in jobs that were funded by these large government schemes, e.g. by the World Bank, no longer exist. Teachers and health care workers have not been paid for months. The NGO job market is still working for women.

19. When asked to what extent the new requirement of a *mahram* has affected the possibility for women to find jobs, the source replied that even though NGOs want to hire women, the requirement of a *mahram* on a daily basis becomes expensive for the donors. The source added that it will not become part of a job description that an employee should have a *mahram* to become employed, but at the same time this government restriction made the recruitment process more complex. The source emphasized that he could only speak on behalf of his own organisation.
20. The main type of jobs that are open for women in Afghanistan are teachers, health care workers and NGOs. Women can also work in the media but not in front of a camera. Women are banned from working in the government.
21. In terms of regional differences in women’s ability to work, the source noted that he did not see a difference. Only in the east, it might be more dangerous for women to work but it has always been like that.

#### *Women who defy the Taliban*

22. For women who defy the Taliban, for instance, in not wearing the correct clothing or refusing to travel with a *mahram*, there is no uniform answer to the reaction from the Taliban. It depends on the situation and on the personality of the soldier that a given women will meet at a given place and time. It is more about the lack of guaranty of being able to travel safely.
23. The source had not seen cases of women who were sanctioned publicly for not complying with the restrictions imposed by the Taliban. The source commented that a better understanding is needed on what happens after the protests, and what the repercussions are when the cameras are no longer there.
24. When asked about the typical profile on women protesters, the source commented that women who are participating in the protests are typically affiliated with civil society organisations and their leaders, who had a publicly known profile before the takeover of power by the Taliban. This is providing a shield for these women because of the attention that it would draw if they were to be persecuted. The female protesters are often from urban areas, they are better educated and come from more liberal households with more financial resources. The source does not see women from rural areas in a restrictive environment protesting, but that was not seen prior to August 2021 either.

#### *Lone women without a network*

25. It is the same as it always has been. Afghanistan is a very challenging environment for lone women without a network. The difference since August 2021 is that there are fewer resources in the sense that women’s shelters have been closed down, many services on gender based violence either

need to be restructured or are no longer available. The issue is more on what type of services a lone woman can expect rather than her status, which has always been very challenging.

26. The source opined that a single mother would not live on her own, but more likely she would move in with male relatives somehow. The exceptions to this are rare and that applies everywhere in the country.

#### *Gender based violence*

27. The rates on gender-based violence has increased since August 2021, mainly due to the deteriorating economy and the socio economic situation. Many men are out of work and are stuck at home which implies why the rates of violence increased. The increasing gender based violence is also linked to returnees coming from Iran. They recently came back in high numbers and many of whom are out of jobs and thus using negative coping mechanisms. Moreover, there are many drug abusers among the male returnees from Iran correlated effect to gender based violence and households.
28. When asked to what extent the Taliban will be able to protect a women from gender based violence, the source replied that according to the Taliban’s interpretation of the threshold of violence, it is allowed - but not too often and not too severely. The source did not have knowledge of court cases and the outcomes.

#### *Shelters*

29. Shelters in Kabul as well as in the provincial capitals still exist but they are severely underfunded. In some places, the shelters for women closed down but not everywhere. The closure of some shelters, may be related to their leaders leaving the country in addition to the funding shortages. The source was not aware of the Taliban issuing an edict saying the shelters are not allowed.

#### **Unaccompanied children**

30. Orphanages exist in Afghanistan and they are the same in numbers since August 2021, only the funding has decreased a good deal. The quality of these facilities are quite low and there is less food, clothing and hygiene facilities available since August. The source further pointed to an increase in the number of children in Kabul city who are living in the streets since August 2021. He also noted that the social family network in Afghanistan is quite strong. It is very rare that a child is completely alone. In case a child is not able to get support from his family, s/he can go to an orphanage.
31. In the rural areas, there are no orphanages. Lone children living in a rural area will need to go to a provincial capital to access an orphanage.

32. Girls are being married off much younger; there has been an 11-15 % increase in early marriages, and they are being sold for much less money. Which means that a man does not need to save up for years to pay for a child bride any more, which again means that girls can be married off at a much younger age. The source has heard stories of girls as young as 9 and 10 years old that have been married off. Anecdotally, the source also heard stories of parents selling their children's organs in order to pay off their household debts.

### Targeted individuals

#### *Afghans with links to the former government*

33. When asked to what extent Afghans with links to the former government are in risk of being persecuted in Afghanistan as result of their previous job, the source replied that it depends on whom they worked for, in what capacity as well as on other types of background affiliation. If they worked for the US military, they will be more vulnerable than Afghans who worked for other government forces for whom the risk is much lower. In case someone was very vocal on social media against the Taliban and if s/he worked for an embassy, then this person would be at risk. The source commented that people who really want to leave the country and obtain a visa are playing up the risks they are facing; the source emphasized this does not apply to everyone trying to leave.
34. In terms of civil government employees in Afghanistan, it is an important point that if someone before August 2021 worked for a ministry below director level, which is the vast majority of the government employees, and did not leave the country, this person is still in the same job. When the source visits the Afghan ministries, he meets with people who were there prior to August 2021. The Taliban wanted them to return to work in order to keep the bureaucracy going. The source added that it is a misperception in the international community that there was a complete turnover over staff. That was not the case. The same situation applies for local governments in the provinces below a certain level.
35. The official line of the Taliban is that people who worked for the embassies, international organisations and NGOs are not going to be persecuted. If something happened to certain individuals, it was due to a number of factors in their background or in their family. The source stated that they have been clear with their staff in saying that the staff is not in danger for having worked for the NGO per se.
36. In terms of low-level workers for the foreign troops, e.g. drivers, cooks, mechanics etc., who were seen entering the military base on a regular basis, the source opined that, as a general rule, workers in that type of functions would not face risks, but it would depend on other factors involved in terms of their passed affiliations. The source elaborated in saying that at that level of jobs, if they were in combat supporting a troop unit that was in active combat with the Taliban that would make them more vulnerable. Likewise, if they had family affiliations who had problems with

the Taliban that would make them more vulnerable.

37. According to the source, people are less targeted in the rural areas. People who are more high profile or more senior would be in more danger and these profiles tend to live in more urban environment.
38. With regard to people who work for the foreign embassies, most of them were evacuated in August. Embassy workers who are still in Afghanistan they will feel abandoned. If there are any US embassy workers left they are probably trying to keep a low profile while they wait to get evacuated. The mere fact that one has worked for a western embassy does not put him/her at risk. However, if you were working for an embassy that had troops on the ground in active combat with the Taliban, then you are more vulnerable. For the vast majority of embassy workers, the source opined that the Taliban did not see them as a threat.
39. Concerning the Taliban’s ability to monitor and obtain intelligence regarding the employer of a given individual, the source noted that one of the first organisations that the Taliban took over after 15 August 2021 was the former intelligence service, ‘National Directorate of Security’ (NDS), that had all the information on people. Those are the resources that the Taliban is relying on, as well as on their social networks that are very strong. At the same time, it is easy to reach out to community members and find out where a given person works. Members of the NDS are more persecuted than members of other forces.
40. The internet has been cut off for NDS’ databases and some of the archives were burned or hidden, which means that the Taliban does not have the full information available. Some of the data was paper based.

#### *Rights based NGOs*

41. Some of the larger INGOs who worked closely with the former government have left the country. As a former employee of one of these INGOs, one would not be especially targeted. There are still rights based NGOs in Afghanistan, however, they re-shifted on how they speak of their activities and how they broadcast themselves. The source would not apply a blanket statement on the eradication of the human rights initiatives in the country.

#### **Family members to targeted individuals**

42. Family members of former NDS employees would be interrogated about his whereabouts. But whether or not the family members are at risk themselves is not entirely clear to the source.
43. The source did not know for sure if family members of ISKP affiliates would be persecuted, but the source believed that the family members would have a legitimate reason to be concerned.

#### **Insecurity and crime levels**



44. There is a rise in crime levels, particularly in Kabul and other urban areas. The type of crime that has gone up is primarily theft and robberies. In terms of kidnapping, there have been incidents related to car robberies, which means that if a car is hijacked and if a passenger does not get out in time, then they are going with the car and the robbers.

**Conditions for Afghans returned to Afghanistan after being evacuated**

45. There are many involuntary returns to Afghanistan from Europe and from Afghanistan's neighboring countries; if it is voluntary, then the source questioned the definition of voluntary. It is mostly labour migrants unable to find work in other countries and are returning.
46. The source assessed that the Taliban would make a distinction between returnees who applied for asylum in Europe due to their work history and returnees from the region, but he could not tell for sure.
47. As a final statement, the source opined that the Taliban is making things difficult for a number of groups in the population. It should be considered that the economy has worsened since August 2021. The conditions in the country are miserable.

## Meeting with IOM

30 March 2022

*IOM Pakistan’s mandate is the Afghan population in Pakistan who are undocumented, holders of Afghan citizen’s cards as well as the host communities. Their focus is on protection as well as livelihood and community integration.*

1. IOM has a flow monitoring activities displayed at the data site funded by the EU.<sup>340</sup> The data shows the return of the undocumented Afghans or the Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC) holders from Pakistan to Afghanistan, which is produced every two weeks. Since August 2021, the IOM had a regional perspective on population movements in and outside of Afghanistan. They do not conduct registration and they do not report people as individuals - but they observe the movement of people between the two countries.

### Conditions for returnees in Afghanistan

2. IOM stated that they do not have information on the prevalence of returned Afghans who were evacuated out of Afghanistan after Taliban’s takeover in August 2021.
3. With regard to the prevalence of Afghans who returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan after 15 August, IOM pointed to available data on their website<sup>341</sup>, but emphasized that it is hard to say how many have returned, because the circular migration between Afghanistan and Pakistan is ongoing. When the border is open, migration in both directions continue.
4. According to IOM’s internal data, there is a trend within the groups of individuals returning; a combination of those who came to Pakistan temporarily, and those who stayed longer. The data included a high number of Afghan people with need for medical care, who came to Pakistan on a regular basis and who never intended to stay. At the same time, there are a number of people who voluntarily returned to Afghanistan with the intention of settling in Afghanistan. The reason for this could be, that returnees assessed that the hardship in Afghanistan seemed like the better option rather than staying in Pakistan and facing the challenging living conditions. Meanwhile, others viewed the change of government in Afghanistan as an improvement and went back for that reason. IOM further assessed, that for undocumented Afghans in Pakistan it may be safer to return rather than face deportation, if they are caught by the authorities. This, combined with the aforementioned economic hardship in Pakistan, for some Afghans, returning home may end up being the better option.
5. IOM is tracking the return flows rather than verifying each individual. The Pakistani government has since August 2021 tracked peoples’ ID documents at the border to know who is coming and leaving. The source summed up and stated that it is difficult to say precisely how many Afghans are returning to Afghanistan.

<sup>340</sup> IOM referred to data on their website: *FLOW MONITORING / SITUATION REPORTS*, n.d., [url](#); *Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Pakistan*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>341</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), *AFG\_MOVEMENTS IN AND OUT (19 MAR-25 MAR 2022)* (iom.int), [url](#)

6. There is available data on IOM’s website on Afghanistan that gives some explanation on why some Afghans are returning. IOM has staff at the border crossing points where they interview returnees, specifically Undocumented or ACC holder. However, they do not interview every single person. The given reasons for returning are related to family and economy, but other than that, IOM does not know the specific reasons why some Afghans are returning. IOM added that when interviewing Afghans returning, livelihood and shelter are always on top of the list of reasons for return rather than physical security per se.

### **Profiles of returnees**

7. The first question to answer when somebody returns is what kind of assistance would the person need upon return. Right now, the challenge is that there is a lack of infrastructure to support the assistance, e.g. there is a lack of physical cash in the country. This situation has slightly improved since August and September, but it still poses challenges for the IOM.
8. According to the IOM, it is challenging for returnees, including returnees from the middle class, to access the housing market in Kabul at the moment because of the economic situation in Afghanistan. Kabul, being a big urban center and expanding rapidly, would be the hardest place to resettle, because the city’s infrastructure cannot absorb all the newcomers.
9. For single women without a male support network, it would be very difficult to return, because the concept hardly exists in the country. A single woman cannot rent a place to live. However, there are many female-headed households, but the perception among people is that these women must be under the protection of a male relative.
10. Concerning unaccompanied minors, IOM is not aware of returns from beyond the region, but from the Iranian border, many below the age of 18, return to their families in Afghanistan after seeking opportunities abroad. They seek work to help their families.

### **Re-integration**

11. Asked about how returnees in Afghanistan are re-integrating into the Afghan society, IOM stated that their Pakistan Office does not have the information. The Afghanistan Office, on the other hand, has a protection program financed by ECHO and implemented by IRARA that is following up on the returnees from the region as well as from European countries. However, the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration projects from European countries are on hold for the time being. The IOM Afghanistan Office does not yet have information to share on returnees and their situation in Afghan society.
12. When asked if IOM knows of NGOs in Afghanistan who work with reception of returnees, IOM noted that according to their knowledge ACE and IRARA are no longer implementing projects in

Afghanistan; however, IOM referred to the organisation for confirmation. It is very challenging to implement projects due to the lack of cash in the Afghan society and the organisations could not pay salaries to the employees. Another reason why it is currently challenging to implement projects in Afghanistan is the communication challenges that IOM faces due to physical conditions and for technology reasons, e.g. the low internet speed.

13. IOM added that a relationship with the de facto government is challenging. On the ground, IOM must coordinate with the de facto government to ensure the staff’s safety, but IOM does not seek any approval from them.
14. The de facto government requires female staff to have a male escort (*mahram*) which IOM does not accept. But if someone is in danger, because she does not have a *mahram*, the IOM does not demand of her to come to work. The scope of activities are not consistent throughout the country but is dependent on the local authorities. In a limited number of provinces, the local leaders accept the IOM staff, whereas in other parts of the country they have very different requirements.
15. The source gave an example on how requirements sometimes change at the local level. For example, the staff is allowed to access certain communities one week and the next week the leaders issue an instruction saying that the team cannot revisit the same communities.
16. IOM highlighted that the lack of cash in Afghanistan is a challenge for organisations working in Afghanistan. The source exemplified this by saying, that as of December 2021, there was no cash in Afghanistan, which meant that they could not pay for anything such as fuel – and if they cannot pay their partners, the activities will not take place.
17. The majority of Afghans have a family member who have been displaced at least once in their lifetime - either internally, regionally or internationally. Another aspect is that families invest in a family member to go abroad. They borrow a large amount of money to pay a smuggler to facilitate migration. The expectation is that the investment will succeed. The obligation to provide for family members extends as far as second cousins or further out.
18. IOM opined that a distinction must be made between voluntary return and involuntary return. The latter is generally targeting undocumented Afghans, which by the law are subject to deportation; it may also include minority members, although not targeted per se, for instance from the LGBT community. A person from such a community will be in danger if they return, because homosexuality is perceived as unacceptable in Afghanistan. The source knew about cases from before August 2021 of LGBT people who returned and experienced difficulties.
19. On the importance of having a network upon return, IOM commented that it goes without saying, that for returnees their whole life is based on their network. Everything is about extended family. Returnees will check who in their family is left in the country, and whether housing is available. Those who have resources are less dependent on their network. Others who have fewer resources

would turn to their tribe for assistance. In times of economic hardship, and when resources are scarcer, the network becomes more important.

### **Discrimination**

20. When asked to what extent returned Afghans face discrimination, IOM stated, that their office in Afghanistan was unaware of any cases of discrimination due to return, or the way they left the country or the way they arrived.

### **Monitoring**

21. When asked, to what extent Afghans are monitored by the de facto government upon return, the source replied that the infrastructure of the de facto government is extremely weak. IOM has a team at the border crossing points in Jalalabad which hands out small cash grants to returnees for transportation to their final destination. IOM noted that they used to be able to share the information on somebody returning with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation that had a local office in each province. At the time, this meant that the returnee could register with the local office of the ministry. However, currently, this system is not working. The source assessed that the de facto government does not have the capacity to track returnees.
22. In terms of regional differences in how returned Afghans are treated, the source stated that the de facto government does not have the infrastructure to monitor returnees.
23. Returnees from Pakistan go back to a top 6-7 provinces along the border between Pakistan and Kabul where they have their connections. The majority of Afghans in Pakistan are Pashtuns; after August 2021 more Hazaras travelled to Pakistan. IOM further noted that Afghans without connections in Pakistan do not go there. Which is very different from Iran where many more go and seek for job opportunities.
24. When asked, how Afghans convicted of a crime abroad were treated by the authorities upon return to Afghanistan, IOM replied that they do not have data, but the source assessed that the de facto government does not have the capacity to systematically track people who are coming back. However, on the ground at village level, the local leaders will know who has returned back, but the information will most likely not reach the de facto government in Kabul.
25. Regarding the targeted individuals (Afghans with links to the former government), IOM does not know; but it depends on the position of the person in question.

## Meeting with a representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan

Islamabad, 29 March 2022

### The overall security situation across Afghanistan today

1. According to the representative of an international organisation in Afghanistan, one of the main differences after the Taliban takeover is the easier access to different regions because of safer travel conditions across Afghanistan and fewer combat activities. Security has been somewhat stable since August 2021 with a significantly lower number of conflict incidents, which means an increased freedom of movement on the ground for the civilians.

### *Crime levels*

2. The crime level is increasing in Afghanistan – from petty crime to serious types such as kidnapping – and the source linked this increment to the economic situation in the country. The common nominator for the types of crime the source knows of are financially motivated. Kidnapping cases seem planned to a degree, because the victim usually is someone who has a firm daily pattern of movement. These kidnapers usually target local business owners and their children.
3. Because of the difficulties linked to tracing crime, the source assessed that the crime level is underreported and many kidnapping cases are dealt with internally between the parties. In some cases, the Taliban has as law enforcement killed the kidnapper, as in the case in Herat, and displayed the body around the city on cranes as a deterrence strategy. They do not have the necessary education as police enforcement; they are an insurgency group, and are not familiar with regular policing. There is a large degree of autonomy within the Taliban, in a city like Herat for instance, either the police or the DGI is responsible for criminal cases such as these.

### *Power structures within law enforcement entities*

4. When asked about the power structures within law enforcement entities, the source replied, it is not always clear who has the last word when it comes to decisions in a given situation; is it the province or the district authorities. Sometimes individuals have more authority than institutions. An individual who does not work at a ministry can have more authority regarding permissions for NGOs, than the ministry. That individual could be a warlord in a part of the country, and in other parts, it could be a member of an elders' council.

### Edicts concerning women's rights

5. Based on these edicts, the source assessed that the Taliban was moving towards a more conservative direction:
  - Secondary schools for girls did not reopen as promised earlier
  - Requirements for a *mahram* (male company) was placed for all women who leave their homes

- Gender segregation at public parks was effectuated
  - In Bamiyan, women were prohibited at state facilities
6. In Herat City, there have been several cases of arrests of people engaging in “immoral relations”, which means premarital relationships. The source had not seen similar cases in eastern and south-eastern parts of Afghanistan, likely because these communities are much more conservative compared to the more liberal areas such as Herat, where enforcement is deemed necessary. This also highlights the lack of central policies and rules. Thus, there have been sporadic cases of barbershops that are shut down in some areas, while thriving in others. In the aftermath of the takeover, the Taliban showed a willingness to accommodate local practices in various parts of Afghanistan, but they have since retracted this approach to some extent.

### Land conflicts

7. Regarding conflict resolutions the source emphasized that back tracing the origin of a conflict can sometime be very difficult. There are many land disputes at the moment because they have a seasonal dynamic. When nomads enter the southern areas for instance, disputes can occur over who has the right to the land. Many of those types of disputes in Daikundi and Ghazni occurred shortly after the Taliban took over in 2021. Typically, these types of land dispute eventually fade out, not because they are resolved, but because the nomads move on. In the south-eastern and southern parts of the country, the source noted a rise in conflicts due to the cultivation season. Resolving conflicts usually involves the participation of the local elder council and the Taliban. However, solutions for land disputes are usually difficult to reach because they stretch back generations and have witnessed land reforms, land distributions, various ownerships and different regimes. So, the complexity makes it challenging to reach a resolution.
8. In Daikundi, the source pointed to examples of land disputes between local and Taliban members or people affiliated with the Taliban. In these cases, the locals were driven away from their land and the court ruling gave a preferential treatment to the Talibs or people linked to the Taliban. The source assessed, there can be advantages in being close to the Taliban, but this can vary from province to province.

### Honour conflicts

9. In Herat City, arrests have occurred based on moral values. Young women and men who used to study together have been arrested because they were seen in public drinking coffee together. This used to be acceptable in Herat City prior to August 2021. There have been other examples of arrests – so far one incident of a woman and a man who were whipped in Herat’s judiciary compound, because they breached the moral conduct, according to the Taliban. Other examples included exchanges of text messages between men and women. The source noted that the outcome of honour conflicts are difficult to monitor since these conflicts are subdued by the families and they are not solved in public. The Taliban leaves the impression that all contacts between men and women, who are not *mahram*, is unacceptable.

**Taliban's ability to monitor**

10. Many are stopped at checkpoints where their personal phones are checked for content perceived as problematic. The source did not know to what degree the Taliban monitors social media platforms in a systematic manner. The source pointed to the house searches as a mean of monitoring as well. Data on former employees belonging to the former government at offices and embassies are also used to monitor. However, the source was uncertain, and to what extent to Taliban are able to access and utilise the data.
  
11. The strength of Taliban as a local monitor is linked to their local presence, which again varies from province to province. Their weakness compared to the former government lies in the lack of foreign technology as a means to gather intelligence.

**Targeted individuals**

*Employees or former employees of international companies, foreign troops and foreign embassies in Afghanistan*

12. The source does not know of any Afghans linked to the former embassies, who have not been evacuated yet. On whether the local Talibs would know of low-rank employees at foreign embassies, such as gardeners and electricians, the source assessed that the Taliban would know of their identity. The Taliban are well entrenched within the local communities, especially in rural settings. The source added that local Afghans who work for NGOs and international organisations, are often treated roughly at checkpoints because they are related to foreigners.
  
13. The individuals most at risk of being targeted are the remaining of the former security forces. It is unclear whether they are targeted because they belonged to the security forces or other whether they are targeted for personal reasons. The source added that he knew of a great deal of incidents where Afghans, including interpreters who were arrested or killed without an apparent motivation or legal ground. Members of the former security forces in Afghanistan have been subject to a wide range of treatment from the Taliban including arrests, house searches as well as being shot and killed after been detained by the Taliban. Most of these attacks against former security forces were concentrated in Kabul and the south and southeastern parts of Afghanistan, including pilots from the former air force and police officers. The sources added that members of the special forces were targeted and killed in Khost. Tribal cultures in these areas had a direct effect on the power dynamics between the Taliban and former security forces. Generally, on targeting of the armed forces, it was mostly the mid- and low-level officers who were targeted. This distinction might be the result of former low-level officers who accepted bribe, or the fact that it simply is easier to target people from the lower ranks because it does not cause a stir in the same manner as targeting people in senior positions.

*Bureaucrats in public offices and ministries*



14. According to the source, many have returned to their former positions. However, higher leadership positions are occupied by members of the Taliban while people employed in lower positions such as the passport office or the counter at the foreign ministry have returned to their jobs.

#### *NGO workers*

15. According to the source, there has been pattern in the way Western journalists and foreign employees at the NGOs have had their homes searched by the Taliban in the recent weeks. The patterns is that foreigners have generally received a softer treatment, while local Afghan employees who are very scared of the Taliban, have had a harsher experience. For instance, the Taliban has been more aggressive in some houses and ripped up pillows. Other local Afghans have been better at de-escalating their encounter during these home searches and therefore experienced a softer treatment as well.
16. Recently, the Taliban has been trying to interfere in which local NGOs in which area ought to be beneficiary. According to the source, there has been examples of assaults on NGO employees who are handing out aid. Traveling for NGO workers is easier under the Taliban due to improved security; however, principled humanitarian assistance is harder now because of the interference. The source has met Taliban commanders across Afghanistan, and has a strong impression that the Taliban is trying to reroute the NGO beneficiaries towards the areas that are home to their own support base. In Ghor Province, the Taliban commander has called NGOs to shut down their activities and has tried to interfere.
17. NGOs are not allowed to carry out rights-based work in Afghanistan.
18. The source assessed that these encounters to a high degree varies depending on the person who is in charge of that specific house search. The house searches have also included homes of Talibs, who have gathered weapons and vehicles without permission in the recent months. The source added that these searches is a way to clean out after the takeover, to secure and ensure that new hubs of strongmen do not grow among Taliban's own forces.

With regard to searches in houses owned by Tajiks, the conducted search was more thorough. This could be linked to a perceived threat of a spring attack by the National Resistance Front (NRF). The search focused on members of the former government forces, especially the commanders.

#### *Journalists*

19. The source has listed 24 incidents since August 2021, where at least one journalist has been detained by the Taliban. Critique of the Taliban prompts arrests, according to the source, and it could seem that these arrests are meant to have a deterrent effect. Journalists are often treated roughly and in one incident, the detained journalists was beaten. The source does not know how journalists are treated once arrested.

## **Vulnerable groups**

### *Ethnic minorities*

20. In Kabul, there have recently been a higher level – or perceived higher level of threat - towards Tajiks from Panjshir. The focus seems to be on confiscating weapons in homes linked to the NRF in the north.

### *Religious minorities, including converts*

21. The Salafi communities have been exposed since the 2021 Taliban takeover. Because of the activities of the Islamic State Khorasan Province’s (ISKPs) Salafist communities have been targeted in the east and south-eastern provinces, such as Kunar.
22. Shia communities are not as exposed as they were in the past. The source assessed that the Taliban are specifically not targeting the Hazara Shia communities. Some of the Taliban’s foot soldiers in Bamyan and Daikundi are Shia Muslims themselves. As law enforcement, Taliban has attempted to deploy members to protect Shia mosques and to a certain degree to allow Shias to protect themselves with weapon towards ISKP.

### *LGBT*

23. The LGBT community is invisible in Afghanistan, because they live in hiding. There has been incidents where the Taliban has arrested people and accused them of homosexuality. In one case three men were attacked, accused and later jailed – where after, the elder men in their community started a negotiation process with the Taliban to free them.

### *Well-educated, members of the intelligentsia and artists*

24. The source stated, that there are several examples of individuals belonging to this group, who have been targeted by the Taliban. The source highlighted a university professor who was critical of the Taliban in the media who was arrested as a consequence of his critical remarks. The source did not know what happened to the people once arrested. Vocal people on social media are also being arrested.
25. Some musicians have been physically attacked, have had their instruments destroyed and have been arrested. These sporadic examples have been seen all across the country, in conservative and in more liberal communities and cities as well.

### *Treatment of ‘Westernised’ Afghans*

26. Men who shave, dress differently or generally look different, are to some degree harassed and assaulted at checkpoints. In Kabul, this moral code is less enforced than elsewhere in the country.

## Women

### *Regional differences for women*

27. Rural areas in the southern and eastern parts of the country, practiced the same treatment of women prior to August 2021 as Taliban does today. Beside the differences between the rural and urban settings, other parts have experienced more profound changes as well. In Herat, women have been approached and asked why they are not accompanied by a *mahram*, but in the north women feel insecure and are uncertain to what degree this rule is enforced. This insecurity has a deterrent effect on women. In Kabul city, there has not been a demand of a *mahram*. Women tend to dress more conservatively to be on the safe side, because the rules are unclear. It is often up to the individual Taliban monitoring at the check points whether the woman standing in front of him lives up to the rules or not. Overall, the source stated that recent events indicates the conservative voices within Taliban have the upper hand in regards to women’s issues, with a reference to the recent gender divisions in parks and universities. Recently, women have been denied entry to the ministries and female NGO directors have been denied entry at Ministry of Foreign Affairs for not being accompanied by a *mahram*.

## DACAAR, Skype meeting, 18 March 2022

*DACAAR operates exclusively in Afghanistan, and in various locations throughout the country.*

18 March, Skype interview

### **Ability to operate in Afghanistan**

1. DACAAR operates at the intersection between development work and humanitarian work, which have allowed them to continue their work in Afghanistan, because this work is not affected by the sanctions imposed on the Taliban leadership. However, DACAAR noted that the sanctions have made it more challenging to operate.
2. The apparent need for humanitarian relief in Afghanistan meant that the Taliban were quick to allow DACAAR to continue their work after they assumed power in August 2021. The nature of the needs-based work has also meant that local disputes rooted in tribal or ethnic disagreements have not stopped them from operating.
3. The relationship with the authorities in Afghanistan have changed since August. It is DACAAR’s assessment that there is less corruption within the bureaucracy, which DACAAR deals with, but many of the old bureaucrats who worked from the former government have returned to their former jobs which means that DACAAR deals with many of same issues they dealt with in their corporation with the bureaucracy of the previous government. The source senses a greater need in the current bureaucracy to control the processes and this has resulted in DACAAR getting

permission at a slower pace than under the previous government. This could be due to the fact that a lot of new personnel with no previous experience or knowledge of humanitarian aid have been installed in top positions in the ministry and in the provincial administrations throughout the country.

4. The working conditions and relationship with the local authorities varies throughout the country. As many of the local leaders are newly appointed and often have little experience in working the NGOs the working conditions often comes down the a personal relationship with the local authority rather than a set of rules. Therefore, DACAAR have employed local Afghans with a religious background to engage in negotiations with the local Taliban leadership.

### Women’s rights

5. When asked if there is a change of attitude in the new government towards women, the source replied that the confidence of the female population has grown tremendously. The source also pointed to a development for women in the country in terms of education: as from 2005 7,000 girls attended schools and currently there 5,000,000 educated females.
6. The Taliban approaches the issue of women’s rights and women’s role in society different throughout the country. In Badghis, the local leadership put forward a draft list of rules for females in the province, and stated that females who did not comply with the rules should be shot. This was after a week edited out of the final rules list following a meeting with the governor of Kabul, a meeting with the UN who intervened; in this case the local leadership listened to Kabul. The source stated that local conditions for women and the general public are often put in place by individual Talibs at the top rather than as a result of broader consensus-based process.
7. DACAAR advised that women’s right to work and freedom of movement vary a lot in Afghanistan depending on the setting. Generally, women in the bigger cities enjoys wider freedoms than women in the rural areas. This trend has not changed with the change in government. To illustrate this, the DACCAR representative shared an episode that took place two years ago: DACAAR had a big program in Kandahar in a rural area, housing IDPs from Lashkargah. The program offered shelter, water and livelihood to both men and women. In the attempt of giving the women a long term solution, a cake and biscuit factory was set up. The local community signed the program off and the twenty women who worked in the factory were able to go out to a larger extent than before. Within six weeks the local community got under a lot of pressure from other people and the factory had to close down. In this respect, the DACAAR representative summed up that for the last five or ten years the NGOs have been able to do a lot less for women in the rural areas than in the cities.
8. The source elaborated that DACAAR’s use of *mahrms* for their female employees have not changed in the areas they work in since August. However, it is his belief that there are more areas in Afghanistan where women has to be accompanied by a mahram now than before August 2021. Whether this is a knee-jerk reaction or a change in local policies is too early to conclude. In terms of women’s freedom, young women have been seen in Kabul without facemask and wearing jeans

and they do not seem to be harassed; however, the source did not know if this is a directive from the central government.

#### *Access to the job market*

9. Women's access to the job market has worsened since August. However, it is difficult to determine whether this is due to discrimination or whether this is due to the high unemployment rates in Afghanistan. The male population tend to be better educated and so they are often picked for a position at the expense of women due to their qualifications. DACAAR stressed that women's access to the job market vary depending on what province they find themselves in, but this has not changed since August. DACAAR have not laid off any of their female staff since Taliban assumes power in Afghanistan.

#### *Lone women without a male support network*

10. The situation for lone women without a male support network has worsened since August because much of the support structures such a women's shelters have disappeared since August. This includes orphanages. This is because the government is not supporting shelters and the private funding has disappeared. As a result, the source have observed a rise in female beggars on the streets in Afghanistan. DACAAR pointed out that because being a lone woman without a male support network in Afghanistan is associated with social and cultural stigma, widows often remarry in order to re-enter a social support structure. As an example hereof, the source stated that when one of his colleagues died in a car crash, his widowed wife married his brother so that he could provide for her.

#### *Marriage and conflict*

11. The source noted that there have been a rise in marriage around August 2021 because families did not want their daughters to be married off to Taliban officials.
12. DACAAR have heard of some Afghan women approaching the Taliban courts in order to resolve disputes with their husbands because the Taliban courts are perceived as less corrupt than the courts of the previous government. That being said, it is the source's overall assessment that the Taliban courts very rarely sides with the women in cases concerning marriage disputes.
13. Overall, the source advised that women's rights in Afghanistan should be assessed over time because there is room for gradual improvements.

#### **Land disputes**

14. According to the representative of DACAAR, many land disputes across Afghanistan have resurfaced again since the Taliban assumed power. Many of these conflicts have persisted for decades throughout the country and now that there has been a power-shift, people try to take advantage of this new situation to assert their own agenda.

#### **Ethnic and religious minorities**

15. The Source assessed that the overall conditions for ethnic minorities have slightly improved since August. This is because a lot of the fighting took place in areas where there were many ethnic minorities. The DACAAR representative is not an expert of the ISIS position right now in the country; however, there has been a few attacks over the last few months in the Shia community in south-west part of Kabul. The threat from ISIS towards the minority groups are bigger than the negative feelings from the Taliban or ex-Taliban members.
16. To the source's knowledge, there has not been introduced any legislation from the Taliban that tightens the rights of ethnic minorities in Afghanistan. The situation for religious minorities such as Jews and Sikhs in Afghanistan have been on a downwards trajectory for years now, and it is not the source's opinion that these trend has changed significantly since August.

### **Insecurity and crime levels**

17. Crime levels have gone up across Afghanistan because of the high employment rates and the challenging humanitarian situation. As anecdotal evidence of this, the representative of DACAAR advised that his Kabul office usually had one or two incidents of theft per year, but that his office have experienced six of such incidents in the past six months alone.
18. The Taliban conducted a citywide house-to-house search in Kabul in mid-March, and the searched the representative of DACAAR's house. The house-searchers were polite and agreed to the representative of DACAAR's terms for searching his house. It is his perception, however, that not everyone in Kabul received to the same polite treatment as he did. The source see this comprehensive house search operation as the Taliban wanting to show strength and to send the message that they are in control of the city and the security of the city. They also found weapons and vehicles.

### **Returnees**

19. The representative of DACAAR advised that very few Afghans have returned to Afghanistan from the West since August, and as such, it is very difficult to assess their situation in Afghan society at time moment. He has heard of one episode of former National Directorate of Security (NDS) employee whose family was chased down by the Taliban because of his previous work. The Taliban had received this information from members of the local community and it is the representative of DACAAR's belief that the Taliban would not have been able to gather this information themselves.
20. Generally, it is not the source's impression that Afghans returning from the West would be subject to targeting from the Taliban unless it is a result of a personal dispute of vendetta.
21. The representative of DACAAR's stated that Afghans who appear 'westernised' are in a more vulnerable position than other Afghans are. As an example of this, the source stated that members of the Taliban detained a staff-member's family for a week because they had been wearing western clothing and because they had 'western' music and anti-Taliban content on their phones.

## Meeting with Amina Khan

*Islamabad, 31 March 2022*

Amina Khan is the Director of Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI), Islamabad, where she oversees research and advocacy-related work on all facets of CAMEA. Prior to this, she served as a Research Fellow and a Senior Research Fellow at the ISSI, focusing on Afghanistan. Over a period of fifteen years, she has published extensively on Afghanistan, and has presented her research at multiple national and international forums.

### Targeted individuals

*Afghans with links to the former government*

1. There have been incidents of people associated with the former government being killed or arrested since August 2021, but according to Khan, there has not been a large scale systematic targeting of people associated with the former government. Khan views the incidents of targeting that has occurred as a result of personal grudges and disputes.
2. The Taliban lacks experience in administration and governing, and therefore they have allowed many of the bureaucrats from the Republic back into their old positions. This is mostly true of people in mid and low-level positions, but there are also some cases of high-level officials, such as the deputy finance minister, who has been allowed to return to his former position. Khan stated that many were wary of returning to their position immediately after August 2021 because of the uncertainty of how the Taliban would govern, but many have since returned despite concerns of what might happen to them. Many former Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan Local Police (ALP) officers are still working, but they do not wear uniforms because they are not receiving any salaries. In general, the Taliban is struggling to find sufficient and qualified personal for many of the tasks they need to carry out now, because of the salary issue. According to Khan, many Afghans have left the country, not because of threats from the Taliban or general security issues, but because of the economic situation in Afghanistan. Rather, the security situation have improved since August 2021, and people are now able to travel safely between cities and town across Afghanistan for the first time in years.
3. People associated with the National Directorate of Security (NDS), on the other hand, have been subject to targeting from the Taliban and many of the people in senior positions within the NDS have fled the country. Khan stated that no one has the full overview of how many NDS members have been targeted but to her knowledge, the Taliban has mostly targeted people in mid and high level positions, many of whom have been outspoken critics of the Taliban. People in these positions have been targeted regardless of their ethnic background. According to Khan, the general amnesty issued by the Taliban also includes low-level NDS officers. The incidents that have been recorded against low-level personnel should be seen as a result of a personal vendetta rather than the official policy of the Taliban. This is a general issue throughout Afghan society, and many Afghans are taking advantage of the current situation to advance their own agenda. This was also the case when the Taliban was toppled in 2001 and this is the case today.
4. According to Khan, the family members of NDS officials have not been targeted by the Taliban.

*Employees or former employees of international companies, foreign troops, NGOs, or foreign embassies in Afghanistan*

5. Khan advised that the Taliban leadership has shown that they are willing to work with prominent Afghans, who have been critical of them in the past and actively worked against the Taliban’s agenda. To Khan, this signals that the Taliban leadership are aware that they cannot persecute or target every Afghan who have worked with western organisations or embassies because they need legitimacy amongst the population as well as the neighboring countries.

*Journalists and human rights defenders*

6. There have been incidents of human rights defenders who have fled Afghanistan as a result of persecution. Khan also pointed out that other human rights defenders have been put under house arrest due to their activism. However, the Taliban have engaged with other human rights activist such as aforementioned Mehbobah Seraj, who have been advocating for women’s rights and criticizing the Taliban for years.
7. Concerning journalists in Afghanistan, Khan stated that many have fled the country since August 2021, especially those associated with the international press. TOLO News are still allowed to operate in Afghanistan with female hosts and anchors, despite being a staunch critic of the Taliban in the past. Khan added that they operate with constraints and that there have been cases of TOLO journalists being detained for a number of days because of content critical of the Taliban. Nevertheless, Khan has been surprised that TOLO has been allowed to continue to operate, as this was unthinkable in the past.

Despite this, there have been cases of Afghan journalists who have been abducted and punished physically because of their reporting since August 2021.

*Monitoring*

8. The Taliban has trained their personnel at checkpoints in the cities to obtain information about people passing by through questioning. According to Khan, this has been a policy developed by the leadership, which serves two purposes: First, this way of questioning the local population serves as a means to extract information about what is going on in the local communities, but it is also meant to show the Afghans that the Taliban should not be feared. The idea is that if Talibs engage with the local population in a polite manner, this will convince Afghans – especially in the cities – that Taliban should not be feared.
9. In many parts of rural Afghanistan, the Taliban has long had a strong presence, and they have been good at obtaining information about what goes on in the local community through everyday interactions with members of the local community.
10. Khan stated that the new generation of Taliban are very tech savvy and they have a strong presence on social media platforms, especially on Twitter. Here, they monitor the activities in Afghan circles, and they will engage in discussions in a non-confrontational manner with people they disagree with.



## Vulnerable groups

### *Ethnic minorities*

11. Khan has noticed that senior Taliban members have made the effort to reach out to the Shia community in Afghanistan. The Taliban have also welcomed Shia Hazara commanders as well as Tajik and Uzbek in some provinces in Afghanistan. On the basis of these efforts, Khan assessed that the Taliban in 2022 are more willing to engage with Shia Muslims, Hazaras, Tajiks, Uzbeks and so on, than they were in the past. Moreover, the Taliban has also showed a willingness to protect Shia mosques in the aftermath of attacks by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP). Khan further stated that this new way of engaging with the ethnic minorities is part of the explanation of how the Taliban was able to conquer all of Afghanistan in a matter of months. During their past reign in the 1990's they never managed to conquer the north. In part because they had little support amongst the local population in the north which is largely comprised of Tajiks and Uzbeks. This has now changed to some degree because they are treating ethnic minorities in a more inclusive way.
12. Despite these efforts from the leadership, there are still incidents of ethnic minorities in Afghanistan being harassed and discriminated against by low-ranking members of the Taliban. According to Khan, the organisational structure and the lack of control over the low-ranking members, is one of the biggest challenges of the Taliban leadership now that they are the de facto government. Their organisational structure was set up for fighting an insurgency, and now they have to perform a completely different task. This requires a restructuring of the Taliban, and this takes time.

### *Women*

13. The Taliban have recently restricted women's rights in Afghanistan with regards to the banning of girls attending secondary school. This was a surprise to Khan, because the Taliban leadership had been sending the message that girls would be allowed back in schools when they reopened in spring. This backtracking is a sign of internal power struggles within the Taliban leadership. After the banning of girls attending secondary school was announced, spontaneous protests erupted in various places throughout Afghanistan, where father and daughters protested side by side against the decision. The fact that this was allowed further goes to show that there is internal division within the Taliban, according to Khan.
14. There has also been a limiting of women's freedom of movement in Afghanistan with the imposed need for a *mahram*. Khan elaborated that in many provinces, the need for a *mahram* is not new because this was already part of the local custom in many conservative areas of Afghanistan, but it is a new phenomenon in cities like Kabul. According to Khan, Kabul is an interesting example of women's freedoms in Afghanistan, because there are mixed signals regarding what women can and cannot do in the city. On the one hand, many beauty shops are still open, but on the other hand, women cannot attend cafés without a male companion any longer. The Taliban has also restricted access to parks and theme parks, so that women and men cannot attend these public spaces on the same day.

15. In the health sector, women are allowed back to work and women taxi drivers are allowed to operate in Kabul, but in many other sectors women have not been allowed to return to their former professions.

*Conflict resolution*

16. One of the appeals that Taliban had amongst the general public when they were an insurgency, was their ability to deliver speedy justice. This meant that people often went to the local Taliban courts rather than the formal justice system because this was perceived as corrupt, slow and inefficient. According to Khan, the Taliban has an issue with regards to the interpretation of the law, however. This means that different Taliban courts can reach different verdicts in similar cases across the country. As an example of this, Khan highlighted a case where a woman from rural Afghanistan sought divorce from her husband. The rural court decided that she could not be allowed a divorce, but local Talibs interfered and brought the case to Kabul where she was allowed to divorce her husband. To Khan, this shows that different courts reach different verdicts, and she further stressed that this verdict is an unusual ruling within the Taliban court system, and that women are not often allowed a divorce.

Khan stated that within the areas of rulings over inheritance, the Taliban court are very close to the text with regards to Sharia law.

*Insecurity and crime*

17. According to Khan, there has been a decline in the crime levels in Afghanistan since August 2021. Due to the economic crisis, people are engaging in petty crimes to sustain themselves, but the scale of serious crimes such as kidnapping with declined because people are afraid of the punishments from the Taliban.

## Minutes from Interview with Lynne O'Donnell

1 April 2022

Lynne O'Donnell is a columnist at *Foreign Policy* and an Australian journalist and author. She was the Afghanistan bureau chief for Agence France-Presse and the Associated Press between 2009 and 2017.

### Taliban structure

1. O'Donnell believed that decisions are still made in a *Shura*-style with discussions on issues, which then are arbitrated on from above. Many say there are differences within the Taliban between the Haqqani and the Kandahar fractions. O'Donnell did not believe there are differences when it comes to core issues such as how women should be treated or whether girls should be allowed to go to school. The Taliban's priority lies with receiving diplomatic recognition as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. The source stated that she cannot give an analysis on the decision-making process within the Taliban, because they are still in the process of dividing positions and areas to govern among themselves.

### Regional differences

2. To the question on whether there are any regional differences in how the Taliban treats local population, O'Donnell said, there are some, especially in the north where there are Talibs who are ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks.

### To what extent are the following groups and individuals targeted by the Taliban?

*Afghans with links to the former government, employees or former employees of international companies, foreign troops, NGOs, or foreign embassies in Afghanistan*

3. According to O'Donnell, people who worked in any capacity for the former government are targeted, detained, kept in secret prisons, beaten, tortured and in some cases killed in Afghanistan today. The Taliban visits people's homes armed, looking for members of the former security forces. They use their weapons against relatives who might still be there or against neighbours. There are cases of extrajudicial killings occurring. People who worked for the former government are in danger for their lives.
4. A police woman went missing days after the Taliban takeover in Mazar-e Sharif. She has not been seen or heard of since. Other women received text messages calling them to the airport in Mazar-e Sharif to onboard flights to leave the country. This was a method of luring them out. Later their bodies were found.

5. Lower level bureaucrats and technocrats might be less of a target, but if they are of a contentious ethnicity or religious belief – then the stakes are higher. O’Donnell’s overall impression is that there is a lack of discipline and a rule of law in the Taliban security forces. In the absence of a trickle down authority, many things are happening arbitrarily. When people address the central authorities regarding the whereabouts of their relatives, they are told that stories of detained relatives are lies. These are results of a broken chain of authority and accountability. People are in danger for a broad range of reasons, and O’Donnell does not believe there is a difference in whether people were sitting in the back or in the front of the office.
  
6. O’Donnell emphasizes that the nature of the people who have taken over in Afghanistan, leads back to generations of boys who have been absorbed into a broad system of *madrasa* schools on the Pakistani side of the border. They have essentially been taught very little other than recitation of the Quran. So this ignorance means that they are approaching Afghan society from a complete cultural deficit. In general, O’Donnell believed many of the targeted individuals are persecuted for political reasons. However, she cannot rule out the possibility of personal vengeance as the motif.

#### *Journalists*

7. O’Donnell spent the last three months of the war traveling in Afghanistan. The areas taken over by the Taliban had either closed down or taken over the local media organisations. Journalists were forced to flee and felt their lives were in danger. In August 2021, many journalists had come to Kabul from provinces, and many of them are still trapped there or in hiding. Journalists were amongst the first targets after the fall of Kabul, they were beaten, and O’Donnell has written about their situation extensively. VOA, DW and BBC have closed down. Journalists are generally not able to do journalism. Prior to August 2021, there were very good journalists that reflected modern values of free speech. O’Donnell added that she has worked with Afghan journalists closely for a very long time.
  
8. Social media is at the moment the only source of information on the situation for journalism in Afghanistan, even though much is unverifiable. O’Donnell emphasized, that she cites sources she knows and trusts because they verify their information prior to circulation. She believed that her information on this topic is less anecdotal and more factual, and there is a wholesale targeting on women – because they are being the most vocal.

#### *Human rights defenders*

9. O’Donnell had not seen any demonstrations by men.

10. There are many examples of female rights defenders who are being targeted. Women especially seem to be leading the charge against the way the wholesale cancelation of their rights, which they won under the constitution. Right from day one, women were being specifically targeted. Women are being detained and badly treated for demonstrating and speaking out against the way they are being treated. Many are not talking publicly about being detained because there is a high risk of assumption that they might have been raped. Gang rapes are happening to women who have been imprisoned – but admitting to being raped means taking the blame. There are stories of young women who are killed by their families based on rumors of them being raped in detention. This is linked to the idea of losing your honor.

#### *Family members*

11. Much of the source’s information on family members of targeted people is anecdotal. O’Donnell used the example of a photographer from a high profile Shia family, who left Afghanistan in August. Today, his family is in danger by association, and because they are Shia Muslims, and because his father and grandfather are central figures in their community.
12. In a different anecdote, Lynne O’Donnell referred to a person in a senior position at the former vice president’s office, whose family’s life is in danger because they are associated to him. In Afghanistan, family is everything and the deeds of the fathers trickle down to the sons and the daughters, and the nieces and the nephews.
13. A former employee at the Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoI) who has left Afghanistan told the source that the Taliban gunmen keep visiting his home and his parents’ home in Kabul. They are looking for him and have shut down his house, by emptying magazines on his doors and windows. Some Afghans receive threatening ‘night letters’. There has been house searches and some women have been taken away in the middle of the night. Overall, there is an atmosphere and feeling, in which people feel in danger because they see what is happening to others.

#### *Monitoring*

14. Media organisations are monitored and regularly visited. Under the new rules, they are not supposed to do any reporting, unless, it is approved by Taliban’s oversight committee. Taliban’s presence in bureaus is intimidating. Many journalists operate from outside of Afghanistan, using sources inside the country.
15. To the question on how the Taliban monitors the population, O’Donnell answered that intimidation and fear are powerful tools to control the action of the people. Streets are relatively empty and many people stay at home. This is partly due to the economic situation and partly fear.

16. The source pointed to the assistance that the de facto government is receiving from the Chinese government to monitor social media and summarized, that monitoring the civilian population on digital platforms is imaginable.

### **Vulnerable groups**

#### *Ethnic and Religious minorities*

17. Hazaras and Shias are generally considered as apostates, and probably regarded as inferior as human beings. They have been targeted in the past by the Taliban and killed in large numbers. O’Donnell knows of high profiled Shias who have left Afghanistan since August 2021, who rightfully, O’Donnell added, assumed their lives were in danger. Hazaras in her network have left Afghanistan because they felt scared and were threatened due to their ethnicity. Panjshiris are being targeted because they are the ‘wrong’ tribe and a hot bed of potential or real resistance. It is different with Tajiks and Uzbeks.
18. In O’Donnell’s view, the Taliban is a Pashtun nationalistic movement, which is not inclusive. Therefore, abuse will be part of the movement. The source did not view the situation safe for Hindus nor Sikhs. Christians have never been safe. If you are not a Pashtun, your status is contentious.
19. To the question on to what extend the de facto government is able and willing to protect the civilian population from the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) O’Donnell stated that they are not willing at all. In her view, there are in some cases symbiotic relations between the Taliban and ISKP. The latter has been very useful to the Taliban in many ways. A useful deflection of blame for their own activities. The source added that some of the attacks blamed on and even claimed by ISKP have actually been carried out by or for the Taliban.

## Minutes from Interview with male human rights defender

1 April 2022

### *Human rights defenders*

1. On the question on how the source is treated by the de facto government, the source answered that he has received life-threatening intimidations from people he does not know on Twitter, Facebook and via phone calls, saying: “We will kill you”, and “you belong to western countries”. The source explained that in the view of the Taliban and many conservative-thinking Afghans, human rights ideas belong to the West. He added that the threats he has received on the ground by individual Talibs does not reflect policies of the ministries, which he has accessed. The source also added that even though he is very active, the Taliban has not attacked him nor his family members and elaborated that he is of an influential family in a conservative part of Afghanistan.
2. In his personal view, many activists state that the Taliban is targeting them and their families, so they can reside in the West. The source viewed himself as an example of how that fear does not apply to all human rights activists.
3. When the co-workers at the NGO travel together for work, the women can no longer accompany them. Co-gendered meetings at the office are still possible. During work related journeys, the source fears that the Taliban might look through his cellphone at checkpoints, and question him as they have questioned others, regarding his contacts and the photos taken of the people involved in awareness campaigns in different areas in Afghanistan.

### *Journalists*

4. Journalists cannot cover any issues that contradict the Taliban. According to the source, the Taliban monitors the mainstream media and the social media. To exemplify this, the source mentioned an acquaintance of his, who wrote critically of the Taliban on Facebook, which resulted in the Taliban executing him in the Helmand province around January 2022.

### **Women**

5. Immediately after the takeover in August 2021, the Taliban declared that women could not work at NGOs any longer. Thus, their NGOs ceased their activities with female employees shortly hereafter. After a while, the Taliban permitted the women to return to their work at NGOs. However, women at governmental offices have received some salaries but are not officially allowed to return to their positions. Female teachers at secondary schools are also still at home. Some university classes are open for attendance and female students in Kabul, Kandahar and Mazar-e Sharif are told they can return if they wear hijab. Traveling by air without a *mahram* is not possible any longer. The source used the airports at Mazar-e Sharif and Kabul as examples where he personally experienced this ban in female travel without a mahram. Although, by the borders of Spin Buldak and Torkham, women are traveling on foot without a *mahram*. In the view of the source, the Taliban sometimes lift restrictions, when they see that the population are not following them.

Female human rights activists

6. To the question on whether male and female rights activists face same restrictions, the source answered, based on his experience female volunteers often can enter inside houses, which is restricted for male volunteers. On the other hand, female volunteers can no longer travel from province to province, as they could prior to August 2021. In additions to that, our source asked his female volunteers to wear hijab during office meetings in case the Taliban suddenly enters.

**Unaccompanied children**

7. The source has 12 years of experience working with unaccompanied children in the civil society and in his view, the status of these children at the moment can be compared to child labour. They are either beggars or street workers.



## Written answers by a UN national staff in Afghanistan

27 April 2022

### *1. To what extent has the situation for LGBT people in Afghanistan changed since August 2021?*

After 15 August 2021, several LGBTQ people escaped from the country. Some of them could reach Europe or other safe countries; however, many are still stuck in Pakistan and Abu-Dhabi. Those who remained in Afghanistan are hiding everywhere. Life has changed dramatically for LGBTQ. Life has been eliminated for everyone, especially for LGBTQ. Previously, they could have hidden lives; they could secretly party, have relationships, etc. However, due to threats from the Taliban, they are hiding completely. I do not have examples of what happened to LGBTQ people because the media is censored, and such events do not become public. I know only of one case of a gay boy who the Taliban flogged.

As another example, my boyfriend, whom I was in relationship over four years, disappeared after August 2021. I do not know what has happened to him. Being LGBTQ under the Islamic law, especially the Taliban, leads to death. Hence, the LGBTQ community in Afghanistan spend their days and nights in fear of when they will be trapped and killed by the Taliban. Including myself.

### *2. To what extent are there regional differences in the treatment of LGBT people?*

When we say the ‘Taliban’, we mean a terrorist and religious extremist group. Those who do not accept women nor the education of girls and children, can never accept LGBTQ. So, in every part of Afghanistan, the Taliban has the same attitude towards LGBTQ - that is, killing of LGBTQ people. Although homosexual behaviors are evident among the Taliban very clearly, but still, they eliminate everything under the name of LGBTQ.

### *3. How are LGBT people being treated by their own families and the local community in case their sexual preference is revealed?*

A number of families do not have a problem if their children are not very open with their sexual orientation. But it is not acceptable for any family if their child clearly behaves homosexual. I know someone who is obviously gay and who escaped death threats from his family. His brother has set a reward if anyone should find him. It is not acceptable in the society neither - however some people misuse them sexually.

### *4. To what extent can LGBT people seek protection by the authorities?*

There is no opportunity nor option for the LGBTQ to seek protection at all. Everywhere in this country is a nightmare here nowadays. Any door they knock on leads them to being caught and they fall in disaster.

### *5. To what extent is health care accessible for LGBT people?*

There were two clinics in Kabul, one in Mazar for the LGBTQ to access health services in the past, however, now they are partly active, and LGBTQ hesitate to go there because they fear being identified by the Taliban.



## Online meeting with a member of civil society in Afghanistan

3 May 2022

In Afghanistan, the LGBT issue is very sensitive, especially in the current context. The source is engaged to help the LGBT community in Afghanistan.

### *1. To what extent has the situation for LGBT people in Afghanistan changed since August 2021?*

During the rule of the former government, the Human Rights abuses faced by the LGBT people were severe compared to their health needs. Discrimination against LGBT people took place at community level as well as from the government and the law enforcement officials.

Any hope for improvement under Taliban rule is completely abandoned. Possibilities for support and protection services is not feasible. The LGBT people are currently living in a very threatening situation. The Taliban is actively looking for individuals who are trans-women or trans-men and there are examples from checkpoints in the cities where the Taliban members stop anyone looking differently in appearance. For trans-men and trans-women, who undergo searches at the checkpoints, it is a big issue.

The Taliban members are very harsh at the checkpoints and some trans-people have been beaten and detained for hours. Based on religious principles, the Taliban is against LGBT persons, and for this reason, there is plenty of hostility against the LGBT community. Large parts of the LGBT community have moved to Iran and Pakistan; in Afghanistan, many are living in hiding. This is why, organisations are finding it challenging at the moment to reach and establish contact with the community.

There is a fear among the LGBT community of being detained by the Taliban. In case an LGBT person is detained, the primary fear is the implementation of sharia law that under Taliban rule could include public punishment without any judicial process.

Targeted killings of LGBT people by the Taliban have taken place. Under the previous government, some LGBT people worked as dancers and sex workers and worked in restaurants, which is no longer possible under the Taliban rule. The LGBT community now fears that incidents of killings might take place due to events in the past in which LGBT people were trapped and killed by the people, who knew them as dancers. Not long ago, two young boys were brutally killed in a province in a similar situation.

In terms of how LGBT people are treated by their own families, sometimes the family members establish linkages with the Taliban in order to show their support, and then family members act as informants who provide information about an LGBT member of the family, for instance on activities perceived as immoral.

The stoppage of relevant services has been challenging for organisations, who aim to support the LGBT community by documenting and reporting incidents. Against this background, the source has a feeling that the violence against LGBT people has increased, but it is not possible to document it. The source has received reports on ten LGBT individuals who were tortured and beaten.

### *2. To what extent are there regional differences in the treatment of LGBT people?*

There is no big difference in the Taliban's treatment of LGBT people in the provinces. LGBT people are perceived unacceptable and in opposition to religion everywhere in Afghanistan. Often LGBT people live in the cities. They flee their families and most of them are living in major cities like Kabul and Mazar.

3. *How are LGBT people being treated by their own families and the local community in case their sexual preference is revealed?*

In rare cases the families would accept a son as being homosexual, but normally there is no acceptance in the families of their son or daughter having same sex relations. There has been cases under the previous regime, in which the family discovered their son was homosexual and they either attempted to kill or succeeded at killing him.

In Afghanistan, it is important to maintain the family’s honour; and a son or a daughter having a same sex relation will bring shame on their family. Honour killings of LGBT people have taken place. It is not only the close family members like a brother or father who might execute the killing, but also the extended family members like uncles and cousins will try to kill an LGBT person within the family.

A community member known to the source, who is still living in Kabul, experienced that all of his family members cut off relations with him, because the family discovered his different sexual behaviour. The man is married and has children.

4. *To what extent can LGBT people seek protection by the authorities?*

It is impossible for an LGBT person as such to seek protection from the authorities. It is even unthinkable that an LGBT person would seek protection. During the rule of the former government, there was no protection either. The law enforcement is one of the main perpetrators who were engaged in abuse against LGBT people. There were cases under the previous government in which LGBT people went to the police station to report sexual abuse only to be further abused and raped by the police. Currently, it is unthinkable for an LGBT person to seek protection at a police station. In the current context, there is no functioning judiciary in Afghanistan. Most of the protection mechanisms that existed in terms of Human Rights protection and child protection are almost no longer functioning. There are no specific protection mechanism for LGBT people.

5. *To what extent is health care accessible for LGBT people?*

In terms of health care services for LGBT people, the source pointed out, that very limited health care services existed during the former government. However, following the Taliban takeover, the funding of the those program stopped and therefore the services stopped as well, and there is no longer access to health interventions in Afghanistan.

## A well-informed journalist with years of experience covering Afghanistan

Islamabad, 2 April 2022

### Targeted individuals

*Afghans with links to the former government*

1. There has been revenge attacks and revenge killings of former government employees since August 2021, but not in the same scale as when the Taliban was ousted in 2001. The sources assessed that around 80 % of the bureaucrats employed by the previous government have returned to work again. This mostly concerns mid and low-level employees since the Taliban have employed people from within their own ranks at the top-level positions at the ministries and local administrations. The source knows of former employees under the previous government, at the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Transportation, who have now returned to their positions.
2. According to the journalist, there has been no systematic persecution of employees of the former government. There has however, been a systematic effort by the Taliban to obtain information, especially on the population of Kabul regarding professional positions and affiliations. This has been expressed through house searches, confiscations of vehicles and houses belonging to the former government. People in possession of vehicles and houses received varying treatment by the Taliban. Some were arrested for a couple of days, some were not and some again were taken in for questioning and released afterwards. The source advised that these house searches and efforts to obtain information on the Taliban's part have stoked fear amongst the civilian population.
3. The source stated that members of the Taliban have targeted some bureaucrats employed by the former government. This was due to a personal dispute rather than because of positions previously held.
4. On the other hand, people employed by the former intelligence service, National Directorate of Security (NDS), have been subjected to targeted persecution by the Taliban. Some of these NDS units, who have been trained by the CIA during the last five years of the former government, are mainly subjected to persecution because these units have committed severe human rights violations against many Taliban members in the past. As for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and whether or not they are targeted by the Taliban, it depends on what a given soldier did rather than his rank.

*Employees or former employees of international companies, foreign troops, NGOs or foreign embassies in Afghanistan*

5. The source stated that whether an Afghan who has worked as an interpreter for the international troops in Afghanistan, including the Danish troops, would be subject to persecution, depends on the circumstances surrounding the tasks they performed, as well as individual circumstances. If the division the interpreter in question worked for has engaged in combat with members of the

Taliban, the interpreter would risk persecution. There has also been cases of local villagers sharing information with the Taliban on interpreters employed by foreign divisions who behaved poorly towards the local community.

6. The source further elaborated that the Taliban are often woven into the local communities in parts of Afghanistan, and therefore have excellent intelligence on who has worked for foreign troops, NGOs and so on.
7. The source stated that if an interpreter had behaved poorly toward an Afghan from the local community, it would not be unlikely for that person to inform the Taliban about the interpreter as a way to seek revenge. People have long memories in Afghanistan and disputes are not always settled easily.
8. The source assessed that people employed at military facilities in low-level positions, who were not associated with active combat, would not be persecuted solely based on their previous jobs. The source added that previous occupation could however be used against individuals in a personal dispute.
9. The source has not heard of any former employees at Western embassies who has been persecuted by the Taliban as a result of previous position, but added that almost all of the former embassy employees were evacuated in August and September, and therefore, it is difficult to make any qualified assessments of these people’s risk profile in Afghanistan.
10. Afghans who were employed by foreign troops of Western embassies are thus in a more vulnerable position as it can be used against them, but are not targeted solely based on jobs they held.

#### *Journalists*

11. The Taliban’s approach to journalists and journalism in general largely mirrors other totalitarian governments across the world. This means, if you as a journalist publish criticism of the Taliban, you will risk detention and persecution. There have been recent examples of journalists being detained by the Taliban because they expressed critique of the Taliban. In a recent example two journalists were picked up by the Taliban, because they wrote a story on the Taliban saying no more international series were allowed. To the source’s knowledge, the journalists who have been detained have all been released again after a couple of days of detention, but some of them were subjected to ill-treatment during detention. The Taliban will not target a journalist solely for the employer s/he works for.
12. The source mentioned an Afghan news organisation has more women journalists working than men.
13. Taliban did not target Afghan journalists because they were employed at an American news organisations; however, they have visited the offices of the organisations to check the employees, taxation, and registration of cars

*Monitoring*

14. The Taliban has a very good intelligence network and are very good at knowing what goes on at the local level, because they have been woven into the local population throughout the last 20 years. Therefore, local Taliban members are taking part in the conversations in the towns and at the local mosques, and this gives them very good sense of what people within the given local community is doing. In other words, they are of the villages and know how villages and local communities throughout Afghanistan function. This way of obtaining intelligence within a local community also means that the Taliban are better able to gather intelligence in the Pashtun dominated areas and the areas, where they had a lot of presence as an insurgency. On the other hand, these intelligence networks are less developed in other parts of the country where the Taliban had little or no presence prior to August 2021.
15. The source assessed that the Taliban have some idea of the information flows on social networks, and they are increasingly utilizing these means of communication themselves. However, the source assessed that the posts one writes and shares on a social media platforms are unlikely to have consequences unless they lead to someone’s death or imprisonment.

*Family members*

16. The source assessed that family members of people with links to the former government, employees or former employees of international companies, foreign troops, NGOs, foreign embassies in Afghanistan or journalists are generally not a target. However, this very much depends on the profession of the person belonging to one or more of the above-mentioned categories, as well as whether this person had a prior personal dispute with a member of the Taliban, the character of the dispute and whether it can be resolved by the village elders .

**Vulnerable groups**

*Ethnic minorities*

17. Ethnic minorities are generally more vulnerable now than prior to August 2021. The ethnic groups in Afghanistan have a long history of rivalry and competition for resources, including over access to land. Now that those in power are predominantly Pashtuns, other minorities fear that the Pashtuns in the country – regardless of whether they are with the Taliban – will take advantage of this new situation to assert themselves vis-à-vis other ethnic groups. According to the source, the Taliban have not really addressed this fear amongst the ethnic minorities precisely because they have been excluded from leading positions in the government and elsewhere.
18. Ethnic Hazaras, who for the most part are Shia Muslims, have been targeted by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) before and after the Taliban takeover. The ISKP have carried out attacks on Hazaras in the bigger cities where the Hazaras constitute a minority and are easily identifiable because they tend to form communities in cities like Kabul, Ghazni, Kunduz and Gardez. As such, the source assessed that Hazaras in these areas would be in a more vulnerable position than in Daykundi, Ghor or Bamyan, where they make up the majority of the population. Despite the

Taliban's previous attitude towards ethnic Hazaras, they have shown willingness to protect the Hazara community since assuming power in August 2021.

19. The source stated that ethnic Tajiks from the Panjshir Valley have been scrutinized by the Taliban since August 2021 because the National Resistance Front (NRF) emerged from the Panjshir Valley. Therefore, Panjshiris are generally treated with greater suspicion than other Tajiks are, and there have been incidents of attacks against this demographic. The source further elaborated that Tajiks from Panjshir fear that they will be subject to blackmail because of their background.

#### *Religious minorities*

20. There is a very small Sikh community in Afghanistan. In the past, this community was bigger but because they faced discrimination from the rest of society, many emigrated. The source assessed that the conditions for Sikhs in Afghanistan have not changed considerably since August 2021.
21. According to the source, there is no real Christian community in Afghanistan. On the question of conversion from Islam to Christianity, the source advised that Afghanistan is a conservative Muslim country, and so this behavior is unacceptable to the ordinary Afghan. This was also the case prior to August 2021. The source has not heard of any such cases of conversion from Islam to Christianity.

#### *LGBT*

22. There is an LGBT community in Afghanistan but it is very difficult to assess the size of this community given the secrecy shown by its members. Homosexuality is unacceptable in Afghanistan, and so the source assessed that their conditions are just as harsh now as prior to August 2021. It is not just the Taliban who finds homosexuality unacceptable; it is also the families of the LGBT-person who finds this unacceptable.

#### *Women*

23. Women are barred from working in the public domain except in the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and at the airport in Kabul, where some women conduct security searches and passport check for other female travelers. In many organisations where women used to work before the takeover of power by the Taliban, the female employees have not come back to their jobs.
24. Recently, several new rules have been imposed on women in Afghanistan. As predicted of the Taliban leadership, women can no longer travel or leave the country without a *mahram*. According to the source, these edicts are not always enforced. They are valid on a regional level, but on an individual level; one Taliban guard can enforce the need for a *mahram*, while the next guard will let the women pass without one. This varying behavior extends beyond the edicts and the individual Taliban might enforce his only personal view on women whether or not it is a rule. The



source stated that this sort of behavior further adds to the complexity of the situation in Afghanistan at the moment, and it is very difficult to draw any general conclusion from one or even a few specific cases. This not only applies to the situation of women in Afghanistan, but to all matters in society. The situation in Afghanistan is very fluid and susceptible at the moment.

*Honour-related conflict*

25. The source advised that premarital relationships are usually dealt with and resolved within the families, rather than involving the authorities. This was the case prior to August and is still the case. This behaviour is not acceptable to the surrounding society and the families will try to resolve this issue without the interference from outside. There have been cases where someone was accused of forming a premarital relationship with a non-family member, and this way the case was brought before a court.
  
26. The Taliban court system has a reputation for swift justice, and this was part of the appeal to the public in the past, as the justice system of the republic was widely regarded slow and corrupt. Judges within the Taliban justice system are prone to corruption, but the source assessed that it is far less likely to happen now because the judges have to refer their verdicts to Islamic law. This also ensures that a person can generally expect a fair trial if they have a conflict with a Taliban member, but again this depends on the context of the conflict. The source assessed that Hazaras are likely to be discriminated by court system. This assessment is based on past treatments of Hazaras rather than on incidents since August 2021.

*Access to information on Afghanistan*

27. The flow of information out of Afghanistan have changed since August 2021. Many journalists were evacuated in the autumn of 2021, and many local news organisations have gone out of business because of the economic crisis the country is facing. Moreover, the Taliban have clamped down on independent journalism and gone after some journalists who offered criticism of the new authorities. These changes on the Afghan landscape of information have meant that people now are more reliant on social media for information. The flow of information from social media is much harder to fact check and verify, and so the risk of spreading misinformation rises when one becomes too reliant on social media.