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Country Policy and Information Note

Afghanistan: Anti-government elements (AGEs)

Version 3.0

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Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in [the basis of claim](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment on whether, **in general**:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- Claims are likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

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

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion.

Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

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

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

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

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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Assessment

Updated: 15 August 2019

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution and/or serious harm:

(a) by state actors, because of the person's actual or perceived association with anti-government elements (AGEs); or

(b) by AGEs:

- i. because of the person's actual or perceived association with, or support for, the government and/or international military forces; and/or
- ii. for reasons specific to the person's profile (e.g. gender, ethnicity, religion, perceived as 'Westernised').

1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 This note focuses primarily on the Taliban. AGEs also include those who identify as: the Haqqani Network; Hezb-e-Islami; Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan; Islamic Jihad Union; Lashkari Tayyiba; Jaysh Muhammed; and groups identified as 'Daesh' (Islamic State), and other militia and armed groups pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives including armed criminal groups directly engaged in hostile acts on behalf of a party to the conflict.

1.2.2 This note concerns targeted risk from AGEs as opposed to a generalised risk of indiscriminate violence under Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive or Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. For consideration of such claims see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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

2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 Anti-Government elements (AGEs), including the Taliban, have been responsible for serious human rights abuses (see [Anti-Government Elements \(AGEs\)](#) and [Targeted groups](#)).
- 2.2.2 If it is accepted that the person has been involved with AGEs then decision makers must consider whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses, under Article 1F of the Refugee Convention and Article 14(5) of the Qualification Directive (QD), is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 2.2.3 Members of the Afghan security forces and pro-Government militias may also have been involved in human rights abuses (see [Civilians suspected of supporting AGEs](#)) and consideration must be given on whether one of the Exclusion clauses applies (see also the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#)).
- 2.2.4 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the [Asylum Instruction on Exclusion: Article 1F of the Refugee Convention](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 Refugee Convention reason(s)

- 2.3.1 The person's actual or imputed political opinion, most likely due to their actual or perceived support for the government and/or international forces and, depending on the person's individual profile, their race, religion or particular social group; or the person's actual or perceived support for AGEs.
- 2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason alone is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed in each case is whether the particular person will face a real risk of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.
- 2.3.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Risk

a. from state actors, because of the person's actual or perceived association with AGEs

- 2.4.1 Insurgent groups, or those suspected of supporting them, have reportedly faced the death penalty, extrajudicial killings, targeted attacks, torture, arbitrary arrests and illegal detention. Afghan security forces and pro-government militias reportedly use threats, intimidation and physical violence, including targeted and extra-judicial killings, during raids or search operations, against civilians related to, or suspected of supporting or harbouring, AGEs. Persons may be targeted due to their family ties, kinship or tribal affiliation (see [Civilians suspected of supporting AGEs](#)).
- 2.4.2 Convictions by Afghan courts are often based on confessions obtained through torture or ill-treatment. Detainees suspected, accused or convicted of offences related to the armed conflict, for example, being accused of

terrorist crimes, have reported incidents of torture and ill-treatment whilst held in detention (see [Civilians suspected of supporting AGEs](#)).

- 2.4.3 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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b. From AGEs

- 2.4.4 Civilians associated with, or perceived to be supporting, the Government, civil society and the international community in Afghanistan, including the international military forces and international humanitarian and development actors, have been subject to intimidation, threats, abductions and targeted attacks by AGEs, such as the Taliban. Other targets, though not exhaustive, include members of the security forces; civilians accused of spying; government officials and civil servants; judges, prosecutors and judicial staff; journalists and other media professionals; perceived 'Westerners'; teachers and those involved in the education sector including students; tribal elders and religious leaders; healthcare workers; humanitarian workers and human rights activists; women in the public sphere; and families supporting or perceived to be associated with the above (see [Targeted groups](#)).
- 2.4.5 In the case of [H. and B. v. The United Kingdom - 70073/10 44539/11 - Chamber Judgment \[2013\] ECHR 298 \(09 April 2013\)](#), the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), considered the position of two persons, one who had worked as an interpreter for the US armed forces, and the other as a driver for the UN, who would both be returned to Kabul. The ECtHR:
- '...observes that the parties to the case did not dispute the conclusion of the December 2010 UNHCR Guidelines that, inter alia, individuals associated with, or perceived as supportive of the Afghan Government and the international community fall within a potential risk category and require a particularly careful examination of the risks to them upon return to Afghanistan... All the evidence before the Court supports this assessment. Indeed, the evidence paints a disturbing picture of the attacks carried out by the Taliban and other armed anti-government forces in Afghanistan on civilians with links to the international community' (paragraph 96).
- 2.4.6 Recent country information continues to support this assessment (see [Targeted groups](#)).
- 2.4.7 However, in [H and B](#) the ECtHR commented that the UNHCR Guidelines indicated that 'not every person with links to the international community and forces would automatically be at risk in Afghanistan...' (para 99), and held that the risk faced by those who are perceived as supportive of the international community will depend on 'the individual circumstances of their case, the nature of their connections to the international community and their profile.' (para 100). The court further found that it was '... not persuaded that the applicants have established that everyone with connections to the UN or the US forces, even in Kabul, can be considered to be at real risk of treatment contrary to Article 3 regardless of their profile or whether or not they continue to work for the international community' (para 100).

- 2.4.8 The UK government has a policy to provide support to current and former locally employed staff in Afghanistan who face intimidation as a result of their employment with the United Kingdom (the [Afghanistan Locally Employed Staff Intimidation Scheme](#)). Guidance published by the UK Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, provides information on the eligibility criteria and offers details regarding this scheme (see also [Persons associated with international military forces, including interpreters](#)).
- 2.4.9 In the country guidance case [AS \(Safety of Kabul\) Afghanistan CG \[2018\] UKUT 118 \(IAC\) \(28 March 2018\)](#), heard on 25 and 27 September; 24 October; 20 November and 11 December 2017, the Upper Tribunal held, in relation to risk of return to Kabul from the Taliban, that ‘A person who is of lower-level interest for the Taliban (i.e. not a senior government or security services official, or a spy) is not at real risk of persecution from the Taliban in Kabul’ (para 241(1)).
- 2.4.10 This case was appealed to the Court of Appeal, and the Court of Appeal ordered that this case be remitted to the Upper Tribunal for reconsideration, but only in relation to the issue of internal relocation to Kabul; the Upper Tribunal’s assessment of risk from the Taliban in Kabul was not challenged.
- 2.4.11 In [H and B](#) the ECtHR found that ‘... there is insufficient evidence before [the court...] at the present time to suggest that the Taliban have the motivation or the ability to pursue low-level collaborators in Kabul or other areas outside their control’ (paragraph 97).
- 2.4.12 The country information indicates that the Taliban may have the capability to track down a person who relocates to a different area, particularly when targeting their ‘well known or well positioned opponents’. Reports also indicate that so-called ‘targets of lower importance’ may be targeted if they are easy accessible. The strength of the local Taliban in the area of relocation is a factor, with the Taliban’s influence varying from region to region. Sources also indicate it may be more difficult for the Taliban to locate a person in urban areas (see [Ability to pursue individuals](#)).
- 2.4.13 Decision makers must consider whether the Taliban or other AGEs would have the motivation to track and pursue a person considered low-profile – for example, a person with no or little connection to the government and/or international community – and consider other individual circumstances why they might still target them. Persons not active (or not presumed as such) in the fight against the Taliban are likely to be at lower risk of any direct targeting. The number of persons who are reported to be actively targeted or on the Taliban’s blacklist varies considerably (see [Ability to pursue individuals](#), [Blacklist and threat letters](#) and Targeted groups – [Overview](#) and [Persons associated with, or supporting, the Afghan government or international community](#)).
- 2.4.14 The ECtHR found in [H and B](#), ‘There is also little evidence that the Taliban are targeting those who have, as requested by them, already stopped working for the international community and who have moved to other areas...’ (paragraph 98). Recent country information indicates that the Taliban may not target members of the Afghan security forces if they have resigned from their posts (See [Members of Afghan security forces](#)).

- 2.4.15 For guidance on assessing the risk of forced recruitment of minors see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Unaccompanied children](#).
- 2.4.16 Young men, often recruited from madrasas [Islamic religious schools] in Pakistan, may face coerced or forced recruitment by AGEs. However, there is apparently no shortage of volunteers and forced recruitment is only used in exceptional cases, for example, if the Taliban are under acute pressure. The Taliban often look to recruit cadres with a military background. Each case must be decided on its individual circumstances, considering the age and tribal affiliation of the person, military background, area of origin and the Taliban's presence or influence, increased intensity of the conflict, and the socio-economic situation of the family, that might increase this risk (see [Recruitment](#) and the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#)).
- 2.4.17 In assessing whether a person is at risk, decision makers should take into account the following factors:
- the profile of the person including, where relevant, previous personal security arrangements, their professional role, whether the organisation they work for is domestic or international, and its perceived relationship with the government;
 - the nature of the threat from, and the capability of, the AGEs to pursue the person, the extent to which they and their activities are known by the AGEs, and whether they are perceived to support the government and/or international forces;
 - whether the person has ceased to engage/will cease to engage in the activities that have brought them to the attention of the AGEs and if the person has ceased or will cease to engage in such activities, the reason why they did so. This is because, if the reason why the person will conceal his political beliefs (thereby avoiding persecution) is due to his fear of persecution, then he is still entitled to protection as a refugee – [RT \(Zimbabwe\) & Ors v Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2012\] UKSC 38](#) (25 July 2012), paragraphs 25-26 of judgment;
 - where the person was located and/or threatened, and how far that threat would extend in Afghanistan;
 - their personal circumstances, such as gender, age, family and tribal links, religion, ethnicity, and previous interaction with the AGEs.
- 2.4.18 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where a person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state, they will be unable to avail themselves to the protection of the authorities.
- 2.5.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution by non-state actors, including rogue state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.

- 2.5.3 In areas controlled by the Taliban, the state will be unable to provide effective protection (see [District control](#)).
- 2.5.4 In Kabul, and other districts, cities and towns controlled by the government, the authorities may be willing but will usually be unable to offer effective protection given the structural weaknesses in the security forces and the justice system (see Afghan security forces: [Capabilities](#)).
- 2.5.5 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state, it will, in general, not be possible for them to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.6.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, or rogue state actors, decision makers must give careful consideration to the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person. Each case must be considered on its individual merits.
- 2.6.3 In [SC \(Jamaica\) v Home Secretary \[2017\] EWCA Civ 2112, \[2018\] 1 WLR 4004](#), Ryder LJ noted (at paragraph 36) that ‘the evaluative exercise is intended to be holistic and ... no burden or standard of proof arises in relation to the overall issue of whether it is reasonable to internally relocate.’
- 2.6.4 Depending on their strength in the location, the Taliban and other AGEs may have the ability to find a person who relocates to a different area, particularly if that person has a high-profile. It may be more difficult for the Taliban or other AGEs to track people who have moved to urban areas (see [Ability to pursue individuals](#), [Targeted groups](#) and [District control](#)).
- 2.6.5 In general, persons considered low-profile, or who have ceased the activities that created the risk, may be able to relocate to a part of Afghanistan not controlled by the AGE that they fear. However, persons considered high-profile, who have been able to demonstrate that they are of continuing interest to an AGE, may be at risk in other parts of Afghanistan if the AGE are able and willing to pursue them (see [Blacklist and threat letters](#)).
- 2.6.6 For women, the Upper Tribunal found, in the Country Guidance [AK \(Article 15\(c\)\) Afghanistan CG \[2012\] UKUT 00163\(IAC\)](#) (18 May 2012), heard on 14-15 March 2012, having considered evidence up to early 2012, that whilst women with a male support network may be able to relocate internally, it would be unreasonable to expect lone women and female heads of household to do so (paragraph 249, B (v)). See also the country policy and information note on [Afghanistan: Women fearing gender based harm/violence](#)).
- 2.6.7 For further guidance on internal relocation see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#) and the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.7 Certification

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

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

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Country information

Section 3 updated: 7 August 2019

3. Anti-government elements (AGEs)

3.1 Armed groups (insurgents)

3.1.1 The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) identified Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) as including:

‘... all individuals and armed groups involved in armed conflict with or armed opposition against the Government of Afghanistan and/or international military forces. They include those who identify as “Taliban” as well as individuals and non-State organised armed groups taking a direct part in hostilities and assuming a variety of labels including the Haqqani Network, Hezb-e-Islami, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan [IMU], Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkari Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed, groups identifying themselves as “Daesh”, Islamic State [ISKP – Islamic State of Khorasan Province] and other militia and armed groups pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives including armed criminal groups directly engaged in hostile acts on behalf a party to the conflict.’¹

3.1.2 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Department for Country of Origin Information Reports (CAB), report on Afghanistan, dated March 2019 and based on a range of sources, noted ‘The Taliban and the Haqqani network are the largest and most important insurgent groups fighting against the Afghan authorities.’ The CAB report also noted that ISKP and Al Qaeda were active in Afghanistan². The Taliban refer to themselves as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan³.

3.1.3 As well as those AGEs cited above by UNAMA⁴, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) report on the security situation in Afghanistan, dated June 2019, added: the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM); Jundullah, Lashkar-e-Islam, and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)⁵. The EASO report stated that these groups, as well as ISKP, IMU and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, were ‘sometimes even more radical than the Taliban.’⁶

3.1.4 For a more detailed description on, and the activities of, AGEs in Afghanistan, see the [UNAMA Annual Report 2018](#)⁷ and the ‘[EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Security Situation](#)’⁸.

3.1.5 For information on the general security situation, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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¹ UNAMA, ‘Afghanistan Special Report’, (page 10), October 2018, [url](#).

² CAB, ‘Country of Origin Report Afghanistan’, (page 23), March 2019, [url](#).

³ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, (Taliban’s website), [url](#).

⁴ UNAMA, ‘Afghanistan Special Report’, (page 10), October 2018, [url](#).

⁵ EASO, ‘Afghanistan Security situation’ (page 32), June 2019, [url](#).

⁶ EASO, ‘Afghanistan Security situation’ (section 1.2.2), June 2019, [url](#).

⁷ UNAMA, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (page 59), February 2019, [url](#).

⁸ EASO, ‘Afghanistan Security situation’ (page 32), June 2019, [url](#).

4. Taliban

4.1 Strength

- 4.1.1 The June 2019 EASO report noted, regarding the number of Taliban fighters, noted that Antonio Giustozzi, scholar and author of several books on the Taliban, estimated:

‘... the total manpower of the Taliban to exceed 200 000 in 2017, of which 150 000 were reportedly fighters. Approximately 60 000 of these were members of full-time mobile units, while the remaining were part of local militias. Giustozzi however estimated that the number of full-time fighters active at one and the same time within Afghanistan rarely exceeds 40 000. In January 2018, an unnamed US defence official cited in the media estimated the total Taliban strength in Afghanistan to be 60 000, though the same article cites the Long War Journal (LWJ) stating this was a “low-end estimate”.’⁹

For further information on the structure, leadership, force strength, aims and objectives of the Taliban, see the [EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict](#).

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4.2 District control

- 4.2.1 As noted in the EASO country guidance report on Afghanistan, dated June 2019, ‘Many areas in Afghanistan are influenced by insurgent groups; however, the Taliban are the only insurgent group controlling substantial parts of the territory and controlling certain public services, such as healthcare and education, in those areas. ... Insurgent groups have also established illegal parallel justice systems in areas under their control. These parallel justice systems impose extrajudicial punishments in order to sanction crimes under the insurgent group’s strict interpretation of Sharia. The punishments refer to ordinary crimes as well as to transgressions of moral codes, and include severe violations of rights, such as public executions by stoning or shooting and other forms of corporal punishments.’¹⁰ (See also [Parallel justice](#)).

For more information on areas controlled or influenced by AGEs, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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4.3 Recruitment

- 4.3.1 For information on recruitment by the Taliban, including who is being recruited and how recruitment takes place (including use of threats and coercion), see the [EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan –](#)

⁹ EASO, ‘COI Report: Afghanistan Security situation’ (page 34), June 2019, [url](#).

¹⁰ EASO, ‘Country Guidance Afghanistan’, (pages 31 and 44), June 2019, [url](#).

[Recruitment by armed groups](#), dated September 2016, and the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, LandInfo Report [Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban](#), dated 29 June 2017¹¹.

- 4.3.2 A July 2017 paper by Antonio Giustozzi stated ‘... the large majority of the Taliban cadres comes from a madrasa [Islamic religious school] background.’ He added:

‘As the Taliban expanded their ranks, they had to increasingly recruit fighters among common villagers. Even in this case they tended to target young mosque going villagers, usually relying on village mullahs to select and attract them. This shared background or religious practice contributes also to provide a degree of military cohesion. After 2010 the Taliban also started recruiting extensively in high schools, mainly because of the need for educated members to handle clerical tasks and sophisticated weaponry and communications. Taliban commanders commented in interviews that recruits from high schools were necessary to fulfil the new roles, but could not match the motivation and cohesiveness of the madrasa recruits. The core of the Taliban fighting force, particularly the full time, mobile element, continued nonetheless to be recruited largely in the madrasas of Pakistan.’¹²

- 4.3.3 The December 2017 EASO report on targeted individuals noted:

‘The Taliban also recruits family members of fallen combatants, in order to replace deceased fighters. According to Taliban sources of scholar Giustozzi, this is a “common practice”. Borhan Osman [Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) researcher], as quoted in the [EASO COI Report Recruitment by Armed Groups](#), in contrast, gave the opinion that he believed that “the Taliban would show its respect to the family and even support them financially for the deceased family member”.’¹³

- 4.3.4 The recruitment of children was reported by UNAMA in its 2018 report¹⁴, although the Taliban maintained that it ‘does not allow children without beard to join its ranks and it assigns delegations to monitor and ensure that children are not recruited.’¹⁵

- 4.3.5 The EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan, summarising the COI included in its COI report on individuals targeted by armed groups, found with regards to the risk of forced recruitment by the Taliban, that:

‘The Taliban have no shortage of volunteers/recruits and only make use of forced recruitment in exceptional cases. It is, for example, reported that the Taliban try to recruit persons with a military background, such as members of the ANSF. The Taliban also make use of forced recruitment in situations of acute pressure. Pressure and coercion to join the Taliban are not always violent and would often be exercised through the family, clan or religious network, depending on the local circumstances. It can be said that the consequences of not obeying are generally serious, including reports of

¹¹ LandInfo, ‘Report Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban’, 29 June 2017, [url](#).

¹² Giustozzi, A., ‘The Military Cohesion of the Taliban’, 14 July 2017, [url](#).

¹³ EASO, ‘Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors...’, (page 60), December 2017, [url](#).

¹⁴ UNAMA, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (page 13), February 2019, [url](#).

¹⁵ UNAMA, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (page 76), February 2019, [url](#).

threats against the family of the approached recruits, severe bodily harm and killings. Although the Taliban has an internal policy of not recruiting children, available information indicates that child recruitment, in particular of post-puberty boys, occurs. Children may be brainwashed by insurgent groups in many different ways and can be indoctrinated in madrassas, including being taken to Pakistan for training.¹⁶

- 4.3.6 For further information on the recruitment of minors, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Unaccompanied children](#).

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4.4 Ability to pursue individuals

- 4.4.1 In February 2016, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) Research Directorate provided information, citing a range of sources covering the period 2012 – January 2016, on the Taliban's ability to track and pursue individuals in Afghanistan, and noted:

'In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor, who is the Director of the Program for Culture and Conflict at the Naval Postgraduate School in California, and who, for three decades, has been conducting and publishing research on Afghanistan and South Asia, explained that the Taliban may be able to find a person who relocates to a different area, and that they have been successful in doing so, particularly when targeting their "well known or well positioned opponents"... In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an assistant professor at the Institute of National Security and Counterterrorism at Syracuse University, who has published work on post-conflict reconstruction and terrorism in Afghanistan, gave the view that the Taliban generally has the capability to track individuals, through the use of "formal and informal communication" networks to obtain information about a person's whereabouts...

'The Professor explained that the Taliban has shadow governors and military commanders in almost all provinces; communication and information-sharing between the command structure is likely, including in efforts to obtain information about a person's background... Additionally, there may be communication between mullahs and the shadow governors, particularly in the southern regions, who serve as a source for information... The AAN [Afghanistan Analysts Network] analyst explained that there is some coordination between higher levels within the Taliban, but that information being fed back up from local levels is "not done in a systematic way" and that local level Taliban have a lot of "discretionary power" when carrying out their activities... The Professor similarly explained that command and control can vary with regional commanders in some areas; for example, in Arghandab, local commanders have a "free hand" with only a small number of fighters and little relationship with the Quetta Shura Taliban leadership, while in other areas, such as Helmand, there is tight command and control over the area... He further stated that whether the Taliban will seek information about someone can depend on the relationship between the commanders of the individual's province of origin and the destination province... Similarly, the AAN analyst indicated that the strength of the local Taliban in the location

¹⁶ EASO, 'Country Guidance Afghanistan', (pages 53-54), June 2019, [url](#).

where a person relocates to can be a factor in whether their background is detected; Taliban checkpoints and high levels of Taliban activity in an area increases the likelihood of searches of personal belongings and questioning of travellers...'¹⁷

4.4.2 The IRB response continued:

'According to the Professor, particularly in rural areas of Afghanistan, people are "extremely perceptive of their environments" and "know when a new person comes into the village or travels through it" ... Similarly, the AAN analyst stated that unless an outsider has a very good cover story, their background is likely to become known due to the close-knit nature of Afghan communities... The same source explained that factors impacting a person's ability to conceal their background include: tribal/local connections to elders and family, regional accent differences, last names which may refer to origin, religious affiliation and prayer rituals, and higher education profiles which may identify the individual as belonging to a higher social class...

'Sources report that the Taliban allegedly obtained information about people who were believed to be NGO employees during their September 2015 assault on Kunduz city, and used this information to look for those identified... According to Amnesty International (AI), the Taliban's list allegedly included the names and photos of activists, journalists and government workers in Kunduz... AI further notes that during the assault, the Taliban gained access to addresses, phone numbers, and photos of NGO staff, government employees, and security force personnel by raiding government and NGO offices... An October 2015 briefing note by the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) similarly states that the Taliban has been able to gather personal information about NGO staff, government employees, and security personnel, which "may increase the likelihood of these groups being targeted in future" ...'¹⁸

4.4.3 In reference to locating individuals in urban areas, the IRB reported that:

'According to the Professor, "it is more difficult to track people [who] have moved into urban environments, but even there the Taliban have spies and members who can gather considerable information" ... The same source explained that tribal networks still operate in urban areas, and gave the example of the Taliban infiltrating and obtaining information from large refugee camps near Kabul... The [AAN] analyst stated that the Taliban conducts local-level intelligence gathering in Kabul, and therefore have been able to carry out targeted attacks in some urban centres... A 2015 article by the Christian Science Monitor reports on one instance in which a Western journalist attended a large Pashtun wedding in Kabul as a guest of one of the Afghan attendees; several days later the attendee and his family received threats and was accused of working as a spy for coalition forces. According to [a 2012] article by Agence France-Presse, the Taliban has "spies" within the police and military ...'¹⁹

4.4.4 As regards tribal or family connections, the IRB reported:

¹⁷ IRB, 'Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue ...', 15 February 2016, [url](#).

¹⁸ IRB, 'Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue ...', 15 February 2016, [url](#).

¹⁹ IRB, 'Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue ...', 15 February 2016, [url](#).

'The AAN analyst explained that when people move from one location to another area where they have tribal or family connections, this could potentially shield the person's background from being uncovered; however, these same connections could also be their greatest liability in the sense that a person's connections could also be used as a way to locate the person... The Professor stated that "Afghans are a tribal people and this allows them to, in part, know the circumstances of people in their tribe or ethno-linguistic group. This is obviously easy to do at the local, district and Provincial level of their home locality but because of extended families and other dynamics, it [one's identity] is often hard to hide even when an Afghan leaves their home locality".

'Without providing details, the Professor stated that it is "[m]uch easier for Pashtuns to track people because of their cultural norms than other ethno-linguistic groups" ... According to the Professor, the Taliban "keep tabs" on people by exploiting tribal leaders' and families' knowledge of the whereabouts of their family members or tribe members... Sources also report that the Taliban exerts pressure on family members of wanted individuals ... and that a targeted person's family may be punished in their absence... The Professor explained that in addition to exploiting tribal connections when pursuing a person of interest, the Taliban "can apply pressure and draconian measures on the person's family members to gain information. This is probably their most important means in tracking down a person: "tell me where he/she is or we will kill your family." Such intimidation is usually a fairly successful tactic".

'The professor stated that if the Taliban uncovers the background of an ordinary person, which the Taliban perceives to be questionable, this would create problems for that person ... The AAN analyst explained that if the person in question is someone who has worked as an interpreter, for example, and relocates, if the Taliban becomes suspicious of that person's background, they might contact another district's commander to find out more about the individual ... The AAN analyst gave the view that the concern for someone in a situation like that is about the possibility that their background would be found out in their new location; however, for someone who has a higher profile, for example a district governor who has spent time overseas and then returns, the Taliban can more easily track down such an individual from one location to another location ... The Professor stated that the Taliban's tribal networks are very well established and tribal law can cover long distances; people know what is occurring in their district and that traditional ways of locating people through tribal networks still apply'²⁰

- 4.4.5 According to Giustozzi, reporting for LandInfo, 'Taliban are therefore dependent on their informers providing details about would-be-targets for their intimidation system to function. The Taliban claim however to be able to monitor who enters the country, thanks to spies working for them in the border police at Kabul airport, as well as in many other places. The Taliban claim to be getting regular reports about new arrivals to the country.'²¹

²⁰ IRB, 'Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue ...', 15 February 2016, [url](#).

²¹ LandInfo, 'Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence...', (page 14), 23 August 2017, [url](#).

4.4.6 The same report further stated that:

‘The Taliban spies are a mix of former fighters, fresh madrasa recruits, and villagers. They could be shopkeepers, drivers, government officials, government staff, beggars, etc. Apart from a number of permanent employees acting as professional spies, the Taliban also rely on mercenary informers paid ad hoc for the information they provide. Because of their mutual agreements, each intelligence department can only use mercenary informers in the areas of responsibility of the other intelligence departments, not any permanent staff. Paid informers are usually well placed individuals who can sell classified information about target organisations and structures. In particular, the Taliban recruit informers at high levels of government, including army, police and NDS... Usually these unpaid informers are the source for basic intelligence, such as new arrivals or departures from the village, suspicious behaviour of individuals, breach of Taliban rules, negative commentary on Taliban, recruitment of individuals into the security forces, etc.’²²

4.4.7 Antonio Giustozzi further noted that, with regards to being able to pursue an individual, ‘In some cases, they have gone as far as executing relatives. Mainly, such members and their families have gradually been forced to relocate to safer areas under government control, although some Taliban targeting occurs here too. Others who can afford to do so quit, and hundreds have been executed over the years. Even those relocating have been at risk of being caught travelling on the roads at a Taliban check-point.’²³

4.4.8 As noted in the EASO report on individuals targeted by armed actors, December 2017:

‘According to Abubakar Siddique [a senior correspondent specialising in coverage of Afghanistan and Pakistan], the list of people for whom the Taliban will invest resources and planning to track and target into the major cities is limited to a few dozen and up to a hundred persons, maximum. For lower profile individuals, Abubakar Siddique gave the opinion that the Taliban “probably will not target them or their family members after relocating to the cities”. Both Abubakar Siddique and Anand Gopal [program fellow with the International Security Program at New America Foundation] highlighted that there are exceptions where the targeting actually entails personal enmities, rivalries or disputes.’²⁴

4.4.9 The same source further reported that:

‘In Kabul, there are at least 1,500 spies and informers of the Taliban, according to Giustozzi’s 2017 report for LandInfo, which was based primarily on interviews with Taliban sources. According to these sources, different networks within the Taliban have different surveillance assignments: the Haqqani network gathers information for special operations (large-scale attacks on high profiles), while the Peshawar Shura tracks wanted individuals. The Peshawar Shura is said to have around 500 spies and informers in Kabul. While the high profile attacks seem to take place largely

²² LandInfo, ‘Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence...’, (page 7), 23 August 2017, [url](#).

²³ LandInfo, ‘Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence...’, (page 13), 23 August 2017, [url](#).

²⁴ EASO, ‘Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors...’, (page 64), December 2017, [url](#).

in the city centre, the targeted killings, including the ones with magnetic IEDs, take place away from the city centre...

‘According to Giustozzi, there is a degree of cost-effectiveness involved: a profile of low importance to the Taliban, but residing in an area easy to access for the Taliban, may be targeted sooner than a high profile residing in an area heavily patrolled by the authorities.’²⁵

- 4.4.10 Ashley Jackson, Research Associate with the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), stated in a report on life under the Taliban (ODI Report), dated June 2018, ‘The reach of Taliban governance demonstrates that they do not have to formally occupy territory to control what happens within it. Governance does not come after the capture of territory, but precedes it. The Taliban’s influence on services and everyday life extends far beyond areas they can be said to control or contest.’²⁶
- 4.4.11 As noted in the EASO country guidance report on Afghanistan, dated June 2019, ‘The reach of an insurgent group depends on its power position, including its networks or other cooperation mechanisms. For example, while the Taliban are mostly present in rural areas, it is also reported that they run a network of informants and conduct intelligence gathering in the cities. Information suggests that they will persecute certain individuals even in major cities, depending on the profile and their individual circumstances.’²⁷

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4.5 Blacklist and threat letters

- 4.5.1 EASO’s December 2017 report on individuals targeted by armed actors, noted:

‘Sources provided varying information regarding the procedures used by the Taliban in targeting. Dr. Antonio Giustozzi describes in his report for LandInfo from August 2017 – a report that relies heavily oral sources, mostly Taliban interviewees – a very systematic procedure of identifying and targeting individuals: after being identified and located, (except for the high profiles [e.g. top government figures]) an individual should be warned at least twice. If this individual does not follow up on the threats, they can potentially be interrogated before a Taliban court. If still failing to comply with Taliban injunctions, only then is an individual included on a Taliban black list. People who are to be added as targets on the blacklist have to be cleared by the Taliban leadership (or the leadership of the respective Taliban network), before being included in a Taliban hit list. Subsequently, in each province, a specialised team (Istakhbarati Karwan) of around twenty members is responsible for executing the assassinations. Besides these nationally approved blacklists, local Taliban may have their own blacklists, not necessarily endorsed by the leadership.’²⁸

- 4.5.2 The EASO report continued:

²⁵ EASO, ‘Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors...’, (pages 63-64), December 2017, [url](#).

²⁶ ODI, ‘Life under the Taliban shadow government’, (page 5), June 2018, [url](#).

²⁷ EASO, ‘Country Guidance Afghanistan’, (page 45), June 2019, [url](#).

²⁸ EASO, ‘Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors...’, (pages 23-24), December 2017, [url](#).

‘Abubakar Siddique gave the opinion that the Taliban keeps a blacklist of priority targets. However, when asked about the existence of Taliban blacklists, Borhan Osman stated he had not seen evidence of such a centrally organised system of drawing up blacklists, nor of specialised hit teams. He believed local commanders did have a blacklist of who they want to eliminate in their area, and that they will just try to kill these individuals, without having designated killings squads to do this. Anand Gopal also stated that he had not found any evidence of such specialised Taliban hit teams.’²⁹

- 4.5.3 According to Giustozzi, in late 2016, Taliban sources put the number of individuals in their national blacklist at almost 15,000, suggesting the Taliban do not have access to government databases about security personnel or government officials otherwise the list would be much higher. The report added:

‘Essentially the blacklist includes any type of wrongdoer (in Taliban’s definition) whose identity and address the Taliban have been able to ascertain. Such details are essential because according to Taliban rules before being included in the blacklist a collaborator has to be warned and to be given the chance to amend his ways. Taliban are therefore dependent on their informers providing details about would-be-targets for their intimidation system to function. The Taliban claim however to be able to monitor who enters the country, thanks to spies working for them in the border police at Kabul airport, as well as in many other places. The Taliban claim to be getting regular reports about new arrivals to the country.’³⁰

- 4.5.4 Referring to the Taliban offensive on Ghazni city in August 2018, UNAMA noted ‘Taliban allegedly used lists containing names and addresses of Government and Afghan national security forces employees to target them and their family members.’³¹ (See also [Targeted groups](#)).

For information on night letters (a method of communication, often threatening) issued by the Taliban, see the IRB Research Directorate report on [Afghanistan: Night letters \[Shab Nameha, Shabnamah, Shabnameh\], including appearance \(2010-2015\)](#), dated 10 February 2015.

- 4.5.5 In November 2015, the Associated Press (AP) reported on the prevalence of forged Taliban threat letters. According to the report ‘The handwritten notes on the stationery of the so-called Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan [the Taliban] were traditionally sent to those alleged to have worked with Afghan security forces or U.S.-led troops, listing their “crimes” and warning that a “military commission” would decide on their punishment. They would close with the mafia-style caveat that insurgents “will take no further responsibility for what happens in the future”.’³²
- 4.5.6 However, the AP noted that, according to the Taliban, they have mostly ceased the practice of using threat letters, adding:

²⁹ EASO, ‘Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors...’, (page 24), December 2017, [url](#).

³⁰ LandInfo, ‘Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence...’, (pages 13/14), 23 August 2017, [url](#).

³¹ UNAMA, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (page 20), February 2019, [url](#).

³² AP, ‘Afghans seeking asylum buy fake Taliban threat letters’, 22 November 2015, [url](#).

'Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said that when fighters suspect someone is working with the government or security forces, they contact the person's relatives to request that he stop. "We don't send threat letters, that's not our style. Only very rarely would we use the phone, in cases where we perceive serious problems," he said. "All these so-called Taliban threat letters are fake," he added, reeling off a list of people who he says falsely claimed to have received threatening letters from the Taliban.' A spokesperson at the Afghan National Directorate of Security also dismissed the letters³³.

- 4.5.7 The Taliban were reported, in 2015, to urge Afghans not to leave their country and 'defame the Taliban by presenting fake letters.'³⁴ The Voice of America (VoA) cited a statement issued to journalists by the Taliban, which said 'the fabricated death threat letters being forwarded to [international refugee agencies] by the refugees have no verity and are sold to them by mafia groups for a meager price'.³⁵

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4.6 Parallel justice

- 4.6.1 UNAMA noted in 2017 'All parallel justice structure punishments by non-state armed groups are illegal under the laws of Afghanistan, constitute criminal acts, and may amount to war crimes.'³⁶
- 4.6.2 The CAB report noted 'The Taliban and other AGEs have their own judiciary in areas under their control. Citizens who live outside areas under Taliban control sometimes submit cases to Taliban judges. However, Taliban commanders often impose arbitrary punishments without reference to this legal system.'³⁷ In 2017 UNAMA defined parallel justice punishments as 'the deliberate killing and/or injuring of a person as punishment by Anti-Government Elements that results from the trial, conviction, and execution or punishment of a person suspected of a crime, as defined by Taliban or other Anti-Government Elements.'³⁸
- 4.6.3 According to UNAMA, 'Examples of parallel justice structure punishments carried out against civilians included: public executions by stoning and shooting; beatings; lashings; and amputations. Anti-Government Elements imposed the punishments against individuals accused of committing crimes such as robbery, abduction, adultery, rape, and murder.'³⁹
- 4.6.4 The parallel justice system and punishments continued to be used against women for so-called 'moral crimes' in 2017⁴⁰. UNAMA documented 4 incidents in 2018⁴¹, 4 in 2017 and 10 in 2016⁴², all resulting in women

³³ AP, 'Afghans seeking asylum buy fake Taliban threat letters', 22 November 2015, [url](#).

³⁴ VoA, 'Taliban Denies Threatening Afghan Asylum Seekers', 21 December 2015, [url](#).

³⁵ VoA, 'Taliban Denies Threatening Afghan Asylum Seekers', 21 December 2015, [url](#).

³⁶ UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2017', (page 36), February 2018, [url](#).

³⁷ CAB, 'Country of Origin Report Afghanistan', (page 23), March 2019, [url](#).

³⁸ UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2017', (page 10), February 2018, [url](#).

³⁹ UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2017', (page 36), February 2018, [url](#).

⁴⁰ UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2017', (page 10), February 2018, [url](#).

⁴¹ UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2018', (page 10), February 2019, [url](#).

⁴² UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2017', (page 10), February 2018, [url](#).

casualties, including deaths. UNAMA added that under-reporting was likely given the limited access to areas controlled by AGEs⁴³.

- 4.6.5 UNAMA documented that in 2018 ‘16 incidents of Anti-Government Elements carrying out illegal punishments against civilians. Anti-Government Elements continued to adjudicate criminal and civil cases according to parallel judicial structures, particularly in areas under their control where civilians had very limited access to legal judicial mechanisms. Such illegal punishments included executions, amputations and beatings, for perceived offences, including allegations of spying, supporting the Government, being a member of the Afghan national security forces, and engaging in “moral transgressions”. UNAMA attributed 13 such incidents resulting in 21 civilian casualties (14 deaths and seven injured) to Taliban and three to Daesh/ISKP, which caused eight deaths.’⁴⁴
- 4.6.6 The June 2019 EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan, summarising the COI included in its COI report on individuals targeted by armed groups, found with regards to individuals accused of ordinary crimes ‘In areas under their control, insurgents operate parallel justice mechanisms and impose harsh extrajudicial punishments, including beatings, lashing, public executions by shooting and stoning.’⁴⁵

For general information on the treatment of women, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: women fearing gender based harm/violence](#).

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Section 5 updated: 7 August 2019

5. Targeted groups

5.1 Overview

- 5.1.1 As well as the groups covered in the subsections below see the [EASO COI Report Afghanistan: Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict](#) and the [EASO COI Report Afghanistan: Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms](#), both published in December 2017, as well as the [UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), of August 2018, for further information on groups targeted by AGEs, including, but not limited to: tribal elders and religious leaders; teachers and education-sector personnel; journalists; and people perceived as transgressing Islam, for example, due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- 5.1.2 As reported in February 2016, an AAN analyst explained to the IRB Research Directorate that ‘... when an individual wanted by the Taliban relocates or returns to their province of origin and if their background is revealed, depending on the individual's profile, as well as the political climate of the day, that person could be killed, which has occurred ...’.⁴⁶

⁴³ UNAMA, ‘Annual Report 2017’, (page 36), February 2018, [url](#).

⁴⁴ UNAMA, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (page 31), February 2019, [url](#).

⁴⁵ EASO, ‘Country Guidance Afghanistan’, (page 73), June 2019, [url](#).

⁴⁶ IRB, ‘Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue ...’, 15 February 2016, [url](#).

- 5.1.3 The EASO report noted that, according to AAN researcher, Borhan Osman, in general, 'if a person is not active in the fight against the Taliban, in propaganda or on the battlefield, it is [...] not of interest for the Taliban to target such a person and hamper their efforts to appear as a viable alternative to the current government.' However, according to Antonio Giustozzi, 'local Taliban may target certain individuals outside the general rules set out by the Taliban leadership and therefore not seek approval by the leadership to target this person.'⁴⁷
- 5.1.4 According to Giustozzi, citing Taliban sources dated between 2014 and 2017, 'The Taliban have been targeting a wide range of what they consider 'misbehaving' people:
- a) Political enemies: leaders and key members of parties and groups hostile to the Taliban; examples include
 - a. Prof. Rabbani;
 - b. Uruzgan strongman Jan Mohammad;
 - c. Gen. Daud.
 - b) governments – any civilian working for the government or for western diplomatic representations or agencies;
 - c) Members of the Afghan security forces of any ranks;
 - d) Individual believed to be spying or informing the authorities on the Taliban;
 - e) Violators of Shari'a (as interpreted by the Taliban) and of Taliban rules;
 - f) Collaborators of the Afghan government – potentially anybody helping the government in any way;
 - g) Collaborators of foreign military forces– potentially anybody helping the foreign forces in any way;
 - h) Contractors working for the Afghan government;
 - i) Contractors working for foreign countries, opposed to the Taliban;
 - j) Interpreters working for hostile foreign countries;
 - k) Individuals of any category selected by the Taliban as useful or necessary to their war effort, and who have refused to collaborate.
- 'As a whole, these categories of targeted individuals include a number of people which is difficult to quantify with precision, but in all likelihood exceeds 1 million people (there are around 400-450,000 members of the security forces, plus over 500,000 civilian employees of the government, and then we should add tens of thousands of contractors).'⁴⁸
- See also [Ability to pursue individuals](#) and [Blacklist and threat letters](#).
- 5.1.5 UNAMA noted in its special report of October 2018, on the indiscriminate use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), that:

⁴⁷ EASO, 'Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors...', (page 22), December 2017, [url](#).

⁴⁸ LandInfo, 'Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence...', (page 11), 23 August 2017, [url](#).

'In 2018, the victims of these deliberate attacks have included midwifery students and students preparing for university entrance exams; players and spectators at cricket and wrestling matches; worshippers at mosques; humanitarian aid workers; education officials; civilian government staff providing essential services to Afghans, as well as civilians seeking to access those government services; and election workers, and men and women attempting to participate in the electoral process. Of grave concern, medical personnel and journalists responding to suicide and other IED attacks were also targeted with such devices.'⁴⁹

- 5.1.6 The Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) noted in its June 2019 report on Afghanistan:

'The most common targets for insurgent attacks are: government institutions; political figures; the ANDSF [Afghan National Defense and Security Forces] and other Afghan and international security forces; demonstrations; foreign diplomatic missions; and international organisations. Mosques, schools, hospitals and other civilian targets are also vulnerable. Attacks can include small arms fire, indirect (rocket) fire, suicide bombings, car bombs, IEDs, and complex attacks involving a combination of these methods. While insurgents generally direct attacks against specific targets, the methods of attack can be indiscriminate and often result in civilian casualties.'⁵⁰

- 5.1.7 For information on the general security situation, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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5.2 Abductions

- 5.2.1 The December 2017 EASO report on individuals targeted by armed actors, noted:

'Despite their "internal guidelines" (layeha) against kidnapping for ransom, the Taliban is found to increasingly target financially well-off Afghan civilians. A UN report found that the mantle of ideological or political demands is used cover for pure moneymaking in many of these cases. However, not only rich Afghans are being kidnapped for ransom. Between 2003 and 2014, the UN reports that at Taliban checkpoints, individuals believed to be unsupportive of the insurgency are either executed on the spot or kidnapped in order to extract payments from their relatives.'⁵¹

- 5.2.2 The DFAT report noted, regarding abductions:

'Conflict-related abductions involve the forcible taking and holding of a civilian or civilians by a party to the conflict in order to compel the victim or a third party to take or refrain from taking an action. Anti-government elements kidnap civilians based both on suspicions that they have connections to or work for the government, and for financial gain, with release predicated on payment of a substantial ransom. According to UNAMA, there are also cases in which anti-government elements abduct civilians and hold them hostage

⁴⁹ UNAMA, 'Afghanistan Special Report', (page 2), October 2018, [url](#).

⁵⁰ DFAT, 'Country Information Report Afghanistan', (para 2.59), 27 June 2019, [url](#).

⁵¹ EASO, 'Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors...', (page 22), December 2017, [url](#).

for the purpose of warning against “unacceptable” behaviour. UNAMA also noted continued abductions by illegal armed groups and criminal gangs, particularly in large cities such as Kabul, which are under-reported.⁵²

- 5.2.3 UNAMA documented 271 incidents of conflict-related abductions in 2018 affecting 1,857 civilians and resulting in 53 deaths and 33 injured⁵³. All but 4 incidents were attributed to AGEs; 240 were attributed to the Taliban. Abductions increased by 85% compared to 2017, driven by election-related incidents when the Taliban abducted candidates, election-related personnel, voters and would-be voters leading up to, and during, the elections⁵⁴.
- 5.2.4 According to UNAMA, civilians were abducted in 2018 due to their actual or perceived links to the Government, often for the purpose of prisoner exchange but also for non-payment of illegally-imposed taxes. Whilst many were released without harm after payment of ransom, in 2018 UNAMA documented 62 incidents of abducted civilians being killed or injured⁵⁵.
- 5.2.5 The same source also stated that it noted ‘continued abductions by illegal armed groups and criminal gangs, particularly in large cities such as Kabul, which are under-reported. While UNAMA does not systematically document abductions that are not carried out by parties to the conflict, it regularly received reports of such incidents, including those targeting NGO workers and United Nations staff members.’⁵⁶ (See also [Healthcare and aid workers](#))

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5.3 Persons associated with, or supporting, the Afghan government or international community

- 5.3.1 The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Eligibility Guidelines for Afghanistan, published 30 August 2018 and based on a range of sources, noted that Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) were:

‘... reported to systematically target civilians who are associated with, or who are perceived to be supporting the Afghan Government, pro-Government armed groups, Afghan civil society and the international community in Afghanistan, including the international military forces and international humanitarian and development actors. The (perceived) association with any of these actors may arise for example through current or former employment or family ties. Civilians who have been targeted include district and provincial governors, judicial and prosecution staff, former and off-duty police officers, tribal elders, religious scholars and leaders, women in the public sphere, teachers and other civilian government workers, civilians perceived to oppose AGE values, human rights activists, and humanitarian and development aid workers.’⁵⁷

⁵² DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Afghanistan’, (para 2.75), 27 June 2019, [url](#).

⁵³ UNAMA, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (page 30), February 2019, [url](#).

⁵⁴ UNAMA, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (pages 30-31), February 2019, [url](#).

⁵⁵ UNAMA, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (pages 30-31), February 2019, [url](#).

⁵⁶ UNAMA, ‘Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018’, (page 31), February 2019, [url](#).

⁵⁷ UNHCR, ‘Eligibility Guidelines...’, (page 39), 30 August 2018, [url](#).

- 5.3.2 According to a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School in California, ‘targeted assassinations carried out by the Taliban are aimed towards people perceived as “facilitators” of the government in Kabul...’⁵⁸
- 5.3.3 DFAT assessed in its June 2019 report that, whilst not necessarily the direct target, the highly indiscriminate nature of attacks perpetrated by AGEs, particularly the Taliban, put low-level government employees at risk of violence⁵⁹.

For information on the general security situation, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).

- 5.3.4 As noted in the EASO December 2017 report on individuals targeted by armed actors that, Antonio Giustozzi defined ‘enemies of the Taliban’ as:
 ‘[L]eaders and key members of parties and groups hostile to the Taliban, such as high level individuals killed in 2011: leader of the Jamiaat-e Islami party and president of the High Peace Council, Burhannudin Rabbani; Uruzgan governor and strongman Jan Mohammad; or, police commander for Northern Afghanistan, General Daud; Kandahar strongman and president Karzai’s brother, Ahmad Wali Karzai. For individuals such as these targets, Dr. Giustozzi states that he sees no possibility for someone of such a rank to repent and that the Taliban sees no need to provide a warning to those high profile individuals before being targeted.’⁶⁰
- 5.3.5 The EASO report also noted ‘According to scholar Neamat Nojumi, the targeting by the Taliban goes beyond those working for the Afghan government. One’s adherence to the Afghan Constitution or a liberal social or cultural view can also make a person a legitimate target. He explained that this is why the Taliban target those who participate in the elections or promote women’s rights.’⁶¹
- 5.3.6 The EASO report added:
 ‘According to author and journalist Abubakar Siddique, the targeting of government officials depends on several aspects, such as where a person worked or works, where a person is from, and what level or position a person has. Persons working for the ministries in the forefront of the fight against the Taliban, such as the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior, or the Ministry of Justice, are a priority. According to Siddique: “the Taliban have shown remarkable skill at targeting them and killing them”. For example, the Ministry of Defense offices and busses transporting its personnel have regularly been targeted, as have Ministry of Interior personnel, notably inside Kabul, including police cadets. Although less obvious as a target, similar attacks have also been raised against other ministries, such as attacks on busses carrying the personnel of the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum in October 2016 and June 2017. According to Antonio Giustozzi, not all Taliban networks attribute the same priority to targeting individuals linked to the

⁵⁸ IRB, ‘Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue ...’, 15 February 2016, [url](#).

⁵⁹ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Afghanistan’, (para 3.46), 27 June 2019, [url](#).

⁶⁰ EASO, ‘Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors...’, (page 48), December 2017, [url](#).

⁶¹ EASO, ‘Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors...’, (page 28), December 2017, [url](#).

government. For example, according to Giustozzi, the network loyal to Mullah Rasool does not target government employees at all.⁶²

- 5.3.7 UNAMA stated in its annual report for 2018 that AGEs carried out ‘targeted killings’ of civilians, mainly by shooting. The report noted:

‘In 2018, UNAMA documented 295 such incidents that caused 589 civilian casualties (395 deaths and 194 injured), representing a 17 per cent decrease in targeted killings of civilians from 2017. The civilians targeted were individuals perceived as supporting or otherwise connected to the Government or pro-Government armed groups, whether through current or former employment or family ties. Attacks against tribal elders also remained of concern...’⁶³

- 5.3.8 The same source further noted that ‘In 2018 [...] election-related violence carried out by the Taliban, as well as incidents of election-related threats, intimidation and harassment of election-related personnel, candidates and potential voters had a significant negative impact on civilians.’⁶⁴

- 5.3.9 The CAB report stated in regard to politicians and other individuals targeted during the October 2018 elections:

‘In the run-up to the elections, ten parliamentary candidates were murdered, probably by both political opponents and the Taliban and ISKP. On 25 September 2018, a candidate who was active in civil society and an outspoken critic of corrupt politicians was killed by unknown gunmen. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. On 2 October 2018 an attack took place at a campaign meeting that was claimed by ISKP. On 13 October 2018 an attack on a female candidate took place. She survived the attack. On 17 October 2018 an attack took place on a candidate from Helmand province, which was claimed by the Taliban. Employees of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) were also kidnapped.’⁶⁵

- 5.3.10 DFAT noted in its June 2019 report that:

‘In-country sources report that most people working with the government or the international community take substantial measures to mitigate the risks they face. This includes concealing their employment from their families, not travelling with documentation that would identify them as employees of international organisations, and deleting contact information from phones. Some international organisations reportedly instruct their staff not to carry identification that may incriminate them in this manner.’⁶⁶

- 5.3.11 The June 2019 EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan, summarising the COI included in its COI report on individuals targeted by armed groups, found with regards to government officials and those perceived as supporting the government that:

‘Employees of ministries which are at the forefront of the fight against insurgents, for example the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Interior and

⁶² EASO, ‘Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors...’, (pages 31-32), December 2017, [url](#).

⁶³ UNAMA, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (pages 26-27), February 2019, [url](#).

⁶⁴ UNAMA, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (pages 19), February 2019, [url](#).

⁶⁵ CAB, ‘Country of Origin Report Afghanistan’, (page 74), March 2019, [url](#).

⁶⁶ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Afghanistan’, (para 3.45), 27 June 2019, [url](#).

the Ministry of Justice have regularly been targeted by the Taliban. Judges, prosecutors and other judicial staff are also significant targets for the Taliban. To a lesser degree, employees of other ministries not involved directly in the fight against insurgents, have also been targeted; personal enmity or open statements against the Taliban could be seen as relevant circumstances in this regard. Other targeting by insurgents focuses on local district or provincial government officials... Reports refer to abductions and parallel justice procedures for people suspected of working for the government or of being its supporters or spies ... There are reports of members of political groups considered by the Taliban as their enemies being killed (e.g. Hezb-e Islami, Jamiaat-e Islami party). They could, for example, be targeted at locations where they gather, such as at funerals and mosques ... There are also a number of reported attacks on community elders, who have been punished and killed by the Taliban because of a perceived support of the government... Parallel justice punishment of individuals accused of having family in the government is also documented ... The ISKP also systematically targets elders of communities who are suspected of cooperation with the government or the Taliban.⁶⁷

5.3.12 The UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines indicated that relatives of government officials or the security forces have been subject to harassment, kidnappings, violence and killings⁶⁸. (See [Family members](#)).

5.3.13 As regard those accused of spying against the Taliban, Ashley Jackson, in the ODI Report of June 2018:

‘Spying is a capital offence, but individuals routinely reported that only a [Taliban] provincial governor could approve an execution, and that procedures were now more rigorous than they had been in the past. If no confession is forthcoming, further investigation must be undertaken. The process can require multiple witnesses and testimony, and high-profile cases can often become politicised. Cases are generally not swiftly or easily decided, unlike civil cases, and there are multiple points for intervention on behalf of the accused.’⁶⁹

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5.4 Persons associated with international military forces, including interpreters

5.4.1 A UK Home Office statement, dated 7 March 2019, reported that ‘British armed forces in Helmand Province were supported by 7,000 locally employed civilians, about half of whom worked as interpreters.’⁷⁰

5.4.2 The CAB report noted ‘Afghans currently or formerly employed by foreign military missions, including interpreters, said they felt threatened and approached their foreign employers with a view to obtaining visas for themselves and/or family members.’⁷¹ A former interpreter, now resident in the UK, gave evidence to the UK House of Commons Defence Committee.

⁶⁷ EASO, ‘Country Guidance Afghanistan’, (page 50), June 2019, [url](#).

⁶⁸ UNHCR, ‘Eligibility Guidelines...’, (page 48), 30 August 2018, [url](#).

⁶⁹ ODI, ‘Life under the Taliban shadow government’, (page 19), June 2018, [url](#).

⁷⁰ UK, Home Office, ‘Afghan interpreters to be able to bring their family to the UK’, 7 March 2019, [url](#).

⁷¹ CAB, ‘Country of Origin Report Afghanistan’, (page 76), March 2019, [url](#).

The subsequent report, published 26 May 2018, noted ‘In his [the interpreter’s] opinion, “Afghanistan is more dangerous than ever”, resulting in interpreters living “in fear of revenge attacks, of kidnappings and torture”.’⁷² According to sources, cited in the UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines, ‘AGEs have reportedly threatened and attacked Afghan civilians who work for the international military forces as interpreters or in other civilian capacities. There are also reports of AGEs targeting former employees of the international forces and the government.’⁷³

- 5.4.3 The June 2019 EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan, summarising the COI included in its COI report on individuals targeted by armed groups, found with regards to individuals working for foreign military troops or perceived as supporting them ‘Personnel working for foreign military troops, in particular interpreters and security guards are seen as a top priority target by the Taliban. The Taliban have also forced local communities to banish certain families they considered allies of the international forces. Individuals not on the payroll of the foreign forces but doing general maintenance jobs, are not as systematically targeted, although attacks occur.’⁷⁴

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5.5 Persons perceived as ‘Westernised’

- 5.5.1 The June 2019 EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan, summarising the COI included in its COI report on individuals targeted by armed groups, found with regards individuals perceived as ‘Westernised’, ‘Generally, it can be said that Afghans identifying with western values may be targeted by insurgent groups, since they can be perceived as un-Islamic, or pro-government, or can be considered spies ... Women perceived as “Westernised” may be perceived as contravening cultural, social and religious norms and may be subjected to violence from their family, conservative elements in society and insurgents.’⁷⁵

- 5.5.2 For further information see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Afghans perceived as “Westernised”](#).

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5.6 Members of Afghan security forces

- 5.6.1 The UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines, citing a range of sources, noted: ‘Afghan security forces, particularly the Afghan National Police (ANP), continue to be the object of targeted campaigns. Afghan Local Police (ALP) members are also widely targeted. As ALP members are often stationed in more volatile areas, estimates suggest that their casualty rate is considerably higher than that of other ANDSF members. Both ALP and ANP officers have been targeted both on duty and off-duty. AGEs are also

⁷² UK House of Commons, ‘Lost in Translation?’, (page 17), 26 May 2018, [url](#).

⁷³ UNHCR, ‘Eligibility Guidelines...’, (page 43), 30 August 2018, [url](#).

⁷⁴ EASO, ‘Country Guidance Afghanistan’, (page 51), June 2019, [url](#).

⁷⁵ EASO, ‘Country Guidance Afghanistan’, (page 65), June 2019, [url](#).

reported to target officers of other police forces in Afghanistan, as well as former members of the ANDSF.⁷⁶

- 5.6.2 Numerous reports of targeted attacks, mostly against security and police forces, are reported on the Taliban's website⁷⁷. As reported by Reuters in May 2019, Javed Hamim Kakar, a senior editor with Pajhwok Afghan News, and Colonel Knut Peters, the spokesman for NATO-led Resolute Support, both stated that the Taliban exaggerated casualty numbers and make false claims of attacks⁷⁸.
- 5.6.3 The ODI Report noted:
- 'The Taliban have begun implementing a rule whereby if a man has a son or son-in-law with the Afghan police or security forces, he must bring him to the Taliban within three days. If he does not he must leave the area, forfeiting his land and property. [...] A local Taliban commander stated that the "crimes" of those who surrender are examined and dealt with according to their severity. The Taliban have allowed "reintegration" if soldiers agree to lay down their arms, apologise and have a respected elder vouch for them. Such leniency is relatively common but never guaranteed.'⁷⁹
- 5.6.4 According to sources cited in EASO's COI Report on individuals targeted by armed groups, the Taliban gave Afghan security force members the opportunity to 'repent' and 'redeem' themselves by leaving the forces, and thus avoid being targeted⁸⁰. Al Jazeera reported that in May 2019, the Taliban said it would not target Afghan police or military personnel if they left their posts⁸¹.
- 5.6.5 The June 2019 EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan, summarising the COI included in its COI report on individuals targeted by armed groups, found with regards to members of the security forces and pro-government militias:
- 'ANSF personnel on duty or off-duty alike are a frequent target of insurgent attacks. Such attacks may occur at places where ANSF personnel gather, for example, at army bases or police stations or while lining up in front of banks. Targeting may also take place in the form of deliberate killings and abductions in rural or urban areas ... Top priority for targeted attacks by the Taliban is given to officers of the NDS, as well as to members of local uprising militias, ALP and others that the Taliban find 'hard to defeat' ... Moreover, it is reported that the Taliban filter through the passengers at their road checkpoints to detect and kill or kidnap security personnel ... Individuals under this profile are also seen as legitimate target by other insurgent groups, for example the ISKP ... It should be noted that family members of security forces have also been targeted by insurgents ... Moreover, family members are often pressured to convince their relative to give up his or her

⁷⁶ UNHCR, 'Eligibility Guidelines...', (page 42), 30 August 2018, [url](#).

⁷⁷ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, (search term 'target'), [url](#).

⁷⁸ Reuters, 'Taliban fighters double as reporters to wage Afghan digital war', 11 May 2019, [url](#).

⁷⁹ ODI, 'Life under the Taliban shadow government', (page 21), June 2018, [url](#).

⁸⁰ EASO, 'Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors...', (pages 60-61), December 2017, [url](#).

⁸¹ Al Jazeera, 'Afghanistan: Who controls what?', 24 June 2019, [url](#).

position in the security forces ... There are also reports of former members of the ANSF who have been targeted after having left the ANSF....⁸²

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5.7 Women and children

5.7.1 UNAMA noted in its special report of October 2018 that ‘During the period covered by this report [1 January to 30 September 2018], suicide IED attacks killed and injured increasing numbers of women and children, mainly due to a rise in the deliberate targeting of civilian objects where women and children were present.’⁸³

5.7.2 The CAB report noted ‘Armed opposition groups are the de facto rulers in the countryside and they impose their own values and principles on the population. They generally do not recognise women’s rights according to international standards.’⁸⁴

5.7.3 The June 2019 EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan, summarising the COI included in its COI report on individuals targeted by armed groups, found with regards to women in public roles ‘Most women in public roles face intimidation, threats, violence or killings. ... Women in public roles could be subjected to mistreatment by insurgent groups.’⁸⁵

5.7.4 UNAMA noted that women were subject to illegal punishments under the Taliban’s parallel justice system⁸⁶. (See [Parallel justice](#)).

5.7.5 The CAB report summarised UNAMA’s findings regarding the impact on educational facilities:

‘In its 2018 annual report, UNAMA states that educational facilities, as well as being targeted in election-related attacks, were also threatened and attacked by AGEs in response to military operations by government forces. ISKP particularly threatened girls’ schools in Nangarhar province. From June 2018, ISKP attacked 34 such educational institutions, with 64 victims (17 killed and 39 injured), including nine children. The ISKP also planted improvised bombs in the vicinity of schools. The Taliban threatened and also attacked or set fire to schools in response to military actions by Afghan forces and other government measures. In response to a decision by the Ministry of Education to pay teachers by bank transfer instead of in cash, the Taliban ordered the closure of 342 schools in Kunduz province. The Afghan government wanted to use bank transfers to limit the possibility for the Taliban to ‘tax’ this income. UNAMA recorded five Taliban attacks on mixed or girls’ schools in Farah and Herat provinces in 2018.’⁸⁷

5.7.6 The UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines noted ‘AGEs have been reported to target family members of individuals with the above profiles, both as acts of retaliation and on a “guilty by association” basis. In particular, relatives,

⁸² EASO, ‘Country Guidance Afghanistan’, (page 49), June 2019, [url](#).

⁸³ UNAMA, ‘Afghanistan Special Report’, (page 3), October 2018, [url](#).

⁸⁴ CAB, ‘Country of Origin Report Afghanistan’, (page 87), March 2019, [url](#).

⁸⁵ EASO, ‘Country Guidance Afghanistan’, (page 62), June 2019, [url](#).

⁸⁶ UNAMA, ‘Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018’, (page 10), February 2019, [url](#).

⁸⁷ CAB, ‘Country of Origin Report Afghanistan’, (pages 83 and 84), March 2019, [url](#).

including women and children, of government officials and members of the ANDSF have been subjected to harassment, kidnappings, violence, and killings.⁸⁸

- 5.7.7 The same source also noted that ‘The ANDSF and AGEs are reported to abduct children for various purposes, including reprisals and punishment of the victim’s family members. Children are also reported to be abducted and/or killed on the basis of accusations of having assisted the opposing party.’⁸⁹

For general information on the situation for women and children in Afghanistan, and for information on the recruitment of children by the Taliban, see the country policy and information notes on [Afghanistan: women fearing gender based harm/violence](#) and [Afghanistan: unaccompanied children](#).

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5.8 Ethnic and religious minorities

- 5.8.1 UNAMA noted in its special report of October 2018 that ‘It is particularly concerning that many of the attacks targeting the civilian population appear to have been directed specifically at the Shi’a Muslim religious minority, most of whom are also ethnic Hazara.’⁹⁰

- 5.8.2 UNAMA reported in its annual report for 2018 that ‘UNAMA continued to document high levels of sectarian-motivated violence by Daesh/ISKP against the Shi’a Muslim religious minority population, most of whom also belong to the Hazara ethnic group. UNAMA remains gravely concerned about the safety and security of this religious minority population, and about the extent to which these attacks are impeding their freedoms of religion and movement and quality of life.’⁹¹

- 5.8.3 In its annual report covering 2018 UNAMA ‘remains particularly concerned with the continued targeting of civilians including religious leaders and tribal elders by Anti-Government Elements... In 2018, UNAMA continued to document the same high levels of civilian casualties as in 2017 as a result of attacks targeting places of worship, religious leaders and worshippers, with 22 attacks recorded causing 453 civilian casualties (156 deaths and 297 injured), all attributed to Anti-Government Elements.’⁹²

- 5.8.4 The June 2019 EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan, summarising the COI included in its COI report on individuals targeted by armed groups, found with regards to religious leaders:

‘A high number of religious figures have been killed in recent years. Reportedly, targeting mostly happens in contested areas, but also in cities. The reasons for targeting religious leaders are diverse but must be seen in the context of Ulemas being considered capable to delegitimise the insurgents’ religious ideology. Non-exhaustive examples of targeting include:

⁸⁸ UNHCR, ‘Eligibility Guidelines...’, (page 48), 30 August 2018, [url](#).

⁸⁹ UNHCR, ‘Eligibility Guidelines...’, (page 85), 30 August 2018, [url](#).

⁹⁰ UNAMA, ‘Afghanistan Special Report’, (page 2), October 2018, .

⁹¹ UNAMA, ‘Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018’, (page 29), February 2019, [url](#).

⁹² UNAMA, ‘Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018’, (pages 3 and 28), February 2019, [url](#).

religious figures who have publicly expressed support for government views, including conducting funeral ceremonies for killed members of the security forces; religious figures who have publicly condemned civilian casualties caused by insurgents or have expressed criticism of certain insurgent tactics on religious grounds; religious figures who have publicly rejected the insurgents' ideology because they are following a more moderate or another form of Islam.'⁹³

5.8.5 The same source further provided the following COI summaries with regards to Hazaras and Shia Muslims:

'Attacks by insurgent groups, in particular by ISKP, have significantly affected the Hazara population in 2018. Attacks by ISKP targeted places where Hazara/Shia gather, such as religious commemorations or political demonstrations, and sites in Hazara-dominated neighbourhoods in large cities, including Kabul and Herat. Such attacks could be related to their religion (see the profile on Shia). Among other reasons, the ISKP also reportedly targets the Hazara due to their perceived closeness and support for Iran and the fight against the Islamic State in Syria ... There are instances of Hazara civilians being abducted or killed while travelling along the roads. In reported incidents where Hazara road passengers were singled out and killed or abducted, other reasons could often be identified, such as non-political communal disputes or the individual being an ANSF member, having a job in the government or the NGO sector, etc., linking these incidents to other profiles...'

'In 2018, the majority of ISKP attacks on religious sites reportedly targeted Shia communities. The territorial control of the ISKP is limited, however they have been able to carry out attacks in different parts of the country.'⁹⁴

For information on the situation of Shia Muslims in Afghanistan, who are predominantly ethnic Hazara, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Hazaras](#). For Information on Sikhs and Hindus, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Hindus and Sikhs](#).

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5.9 Healthcare and aid workers

5.9.1 Citing various sources, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated in its eligibility guidelines for Afghanistan, published August 2018, that 'AGEs are reported to target civilians who are employees of international or Afghan humanitarian organizations, including Afghan nationals working for UN organizations, employees of international development agencies, and employees of national and international non-governmental organizations.'⁹⁵

5.9.2 The US Department of State's Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2018 (USSD HR Report 2018) noted that:

'The security environment continued to have a negative effect on the ability of humanitarian organizations to operate freely in many parts of the country. Violence and instability hampered development, relief, and reconstruction

⁹³ EASO, 'Country Guidance Afghanistan', (pages 51 and 52), June 2019, [url](#).

⁹⁴ EASO, 'Country Guidance Afghanistan', (pages 69 and 70), June 2019, [url](#).

⁹⁵ UNHCR, 'Eligibility Guidelines', (page 43), 30 August 2018, [url](#).

efforts. Insurgents deliberately targeted government employees and aid workers. NGOs reported insurgents, powerful local individuals, and militia leaders demanded bribes to allow groups to bring relief supplies into the country and distribute them. Anti-government elements continued their targeting of hospitals and aid workers.⁹⁶

5.9.3 In 2018 UNAMA reported that it:

‘... verified 62 incidents affecting health care in 2018, including direct attacks or threats of attacks against health care facilities and personnel and incidental damage to health care facilities. UNAMA attributed 46 incidents to Anti-Government Elements, including 30 incidents to Taliban, 11 to Daesh/ISKP, three incidents to self-identified Daesh/ISKP and two to undetermined armed groups. Pro-Government forces were responsible for 16 incidents in total.’⁹⁷

5.9.4 UNAMA also noted in 2018 that it regularly received reports of abductions by illegal armed groups and criminal gangs, including those targeting NGO workers and United Nations staff members⁹⁸.

5.9.5 The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported 72 attacks on healthcare facilities or workers in 2018. The same report noted 38 aid workers killed and 20 injured between January and September 2018, compared to 14 killed and 9 injured during the same period in 2017, an increase of 153%⁹⁹.

5.9.6 The World Health Organization (WHO) noted, in its Situation Report of April 2019, that attacks on health workers and facilities furthered the reduction in access to healthcare for civilians. The report added ‘In the first four months of 2019, 47 attacks on healthcare were reported resulting in the closure of 98 health facilities, where only 27 of them re-opened. 13 healthcare workers and patients have been killed and 13 others injured.’¹⁰⁰

5.9.7 INSO noted that incidents where NGOs were directly targeted were ‘rare’, and added that ‘... there have been several prominent cases in which NGOs were targeted as a result of their activities being perceived as either non-neutral or in violation of Afghanistan’s cultural or religious customs.’¹⁰¹

5.9.8 The June 2019 EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan, summarising the COI included in its COI report on individuals targeted by armed groups, found with regards to humanitarian workers and healthcare professionals:

‘Incidents of targeting healthcare workers are reported, including threats, intimidation, harassment and abduction of health-care personnel, such as ambulance drivers for example. They often occur in cases where hospitals are accused to have treated (or to have refused to treat) wounded fighters. Clinics often bargain a deal with the insurgents in order to be able to operate in a certain area. It is reported that the situation for healthcare workers differs from area to area, depending to the degree of control versus

⁹⁶ USSD, ‘Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2018’, 13 March 2019, (page 16), [url](#).

⁹⁷ UNAMA, ‘Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018’, (page 15), February 2019, [url](#).

⁹⁸ UNAMA, ‘Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018’, (page 31), February 2019, [url](#).

⁹⁹ OCHA, ‘2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview’, (page 38 and page 59), November 2018, [url](#).

¹⁰⁰ WHO, ‘Situation Report’, April 2019, [url](#).

¹⁰¹ INSO, ‘Afghanistan’, n.d., [url](#).

contestation by insurgent groups. In some cases, NGO workers were targeted by insurgents as a result of their activities being perceived as non-neutral or in violation of cultural or religious norms; for example, promoting women's rights. Other examples include targeting of people active in polio vaccination campaigns (sometimes considered as spies) or in de-mining programs (considered as an activity contrary to the military interests of the Taliban). In addition, humanitarian workers, including healthcare professionals, are sometimes accused by State actors of maintaining contacts with insurgents and can, therefore, be targeted.'¹⁰²

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5.10 Family members

- 5.10.1 The UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines noted 'AGEs have been reported to target family members of individuals with the above profiles, both as acts of retaliation and on a "guilty by association" basis. In particular, relatives, including women and children, of government officials and members of the ANDSF have been subjected to harassment, kidnappings, violence, and killings.'¹⁰³
- 5.10.2 According to Giustozzi's report of 2017, 'The targeting of family members also occurs occasionally; the Taliban appear to have restrained this practice after police and militia started going after Taliban family members in retaliation.'¹⁰⁴
- 5.10.3 The [EASO COI Report Afghanistan: Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict](#), December 2017, also provided information on the situation of family members of Afghan security forces personnel¹⁰⁵. The June 2019 EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan, summarising the COI included in its COI report on individuals targeted by armed groups, found with regards to family members of members of the security forces and pro-government militias that 'It should be noted that family members of security forces have also been targeted by insurgents ... Moreover, family members are often pressured to convince their relative to give up his or her position in the security forces ... There are also reports of former members of the ANSF who have been targeted after having left the ANSF... '¹⁰⁶

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Section 6 updated: 7 August 2019

6. Afghan security forces

6.1 Capabilities

- 6.1.1 The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) consist of the armed forces, the police and the security forces: Afghan National Army (ANA, including the air force); Afghan National Police (ANP); Afghan Local

¹⁰² EASO, 'Country Guidance Afghanistan', (page 55), June 2019, [url](#).

¹⁰³ UNHCR, 'Eligibility Guidelines...', (page 48), 30 August 2018, [url](#).

¹⁰⁴ LandInfo, 'Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence...', (page 17), 23 August 2017, [url](#).

¹⁰⁵ EASO, 'Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors...', (page 59), December 2017, [url](#).

¹⁰⁶ EASO, 'Country Guidance Afghanistan', (page 49), June 2019, [url](#).

Police (ALP); and the National Directorate for Security (NDS)¹⁰⁷. The Major Crimes Task Force (MCTF) investigated major crimes including government corruption, human trafficking, and criminal organization¹⁰⁸.

- 6.1.2 The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) of the United States stated, noted in its quarterly report dated January 2019 'Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) personnel strength in October 2018 (308,693) fell to the lowest level it has been since the beginning of the RS [NATO Resolute Support] mission in January 2015.'¹⁰⁹
- 6.1.3 According to the DFAT report dated June 2019, 'The ANP has approximately 150,000 active members. It includes a number of sub-agencies, most notably the Afghan Border Police, which monitors Afghanistan's borders and international airports, and the Afghan Local Police (ALP), established in 2010 as a local defence force against AGEs. Police presence is stronger in the cities than in rural areas.'¹¹⁰
- 6.1.4 The USSD HR Report 2018 noted:
'There were reports of impunity and lack of accountability by security forces throughout the year. According to observers, ALP and ANP personnel were largely unaware of their responsibilities and defendants' rights under the law. Accountability of the NDS, ANP, and ALP officials for torture and abuse was weak, not transparent, and rarely enforced. Independent judicial or external oversight of the NDS, MCTF, ANP, and ALP in the investigation and prosecution of crimes or misconduct, including torture and abuse, was limited or nonexistent.'¹¹¹
- 6.1.5 According to the DFAT report:
'International donors have made significant efforts to turn the ANP into a credible, professional and effective police force, including through providing extensive training on human rights. International observers report, however, that the ability of the ANP to provide and maintain security and law and order remains limited, particularly outside major cities. The ANP has a weak investigative capacity, lacking forensic training and technical knowledge. Its overall capacity is constrained by a number of factors, including lack of resources, poor training and leadership, low morale, and high levels of corruption. The majority of ANP members are either illiterate or have very low levels of literacy. Human rights observers have expressed concern over ongoing reports of serious human rights abuses committed by ANP members, including allegations of intimidation, extortion, torture, and sexual abuse.'¹¹²
- 6.1.6 The DFAT report also noted:
'International observers reported that, although authorities investigated and reported some cases of extrajudicial killings, there was an overall lack of accountability for security forces and pro-government groups. While in some

¹⁰⁷ CIA, 'World Factbook – Afghanistan', (Military and security), updated 11 June 2019, [url](#).

¹⁰⁸ USSD, 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2018', 13 March 2019, (page 6), [url](#).

¹⁰⁹ SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report', (page 65), 30 January 2019, [url](#).

¹¹⁰ DFAT, 'Country Information Report Afghanistan', (para 5.11), 27 June 2019, [url](#).

¹¹¹ USSD, 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2018', 13 March 2019, (page 6), [url](#).

¹¹² DFAT, 'Country Information Report Afghanistan', (para 5.11), 27 June 2019, [url](#).

instances authorities conduct their own investigations following the killings, in others authorities have concluded that the victims were AGEs without further investigation, or have requested families to submit formal, written complaints to initiate investigations – a difficult burden given the low literacy rates among large segments of the population. Authorities rarely fully investigated or prosecuted extrajudicial killings carried out by anti-government elements.¹¹³ (see also [Civilians suspected of supporting AGEs](#)).

- 6.1.7 In addition, the DFAT report stated ‘The continuing armed conflict has significantly challenged the government’s ability to exercise effective control over large parts of the country, particularly outside major urban centres. In addition, the increase in the number and impact of large-scale attacks that have taken place in Kabul since the beginning of 2016 demonstrates the limits of the government’s ability to protect its citizens even where its security infrastructure is strongest.’¹¹⁴
- 6.1.8 The June 2019 EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan summarised the capability of the Government in Afghanistan to protect human rights, noting it was ‘... undermined in many districts by the prevailing insecurity and the high number of attacks by insurgents. Afghan security forces have not been able to secure all of Afghanistan and have lost territory to the insurgents. The effectiveness of Afghan forces remains dependent on international support to secure and retain control over territory and support operational capacity.’¹¹⁵
- 6.1.9 The EASO country guidance added:
- ‘Police presence is [...] stronger in the cities and police officers are required to follow guidelines such as the ANP Code of Conduct and Use of Force Policy. However, police response is characterised as unreliable and inconsistent, the police has a weak investigative capacity, lacking forensic training and technical knowledge. [...] Inaction, incompetence, impunity and corruption result in underperformance: there is a reported rise in crime, including kidnappings, and widespread community violence, especially in the cities. An inability to prevent regular large-scale attacks with high casualty numbers, and targeted killings, is also observed.’¹¹⁶

For information on the general security situation, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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6.2 Civilians suspected of supporting AGEs

- 6.2.1 According to the UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines, ‘ALP and ANDSF officers as well as members of pro-government armed groups also reportedly use threats, intimidation and physical violence against civilians suspected of

¹¹³ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Afghanistan’, (para 4.5), 27 June 2019, [url](#).

¹¹⁴ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Afghanistan’, (para 5.2), 27 June 2019, [url](#).

¹¹⁵ EASO, ‘Country Guidance Afghanistan’, (page 123), June 2019, [url](#).

¹¹⁶ EASO, ‘Country Guidance Afghanistan’, (page 123), June 2019, [url](#).

supporting AGEs, while in some instances such civilians have reportedly been killed, including family members of AGE recruits.¹¹⁷

- 6.2.2 The same source further noted that ‘concerns have been raised about the use of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment against detainees, especially conflict-related detainees accused of supporting AGEs, in detention facilities operated by the NDS, ANP (including the Afghan National Border Police, ANBP), ANA and ALP.’¹¹⁸
- 6.2.3 According to sources cited in the December 2017 EASO report on persons targeted by armed actors in the conflict:
- ‘ALP and pro-government militias have mainly targeted and killed civilians because they are suspected of being related to or helping the insurgents or even rival pro-government groups. UNAMA also documented cases where pro-government militias targeted and killed civilians because they refused to pay taxes to these groups.
- ‘In 2016, most of the victims of ALP and pro-government militia targeting and deliberately killing of civilians occurred in the northern region, notably Faryab and Kunduz. While in Faryab, these incidents often happen within the context of rival pro-government groups, linked to either Uzbek dominated Junbesh-e Melli and the predominantly Tajik Jamiat-e Islami. In Kunduz, the primary target for pro-government militias tends to be Pashtun villages accused of harbouring insurgents in the past and present.’¹¹⁹
- 6.2.4 In 2018, UNAMA documented 16 incidents of intentional killings of civilians by Afghan security forces, resulting in 25 deaths. The report noted ‘The incidents in which civilians were intentionally killed by Afghan national security forces occurred during or outside of combat operations, as well as during search operations when civilians suspected of involvement with Anti-Government Element groups (support or membership) could have been safely captured and detained.’¹²⁰
- 6.2.5 Human Rights Watch (HRW) noted in its World Report 2019, covering 2018 events: ‘Afghan special forces conducting search operations and night raids were responsible for summary executions. During the raid of a Taliban stronghold in Maiwand village, Kandahar province, Afghan special forces reportedly executed 20 civilians on the night of January 31, 2018. NDS helicopter units shot dead eight farmers in their fields in Chaparhar district, Nangarhar province, on March 17 [2018].’¹²¹
- 6.2.6 In June 2019, the Voice of America (VoA) reported on an Afghan man, imprisoned for 3 years on suspicion of cooperating with the Taliban by transporting them across checkpoints, even though he claimed he was forced and threatened by the Taliban to do so. He was released following a decree by President Ghani, which also freed hundreds of Taliban fighters as

¹¹⁷ UNHCR, ‘Eligibility Guidelines’, (page 57), 30 August 2018, [url](#).

¹¹⁸ UNHCR, ‘Eligibility Guidelines’, (page 56), 30 August 2018, [url](#).

¹¹⁹ EASO, ‘Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors...’, (pages 78-79), December 2017, [url](#).

¹²⁰ UNAMA, ‘Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018’, (page 43), February 2019, [url](#).

¹²¹ HRW, ‘World Report 2019 - Afghanistan’, 17 January 2019, [url](#).

part of a goodwill gesture to try to persuade the group to come to the negotiation table with the Afghan government¹²².

- 6.2.7 In April 2019, UNAMA and OHCHR issued its 5th joint report on the treatment of conflict-related detainees in Afghanistan. Detainees suspected, accused or convicted of offences related to the armed conflict are generally accused of terrorist crimes, genocide crimes, crimes against humanity, war crimes, crimes against the State, and certain crimes against internal and external security as set forth in the Penal Code¹²³.
- 6.2.8 The UNAMA/OHCHR report, covering the period 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2018, noted '[T]he overall figures of torture and ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees remain disturbingly high, with almost one in three conflict-related detainees providing credible and reliable accounts of having been subjected to torture or ill-treatment.'¹²⁴ Places of custody included those overseen by the National Directorate of Security, Afghan National Police, Afghan National Army and the Afghan Local Police¹²⁵.
- 6.2.9 According to the EASO country guidance, 'The police force is also accused of widespread corruption, patronage and abuse of power: individuals in the institutions may abuse their position of power and use extortion to supplement their low incomes. Arbitrary arrest and detention by the police continued to occur and torture is endemic in the police force.'¹²⁶
- 6.2.10 The same source, summarising the COI included in its COI report on individuals targeted by armed groups, found with regards to members of insurgent groups and civilians perceived as supporting them:
- 'Insurgent groups, as well as people suspected of supporting them, are reported to face the death penalty, extrajudicial killings, targeted attacks, torture, arbitrary arrests and illegal detention. There are also reports of incidents of extrajudicial killings and killings by ANSF abusing their position of power. Conflict-related detainees are often subjected to torture and ill-treatment. Convictions by Afghan courts are often based solely on confessions extracted through torture and ill-treatment, although the use of confessions extracted this way is strictly prohibited by the Criminal Procedure Code. In 2016, the armed group Hezb-e Islami signed a peace agreement with the government and an amnesty was proposed for the insurgent group's activities over the past 14 years. However, it is reported that some Hezb-e Islami fighters have refused to lay down their arms for fear of retaliation and some group members are still operating in certain regions of Afghanistan. Targeting of civilians by the government happens based on family ties, kinship and tribal association, in particular where a certain tribe is associated with insurgents' leadership (e.g. Ishaqzai). ALP and pro-government militias have mainly targeted and killed civilians because they are suspected of being related to or of helping the insurgents. Incidents in

¹²² VoA, 'Freed Taliban Suspect Finds Son Killed Fighting for Afghan Army', 22 June 2019, [url](#).

¹²³ UNAMA/OHCHR, 'Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees', (page 1) April 2019, [url](#).

¹²⁴ UNAMA/OHCHR, 'Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees', (page iii) April 2019, [url](#).

¹²⁵ UNAMA/OHCHR, 'Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees', (page 12) April 2019, [url](#).

¹²⁶ EASO, 'Country Guidance Afghanistan', (page 123), June 2019, [url](#).

which the ANSF shot and killed or injured civilians believing them to be Anti-Government Elements are also reported.’¹²⁷

- 6.2.11 The CAB report noted ‘Despite the improved legislation and the international obligations that the government has entered into, there is still no evidence that torture in government detention has been reduced in practice, and perpetrators are rarely prosecuted or tried.’¹²⁸

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¹²⁷ EASO, ‘Country Guidance Afghanistan’, (page 52), June 2019, [url](#).

¹²⁸ CAB, ‘Country of Origin Report Afghanistan’, (page 67), March 2019, [url](#).

Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToRs, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Anti-government elements
- Taliban
 - Strength
 - Ability to pursue individuals
 - Recruitment
 - Blacklist
 - Abductions
 - Parallel justice
- Targeted groups
 - Government officials
 - International community
 - Security forces
 - Women and children, Family members
 - Aid workers
- Security forces
 - Capabilities
 - AGE suspects

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Version control

Clearance

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- version **3.0**
- valid from **15 August 2019**

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Updated COI and assessment, including the country guidance case [AS \(Safety of Kabul\) Afghanistan CG \[2018\] UKUT 118 \(IAC\) \(28 March 2018\)](#)

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