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2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States has not decided whether to recognize the Taliban or any other entity as the government of Afghanistan or as part of such a government. All references to “the pre-August 2021 government” refer to the Republic-era government of Afghanistan. References to the Taliban in this report do not denote or imply that the United States recognizes the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan.

There was significant deterioration in women’s rights during the year due to edicts that further restricted access to education and employment, with a net result that women were increasingly confined to domestic roles. No decree or directive pertaining to women and girls’ education, or work, was reversed or softened. The Taliban did not purport to formally change existing laws as legislated by the Republic-era government; however, they promulgated edicts that contradicted those laws and were inconsistent with Afghanistan’s obligations under international conventions.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: killings; severe physical abuse; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; unjust detentions and abductions, including disappearances; serious problems with independence of the judiciary; political prisoners or detainees; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses of a relative; serious abuses in a conflict, including widespread civilian deaths or harm, disappearances and abductions, and severe physical abuse; unlawful recruitment or use of children in armed conflict by the Taliban; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including detentions of and violence against journalists, and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; restrictions on religious freedom; restrictions on freedom of movement and residence and on the right to leave the country; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious corruption; serious restrictions on and harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child, early, and forced marriage, and other harmful practices; substantial barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of ethnic and religious minority groups (Hazara, Sikh, Shia, Salafi, Ahmadi, Hindu, and Christian groups); trafficking in persons, including forced labor; existence and enforcement of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct; crimes involving violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; significant restrictions on workers’ freedom of association; and the existence of the worst forms of child labor.

There was widespread disregard for the rule of law and official impunity for those responsible for human rights abuses. The Taliban and ISIS-K reportedly engaged in child recruitment and used child soldiers younger than 12 during the year. Armed groups threatened, robbed, kidnapped, and attacked foreigners, medical and nongovernmental organization workers, and other civilians. Members of the Taliban reportedly killed persons in retaliation for their association with the pre-August 2021 government.

Section 1.

Respect for the Integrity of the Person

A. ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE AND OTHER UNLAWFUL OR POLITICALLY MOTIVATED KILLINGS

There were numerous reports that Taliban and ISIS-K members committed arbitrary and unlawful killings, many as retaliation against officials associated with the pre-August 2021 government, according to reports published by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, and multiple human rights groups. ISIS-K targeted the Taliban in an effort to undermine stability in the country. ISIS-K also disproportionately targeted Hazara community members who were predominantly followers of the Shia branch of Islam.

In its report, *A barrier to securing peace: HR violations against former government officials & former armed force members*, UNAMA documented at least 800 human rights violations against former government officials and members of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) between the Taliban takeover in August 2021 and June 30. The report focused on killings, enforced disappearances, unjust arrests and detentions, severe physical abuse and ill-treatment, and threats experienced by former government officials and ANDSF members. Cases were only included in overall figures where UNAMA obtained multiple credible reports that a member or members of the Taliban were responsible for the incident.

There were credible reports that Taliban security personnel arbitrarily killed civilians in Panjshir and Baghlan provinces, allegedly as collective punishment against communities where the National Resistance Front (NRF) armed opposition group was active. UNAMA also recorded cases in which former government officials were arrested or detained on accusations of affiliation with the NRF. In many of these instances, relatives or victims themselves said that the allegations were false and that the primary reason for their arrest was their affiliation with the pre-August 2021 government.

On January 12, the Taliban reportedly raided the houses of two well-known tribal elders, Pahlwan Yasin, and a civilian known as Farid, in Baghlan's Khost District and arrested both under charges of having association and collaboration with the NRF. The Taliban reportedly shot and killed both men after torturing them.

The Taliban did not publicize efforts to hold its "police" or militia accountable for these abuses despite the Taliban's commitment issued in August 2021, and repeated publicly numerous times during the year, to a "general amnesty" for former government officials and members of the ANDSF.

B. DISAPPEARANCE

The Taliban were responsible for enforced disappearances. UNAMA documented at least 14 instances of enforced disappearance of former government officials and ANDSF members. On 2 October 2021, Alia Azizi, former head of the Women's Prison in Herat Province, did not return home from work and as of August her whereabouts remained unknown. Despite reportedly initiating an investigation into her disappearance, the Taliban had not publicly released any information regarding her whereabouts. In January, Taliban personnel returned the dead body of a former Afghan National Army member whom Taliban security forces had arrested from his home in Kabul three months earlier. His family had no knowledge of his whereabouts and no contact with him following his arrest.

C. TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT, AND OTHER RELATED ABUSES

Although the 2004 constitution prohibited such practices, there were numerous reports of severe physical abuse attributed to the Taliban and ISIS-K. UNAMA reported that punishments carried out by the Taliban included beatings, floggings, stonings, amputations, and executions.

In its September report on the treatment of detainees in the country, UNAMA documented 466 credible instances of physical abuse and other forms of ill-treatment in custody, including 259 instances involving acts causing physical suffering and 207 instances involving acts causing mental suffering. UNAMA also documented the deaths of 18 individuals while in custody of police, the so-called General Directorate for Intelligence (GDI), or prison.

Between November 13, 2022, and April 30, UNAMA documented at least 43 instances of court-ordered corporal punishment ordered by Taliban-appointed judges. Within the 43 instances, 58 women, 274 men and two male children were lashed for a variety of offenses, including *zina* (defined as sexual intercourse between a man and a woman outside of marriage), running away from home, theft, homosexuality, consuming alcohol, fraud, and drug trafficking. In general, punishments consisted of 30-39 lashes per convicted person. As many as 100 lashes were reportedly given in some cases. In a number of incidents, the Taliban publicly announced punishments via social media platforms (namely X, formerly known as Twitter.) These announcements included accounts of the Supreme Court, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid, and the spokesperson for the so-called provincial governor of Kandahar).

On August 12, the *Daily Etilaatroz* reported a man and a woman were flogged 39 times each at a sports stadium in northern Jawzjan Province for committing adultery. Maulvi Abdul Ghani Saeed, the head of the appellate court, called the implementation of the Sharia punishment in the society a “lesson for the people” and necessary to reduce crimes. Local officials, security officials, ethnic elders, religious scholars, and hundreds of residents reportedly watched the punishment.

Impunity was a significant problem among Taliban “police” and militia. The Taliban did not establish a formal system of accountability for abuses or killings. No independent organization was allowed to investigate abuses and killings in the country.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were harsh and life threatening due to inadequate food and hygiene supplies and physical abuse for adults and juveniles. According to a UN report covering the period between January 1, 2022, and July 31, UNAMA documented more than 1,600 human rights violations by the Taliban relating to the arrest and subsequent detention of individuals, of which 11 percent involved women. Just less than 50 percent of these comprised acts of physical abuse and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

Abusive Physical Conditions: The Pul-e-Charkhi prison in Kabul reportedly had poor conditions including overcrowding and inadequate access to water, sanitation, sufficient and quality food, and medical services. The International Committee of the Red Cross reportedly provided three meals per day for up to 12,000 inmates in 2022. While humanitarian organizations donated blankets, shawls, jackets, and socks to keep prisoners warm during the winter, the Taliban reported that at least 120 prisoners died from cold weather in January.

Administration: In its September 2022 report on the treatment of detainees in the country, UNAMA determined that the Office of Prison Administration (OPA) lacked the resources to meet the basic needs or conditions of detention for the incarcerated population for prolonged periods and called on the Taliban to consider developing guidelines providing for an alternative to detention pending investigation and trial, particularly for those individuals accused of petty or nonviolent offenses.

The Ministry of Interior, the so-called GDI, and OPA maintained a dialogue with UNAMA on allegations of human rights abuses brought to their attention by UNAMA, and on matters of detention, including the prevention of physical abuse. During the year, UNAMA conducted several

awareness raising sessions on international standards for prison wardens and guards, including on the prohibition of physical abuse and prevention of mistreatment of detainees, and the use of force. These were welcomed by chiefs of police and the OPA, acknowledging the need and utility of these sessions.

According to UNAMA, the OPA granted UNAMA access to prisons across the country and facilitated UNAMA engagements with prison administrators in the provinces.

There was no further credible reporting on whether the Taliban investigated mistreatment, allowed visitors, or permitted religious observance.

Independent Monitoring: UNAMA reported difficulty accessing detention facilities when it arrived unannounced. In May 2022 the Taliban ended independent prison monitoring in the country by closing the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC).

D. ARBITRARY ARREST OR DETENTION

The 2004 constitution prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The Taliban generally did not observe these requirements. The Taliban reportedly frequently detained citizens arbitrarily without a clear legal basis and without regard to substantive or procedural legal protections. Local Taliban “police” reportedly detained persons capriciously on charges without a clear connection to any law.

In a September 2023 report on the treatment of detainees, UNAMA found that the systematic violation of a detainee’s right to access a lawyer, and to challenge the legality of detention before a court while in the custody of the Interior Ministry and so-called GDI resulted in unjust and prolonged detention, frequently concluding without charges and judicial process. In almost all cases, arrests and detentions carried out by the Taliban were unjust because there was no clear connection to law, individuals were not informed of the reasons for their arrest or charges they were facing, pretrial detentions were lengthy, and detainees were not afforded access to legal counsel.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Arbitrary Arrest: Despite the general amnesty announced by the Taliban in August 2021, there were widespread reports of unjust detentions for lengthy periods of individuals associated with the pre-August 2021 government.

On August 11, the Afghan Independent Journalists Union expressed concern over the arrest of Habibullah Sarab, an independent reporter for Ariana TV in Paktia, Jan Agha Saleh, and Faqir Mohammad Faqirzai, reporters from Kilid Radio in Nangarhar. It claimed the Taliban provided no reason for arresting the three journalists.

Pretrial Detention: The 2004 constitution provided defendants the right to object to their pretrial detention and receive a court hearing on the matter. Nevertheless, lengthy pretrial detention was the norm.

E. DENIAL OF FAIR PUBLIC TRIAL

The 2004 constitution provided for an independent judiciary, but the Taliban did not respect judicial independence. The Taliban replaced most judges with new ones not formally educated regarding the country’s legal system. In November 2022, the Taliban issued a decree placing the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association under the control of the Ministry of Justice, effectively stripping all lawyers and judges of their independence. Defense lawyers reported they were frequently unable to access clients in detention facilities and were often sidelined during court proceedings. In a joint

statement issued on January 20, UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers Margret Satterthwaite and UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan Richard Bennett noted, “currently in Afghanistan, there are no standardized procedures or substantive statutes in criminal or civil matters that police, judges, or lawyers can follow.” They added, “laws and rules concerning legal procedure, judicial appointment, and procedures for fair trials, which were implemented by the previous government, were suspended. The result is a no-longer independent, all-male system implementing the Taliban’s version of Sharia law, and a human rights catastrophe.”

Trial Procedures

The 2004 constitution provided for the right to a fair and public trial, but the judiciary did not enforce this right. Criminal defendants were denied the rights to a presumption of innocence; to be informed promptly of the charges; to a fair, timely, and public trial; to be present at their trial; to communicate with an attorney of their choice; to have adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense; to receive the free assistance of an interpreter; to confront prosecution witnesses and present one’s own witnesses and evidence; not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt; and to appeal. After August 2021, the Taliban changed the structure of the court system, removed judges across the country, replaced them with graduates of Taliban-run *madrassahs*, effectively religious schools, reduced the size of decision-making panels in trials, and eradicated the family court system. They also changed trial procedures to reduce the number of proceedings and eliminated the appeals process.

The Taliban largely did not uphold the 2004 constitution but did not release a new constitution to replace it, thereby rendering judicial proceedings opaque and arbitrary. Speaking at an August 16 press conference in Kabul, the so-called minister of justice claimed that the 2004 constitution was not Islamic, and that the Taliban was working to formulate a new constitution that aligned with “core Islamic principles.”

Political Prisoners and Detainees

The Taliban detained pre-August 2021 government officials, individuals they alleged spied for the pre-August 2021 government, and individuals they alleged or were affiliated with the pre-August 2021 government.

Despite multiple public statements by Taliban leaders referring to the August 2021 general amnesty, there were numerous reports throughout the year of the Taliban detaining or killing individuals associated with the pre-August 2021 government. Credible sources estimated that as much as 90 percent of all prisoners were political prisoners.

On March 23, the Taliban imprisoned Matiullah Wesa, founder of the nonprofit organization Pen Path and a vocal activist who campaigned for the education of girls for more than a decade. He was released after seven months of detention.

F. TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

Not applicable.

G. PROPERTY SEIZURE AND RESTITUTION

There were many reports of the Taliban forcibly evicting or allowing the forced eviction of Hazara families from their land. In August, Hazara homes in Uruzgan Province were reportedly burned, fruit trees cut down, and pasture lands confiscated. According to a prominent Hazara figure, at least 13 Hazara residents in a village in the province had reportedly been killed in the past two years as

part of a campaign against the Hazara community to forcibly displace them from their native lands and homes.

On October 2, armed Kuchi nomads reportedly cut down trees at a public school in Wares District of Bamyan Province in an effort to take possession of a large piece of land that included girls' and boys' schools, an agricultural school, and the local district market, which included more than 100 local shops. The Kuchi nomads claimed ownership of the area after a decision from the conflict resolution commission established by the Taliban provincial governor in Bamyan awarded them the land. According to sources in the area, the Kuchi nomads threatened teachers and students at the schools, and warned the residents that the history of the Hazara people was over in the country.

H. ARBITRARY OR UNLAWFUL INTERFERENCE WITH PRIVACY, FAMILY, HOME, OR CORRESPONDENCE

The 2004 constitution provided for the confidentiality of correspondence and stipulated that personal residences should be free from trespassing or intrusion absent a prior court order, but the Taliban failed to respect these prohibitions. There were numerous reports that the Taliban forcibly entered homes and offices to search for perceived political enemies, at times under the guise of searching for weapons.

On February 7, the Taliban reportedly started a door-to-door security search in wards 15 and 2 of Kabul city. Reportedly, Taliban arrested 18 individuals under charges of having association with the NRF. Taliban security forces allegedly behaved cruelly with inhabitants during their search operations and did not respect the privacy of the home.

I. CONFLICT-RELATED ABUSES

Internal conflict resulted in unlawful civilian deaths, abductions, prisoner abuse, property damage, displacement of residents, and other abuses. ISIS-K attacks continued, and Taliban efforts to defeat the group resulted in numerous violent clashes. According to UNAMA, actions by nonstate armed groups, primarily the Taliban and ISIS-K, accounted for most civilian deaths during the year.

In a human rights report issued on July 17, UNAMA recorded a total of 3,774 civilian casualties (1,095 killed and 2,679 wounded) between August 15, 2021, and May 30. Three quarters of these civilian casualties (2,814 civilian casualties, 701 killed and 2,113 wounded) were caused by indiscriminate improvised explosive device (IED) attacks in populated areas, including places of worship, schools, and markets. The majority of civilian casualties (1,701) related to IEDs were due to attacks carried out by ISIS-K. Suicide attacks remained a significant concern and appeared to have increased in lethality, with fewer incidents resulting in higher numbers of civilian casualties. Victims struggled to access essential medical, financial, and psychosocial support after attacks.

On June 6, a vehicle-borne IED explosion targeting the so-called provincial governor of Badakhshan, Mawlawi Nisar Ahmad Ahmadi, killed both Ahmadi and his driver, and wounded 13 others. On June 8, a suicide IED attack during Ahmadi's funeral ceremony killed 13 persons and wounded 36 others.

Killings: On August 11, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) issued a report recording more than 1,000 incidents of violence targeting civilians by the Taliban between their takeover on August 15, 2021, and June 30, accounting for 62 percent of all attacks on civilians in the country. According to ACLED, this placed the Taliban among the world's top state perpetrators of violence targeting civilians domestically since August 2021. Both ACLED and UNAMA reported that despite the Taliban's August 21 amnesty order the Taliban continued to detain, disappear, and kill many former officials. In some cases, families only learned the fate of their family members when they received their bodies days after their detention.

Abductions: The UN secretary-general's *2022 Children and Armed Conflict Report*, released in July, cited eight verified incidents of the Taliban and other unidentified perpetrators abducting children in 2022, noting most children were abducted for the purposes of sexual violence. The report also stated that Taliban security forces detained 69 boys for alleged association with the NRF. Of those, 29 were released and two died in custody.

Child Soldiers: A 2022 Taliban decree banned child recruitment by Taliban members, and the Taliban claimed it did not allow children younger than 18 to join any of its forces. The *2022 Children and Armed Conflict Report* listed Afghanistan as being among the countries with the highest numbers of grave violations against children in armed conflict, although it noted that Afghanistan was also among those countries that saw a decrease in grave violations. The report listed 54 verified instances in 2022, of the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, 32 of whom were used in armed conflict and 22 of whom served in support roles.

According to Equal Access International, sexual harassment, *bacha bazi* (the sexual and commercial exploitation of boys, especially by men in positions of power), child soldiering, and child labor remained prevalent under the Taliban. Taliban "commanders" reportedly were involved in *bacha bazi*, and reports indicated incidents had increased during the year. In August, during a wedding ceremony in Badakhshan Province, a dispute reportedly arose between two Taliban commanders over a boy associated with *bacha bazi*. The disagreement escalated to gunfire, resulting in the death of two Taliban members and injuries to four others as well as a civilian bystander. The boy reportedly had served as a bodyguard or soldier under the Taliban's so-called district governor for Shahada District.

The Secretary of State determined Afghanistan had government-supported armed groups that recruited or used child soldiers from April 2022 to March 2023. See the Department of State's *Annual Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 2.

Respect for Civil Liberties

A. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, INCLUDING FOR MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA

The 2004 constitution provided for freedom of speech, including for the press, but the Taliban did not respect this right. The Taliban made public statements asserting press protections remained in place, a series of edicts issued in November 2021 severely limited freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media. The Taliban used force against protesters and journalists and suppressed political discussion and dissent, which had a severe chilling effect on civil society.

Freedom of Expression: Public criticism of the Taliban – whether by individuals or groups – was largely muted. Public speech was subject to extensive surveillance by Taliban members, both online and offline. Taliban members often confiscated mobile phones and electronics to search for criticism of the group, third-country affiliations, or perceived violations of their edicts. There were reports Taliban also held male family members responsible for the actions of their female relatives, including for criticism of the group.

On July 31, sources reported the Taliban aggressively stormed into the Hamisha Bahar TV & Radio station in Nangahar Province, disrupted a journalism workshop for children, and shut down the station. On August 8, the Afghan Journalists Center reported the Taliban's local administration in Nangarhar Province shut down the *Nen* (Today) and *Jowanan* (Youth) radio stations, because they were operating out of the Hamisha Bahar premises.

On July 12, the Ministry of Interior tweeted that police had arrested an employee of the Afghanistan International News Channel, Ahmad Ramin Rasooli, for allegedly spreading fake news because of his interview with a person claiming to have been injured in a suicide attack.

Violence and Harassment: There were numerous reports the Taliban subjected journalists were subjected to violence, harassment, and intimidation.

During the July 31 Hamisha Bahar incident, Taliban forces insulted the youth participants in the workshop and expelled them from the class, then physically assaulted the trainers and implementers.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: The Taliban enforced a July 2022 decree stating that “defaming and criticizing government officials without proof” and “spreading false news and rumors” were forbidden under Islam and that those who “slander” government employees were unwittingly collaborating with the enemy and would be “punished.”

Taliban censorship and threats of detention and violence against journalists drove several media organizations to close and journalists to flee.

In early August, Reporters without Borders stated that more than two-thirds of the 12,000 journalists in the country had lost their jobs since August 2021, including more than 80 percent of women journalists who forcibly had to leave their jobs. It added that more than half of the 547 registered media agencies in the country had stopped their activities since 2021, with television channels dropping from 150 to fewer than 70, radio stations from 307 to 170, and news agencies from 31 to 18.

On March 30, media outlets reported the Taliban closed the Sada-e-Banwan (women’s voice) radio station in Badakhshan Province. The provincial head of information and culture said the station had violated Taliban regulations by playing music during the month of Ramadan. Najla Sherzad, the director of the radio station, said she had not broadcast music. She had recently aired programming concerning the Taliban ban on girls’ education, however, and said this was likely the reason for her station being closed.

Internet Freedom

The Taliban selectively restricted access to the internet and blocked websites. There was no expectation of privacy of communications from Taliban monitoring. Media outlets and activists routinely used social media to discuss political developments, and social media was widely used in urban areas. The Taliban used the internet and social media to spread its own messages. The Taliban instituted internet blackouts or severe slowdowns in locations of active dissent and following periods of political discord in the population.

On January 20 a key social activist and media reporter, Natiq Malekzadeh, tweeted that the Taliban started a campaign to control and pressure social media activists and Taliban critics through social media. Malekzadeh shared audio clips of a person allegedly with the so-called GDI who ordered the creation of fake women’s Facebook accounts in an effort to identify and punish those who spoke out against the Taliban.

On June 26, the Taliban circulated on social media an edict from its so-called supreme leader instructing the Supreme Court to work collaboratively with other relevant offices on a proposal for the restriction or complete banning of Facebook.

B. FREEDOMS OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

The Taliban restricted freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The 2004 constitution provided for the right of peaceful assembly, but the Taliban did not respect this right. A limited number of public protests occurred during the year.

In May, Taliban personnel in Farah Province arrested, beat, and detained for four hours 70 farmers who protested against the poor management of agricultural price controls. The farmers were asking the Department of Agriculture to better control agricultural prices and prevent severe daily fluctuations in prices, which sometimes varied between 20 Afghanis and 100 Afghanis (\$0.29 and \$1.44).

On September 27, Taliban security forces arrested Julia Parsi, the founder and leader of a grassroots women's protest movement, one of the leaders of the Alliance of Protest Movements, and the founder of a women's library. 8am news agency reported that Taliban security forces took Parsi and her son from her house in the Qala-e-Fethullah area of Kabul city, seized the phones of Parsi's children, and confiscated documents from her house. Parsi's detention followed the Taliban's September 19 arrest of Neda Parwani, a fellow member of Parsi's protest movement, her husband and child. A women's rights activist and influential figure in the women's protests said Parsi had been under surveillance for some time, had recently stopped using her mobile phone, and had reportedly changed her residence in Kabul 10 days before her arrest.

Freedom of Association

The 2004 constitution provided for the right of freedom of association, but the Taliban generally did not respect it. The Taliban had not permitted any political parties or opposition groups to operate since its takeover. On August 16, the Taliban's so-called minister of justice publicly announced that political parties were not allowed to operate, blaming them for the death and destruction of the country. Speaking at the press conference in Kabul, the so-called minister claimed the constitution was not Islamic, and therefore the Taliban would formulate a new constitution that aligned with "core Islamic principles." In a September 2022 statement, the Ministry of Justice declared "current geopolitical and political circumstances in Afghanistan are not conducive to the functioning of political parties. The traditional role of political parties in a nation is to contribute to nation-building and serve the citizenry. However, the prevailing sentiment among our citizens suggests dissatisfaction with the activities of political parties. Considering the majority's experiences and viewpoints, these same political parties have historically been linked to conflicts and adversities."

C. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

D. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND THE RIGHT TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY

The 2004 constitution provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. The Taliban generally respected these rights for men with sufficient identity documentation, including passports, but it prevented several political figures associated with previous administrations from traveling abroad. Women were prohibited from freely moving around the country or internationally unless accompanied by a *mahram* (male relative).

In-country Movement: After the Taliban takeover in August 2021, intercity travel was generally unobstructed. In December 2021, the Taliban announced that women could not travel more than 50 miles without a mahram, an edict that was enforced by threatening the detention or punishment of male relatives. Within populated areas, women could move relatively more freely, although there

were increasingly frequent reports of Taliban “police” questioning women who were out in public without a mahram. The Taliban banned women from public parks and gyms. In May, the Taliban announced requirements for women to wear a burqa in public and recommended women ultimately not leave their homes at all, severely restricting most women’s access to essential services, employment, education, and health care.

Foreign Travel: The Taliban stated they did not want citizens to leave the country but that those with foreign travel authorization and required documentation would be allowed to depart. Taliban leaders stated that the right to travel was guaranteed by Islam. Enforcement of these orders was inconsistent. Citizens with valid passports and visas for third countries were generally permitted to depart the country, but the Taliban did stop some Afghans from departing without providing reasons, reportedly causing fear of arbitrary obstruction of foreign travel for political reasons. Reports indicated that applications for passports surged during the year, with credible complaints from Afghans throughout the country that lengthy processing times meant it was difficult to get a passport without having connections with local Taliban passport authorities or paying a bribe.

On August 23, media outlets reported that the Taliban prevented 60 girls from traveling to Dubai to go to school on scholarship even though the girls had passports, visas, proof of scholarship, and accompaniment by a mahram. Some individuals associated with the pre-August 2021 government reported being detained and beaten following their visit to passport offices. Reports suggested airlines inconsistently enforced Taliban mahram rules for women departing the country.

E. PROTECTION OF REFUGEES

The Taliban cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees and returning refugees, as well as to other persons of concern.

Access to Asylum: The Taliban had not created a legal and programmatic framework for granting of asylum or refugee status.

Durable Solutions: UNHCR estimated there were 5.2 million Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in neighboring countries as of December 31, 2022. As of August 1, UNHCR documented 8,029 Afghan refugees voluntarily returned to Afghanistan during the year (95 percent from Pakistan, 4 percent from Iran and 1 percent from other countries). As part of its support to refugees voluntarily returning to the country from countries of asylum, UNHCR offered a voluntary repatriation package consisting of a one-off cash grant of \$375 to cover transportation and immediate needs upon arrival. Returning refugees also received basic health care and overnight accommodation when needed as well as other services provided in each Encashment Centre.

On September 28, Pakistani Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani confirmed his government had decided to force out all Afghans and other foreign nationals living unlawfully in the country. Reports indicated that the number of Afghans returning from Pakistan had increased from an average of 85 to more than 700 per day through the Torkham border crossing, and from an average of 176 to 435 per day through Spin Boldak border crossing since September 15.

F. STATUS AND TREATMENT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS)

The IOM and UNHCR estimated there were more than five million IDPs in the country displaced by both conflict and natural disasters, including both new and long-term displacements. As of August 1, UNHCR estimated 1,900 IDPs had returned to their places of origin during the year. Approximately 1.13 million IDPs returned to their places of origin in 2021 and 259,000 in 2022.

Limited humanitarian access due to the poor security situation caused delays in identifying, assessing, and providing timely assistance to IDPs, who continued to lack access to basic protection, including personal security and shelter. Many IDPs, especially in households with a woman head, faced difficulty obtaining basic services because they did not have identity documents. Many IDPs in urban areas reportedly faced discrimination, lacked access to adequate sanitation and other basic services, and lived at constant risk of eviction from illegally occupied displacement sites, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center. Women in IDP sites reported high levels of domestic violence. Limited opportunities to earn a livelihood following the initial displacement often led to secondary displacement, making tracking of vulnerable persons difficult. Even IDPs who had access to local social services sometimes had less access than their non-IDP neighbors, due to distance from the services or other factors.

Kabul municipality authorities reportedly forcibly evicted approximately 1,850 IDPs from Pul-e-Shina No1 and No2 and Hussain Khail settlement in ward 22 on July 10 and 11 without prior notice to the families. Kabul municipality representatives claimed they needed access to the land the IDPs were living on for an unspecific public works projects they wanted to complete before winter. The Norwegian Refugee Council reported the deaths of two children, ages four and 15, during the evacuation in the Pul-e-Shina area outside of Kabul, although a spokesman for Kabul municipality denied there were any casualties during the clearance operation. After a discussion with UN agencies on July 11, Kabul municipality representatives agreed to pause further evictions in Kabul for one month to allow UN agencies to develop a plan for orderly relocations.

On August 26, media outlets reported that the Taliban in Baghlan Province forcibly displaced approximately 15 Tajik families, and threatened numerous others, reportedly charging that the families were cooperating with the National Resistance Front (NRF). These forced evictions followed events earlier in the year when the Taliban forcibly displaced hundreds of predominantly Tajik families in Khost, Deh Salah, Andrabha, and Doshi districts of Baghlan Province.

G. STATELESS PERSONS

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) noted the lack of official birth registration for refugee children in the country as a significant problem and protection concern, due to the risk of statelessness and potential long-term disadvantage.

Section 3.

Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The Taliban maintained an authoritarian approach under a single so-called supreme leader and showed no interest in a participatory form of political organization. They said nothing regarding whether there would be future elections. The country did not have any institutions, independent or otherwise tasked with managing elections. The Taliban's restrictions on women's participation in public life largely prohibited women from contributing to any political processes.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: There have been no elections in the country since the Taliban takeover in 2021. The Taliban did not express any intent to hold elections.

Political Parties and Political Participation: Since August 2021, the Taliban effectively consolidated all political power and disenfranchised all non-Taliban groups by preventing the legal formation and participation of additional political parties.

On August 16, the so-called minister of justice publicly announced that political parties were not allowed to operate, blaming them for the death and destruction of the country.

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups: No laws officially prevented women or members of religious or ethnic minority groups from participating in political life. Nonetheless, the Taliban's edicts limiting women's participation in public life, education, and employment effectively barred their inclusion in the political process.

Most Taliban were ethnic Pashtuns, although some members of other ethnic groups supported or joined the Taliban. Representatives from many other ethnic groups said the Taliban favored ethnic Pashtuns over other ethnicities and expressed concerns over the "Pashtunization" of their lands.

On September 11, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Richard Bennett stated Taliban officials were overwhelmingly Pashtun men and were uninterested in the participation of other ethnic groups and women in power. On September 26, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Sima Sami Bahous said women's influence on decision-making in the country had shrunk dramatically at all levels.

According to media reports, the Taliban repressed members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) community and would not allow members of historically marginalized minority groups to participate in their so-called ministries and institutions. LGBTQI+ persons reported intimidation from Taliban members as a significant deterrent to entry in public spaces, keeping them from participating in any political process.

Section 4.

Corruption in Government

The law under the pre-August 2021 government provided criminal penalties for corruption by government officials, but the Taliban did not implement the law effectively. There were numerous reports of Taliban corruption.

The public security division of the appellate courts and so-called military courts adjudicated corruption cases under the Supreme Court.

Corruption: The Taliban announced anti-corruption policies following their takeover in August 2021, including the creation of commissions to identify corrupt or criminal Taliban members. The Taliban also launched a commission through the Ministry of Defense to identify members who were flouting the movement's directives.

On September 25, sources reported that Taliban personnel in Kunar Province asked local NGOs to hire their relatives and members, rent their vehicles, and otherwise indirectly requested money from the project implementers. When the NGOs denied the Taliban's demands, the Taliban reportedly ordered local residents and district officials not to coordinate or work with the project implementers.

The Taliban called bribery in the public sector a criminal act, but there were reports that lower-level Taliban members attempted to manipulate food aid beneficiary lists to ensure that Taliban-affiliated families benefited from assistance at the expense of others. There were reports of widespread nepotistic appointments to public positions and the abuse of official powers throughout the country.

For additional information about corruption in the country, please see the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

Section 5.

Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

The Taliban created a forbidding environment for many international and nongovernmental entities, especially human and women's rights organizations. The legacy of the Taliban's retaliatory actions against activists created a climate of uncertainty and fear, which curtailed the work of journalists, civic activists, and human rights defenders, many of whom left the country due to retaliation or engaged in self-censorship. Some investigations and reports by international human rights organizations documented widespread human rights abuses and atrocities by the Taliban, including allegations of summary executions of persons associated with the pre-August 2021 government, as well as unlawful killings and forced disappearances of journalists and activists. Since their takeover, the Taliban closed most official bodies responsible for protecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens, including the AIHRC, Electoral Commission and Ministry for Women's Affairs.

On January 1, the Taliban's spokesperson reaffirmed a restriction banning all NGOs and international NGOs from employing Afghan women in the country. According to the spokesperson, the decree was issued to preserve the dignity and chastity of women. On April 4, UNAMA stated the Taliban informed it that no Afghan women (national staff) were allowed to work at UN offices in the country.

Also on April 6, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation issued a statement calling the ban on women working for the United Nations in the country an alarming violation of women's fundamental rights.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders: Women organizing for women's and girls' rights, civil society activists, and others who publicly dissented from Taliban policy suffered unjust detention or disappearance.

The Taliban reportedly arrested and beat university professor and women's right defender Ismail Mashal on February 2, for protesting against the Taliban's ban on education for women and girls.

On January 7, the Taliban reportedly raided a home in Kabul and arrested civil society activist Sultan Ali Ziayee, who had gathered with other activists to protest the Taliban's decision to ban women's education and work. The civil society activists had reportedly gathered in the house of a woman activist who had been released from a Taliban detention cell only three days prior.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Taliban did not maintain any official bodies or institutions tasked with protecting or monitoring human rights.

Section 6.

Discrimination and Societal Abuses

WOMEN

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalized rape against both women and men, but the Taliban's deconstruction of the justice system severely eroded enforcement of these laws. The Taliban maintained no support system for survivors of rape and provided only limited protection services.

On May 14, *Hasht-e-Sobh* news agency reported that women prisoners in Taliban prisons in Jawzjan, Faryab, and Samangan provinces suffered from humiliation, insults, physical abuse, and sexual assault. According to the report, 10 women employees were present in the prisons during the daytime performing tasks such as physical searches, cleaning, and general prison duties. Only male guards were on duty during the night, which led to instances of sexual assault against women prisoners. Out of the 90 women imprisoned in Jawzjan, Faryab, and Samangan, 16 of them reportedly became pregnant because of repeated rape and were forced to undergo abortions in local hospitals. The Taliban reportedly ordered these women's pregnancies terminated during the third and fifth months. At least four women inmates in Samangan reportedly fell seriously ill as a direct consequence of repeated sexual assaults by Taliban members and were ultimately executed by the Taliban.

Many of these women were reportedly incarcerated in the Taliban women's prisons in the north for reasons such as moral corruption, theft, and fleeing from their homes. Over the past year, the Taliban had reportedly discreetly brought 48 women to the Faryab, Samangan, and Jawzjan hospitals to receive treatment for severe bleeding because of physical abuse and sexual assault. On July 3, media outlets reported that a girl, age 16, who was forced to marry a member of the Taliban in Ghor Province committed suicide on July 1. She reportedly became depressed because of her forced marriage and the requirement that she stay at home after the Taliban banned girls' education.

Domestic violence was viewed in the country as a "family matter." Institutional responses to domestic violence were not available, and patriarchal norms, corruption, and family or tribal pressure persisted.

Women survivors faced stringent or violent societal reprisal, ranging from imprisonment to targeted killings.

The Republic law criminalized forced gynecological exams, which acted as "virginity tests," except when conducted pursuant to a court order. Awareness and enforcement of the restrictions on forced gynecological exams remained limited. There was insufficient information to determine whether the forced gynecological exams continued.

Taliban members stated survivors of abuses should resolve issues within their family unit. Taliban "police" held women in detention centers after they reported gender-based violence.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: Under the 2004 constitution, the law criminalized forced, underage, and *baad* marriages (the practice of settling disputes in which the culprit's family trades a girl to the victim's family) and interference with a woman's right to choose her spouse. The Taliban criminalized forced but the practice of exchanging brides between families was not criminalized and remained widespread. "Honor killings" reportedly occurred throughout the year.

A Taliban decree provided women the following protections: women had the right to consent to marriage and could not be forced; a widow had inheritance rights in relation to the property of her husband, children, father, and relatives; widows had the right to receive a dowry from a new husband; women in a polygamous marriage were afforded rights in accordance with sharia; and the Supreme Court had to ensure courts considered appeals from women to the courts. There were reports that judges and so-called provincial governors ignored this decree and facilitated forced marriages.

Discrimination: The Taliban's edicts formalized discrimination and exclusion of women and girls from most aspects of society and at a nationwide level.

Women did not have equal legal rights, compared to men, to inherit assets as a surviving spouse, and daughters did not have equal rights, compared to sons, to inherit assets from their parents. By law women could not unilaterally divorce their husbands but had to obtain their husband's consent, but men could unilaterally divorce their wives.

The Taliban regulated dress codes for women journalists and banned women from acting in films. Taliban edicts stated women were not allowed to travel further than 50 miles unless accompanied by a mahram.

In December 2022, the Taliban issued an edict prohibiting women's attendance at both public and private universities. The so-called minister of higher education explained the restrictions as being required by Islam due to the use of women's dormitories, failure of women to observe the Islamic veil, continued interactions between men and women on campus, and women studying subjects not appropriate for women's dignity.

On January 28, Reuters reported the Ministry of Higher Education ordered private universities not to allow women students to sit university entrance exams the following month, underscoring the Taliban's policy to restrict women from tertiary education. A letter from the ministry was addressed to institutions in the northern provinces, including Kabul, where exams were due to take place from the end of February. The letter stated that those institutions that did not observe the rules would face legal action.

On May 3, the Ministry of Public Health announced that only men would be able to register for the supplementary "exit exam" mandated by the Taliban as a prerequisite for medical graduates to pursue their four-year specialized studies. The ministry also published the list of specialist vacancies in public hospitals, showing none for women doctors.

On April 30, media outlets reported the Department of Information and Culture in Ghazni Province had prevented media outlets in the province from broadcasting commercial announcements recorded with women's voices. The Taliban in Ghazni Province also prevented radio hosts from making telephone calls to women during programs.

On July 24, media outlets reported that the Taliban in Ghazni Province banned women's participation in the Shia religious mourning ceremony.

The so-called minister for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice announced on August 26 that women could no longer visit the popular Band-e-Amir National Park in central Bamiyan Province, claiming that women visiting the park did not adhere to the "proper" way of wearing the hijab and that "going for sightseeing is not obligatory" for Muslims.

On August 31, the Ministry of Information and Culture told Rashatoudi news agency that the Taliban's restrictions on women's work were due to Islamic law and local traditions, adding that after the return of the Taliban the "attitude toward women has improved and the Taliban are providing security for women and allowing women to pursue entrepreneurship."

On September 26, UN Under-Secretary-General Bahous said restrictions on women were being enforced more frequently and with more severity, including by male family members, and were accompanied by increases in child marriage and child labor. As a result, she said, 90 percent of young women respondents to a survey reported bad or very bad mental health, and suicide and suicidal thoughts had increased dramatically.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of involuntary sterilization on the part of the Taliban.

Women faced nearly insurmountable barriers to receiving health care due to Taliban restrictions on work, travel, and male-female interactions. According to a study conducted by Human Rights Watch, male doctors were afraid to treat female patients because of restrictions imposed by the Taliban on interactions between men and women. In addition, the Taliban prohibited male doctors from treating female patients unless they were accompanied by a mahram. Women could see female doctors, but it was difficult to find them. The Taliban permitted women to working as health practitioners, but many women were reportedly afraid to work due to Taliban restrictions on women in the workplace. The ever-smaller number of qualified women health practitioners steeply increased the risk of poor health outcomes for women.

There were reports of women facing difficulties entering health clinics when they were not accompanied by a mahram.

Having a child out of wedlock was a crime, but the punishment was unclear. Mothers faced severe social stigma for having a child out of wedlock, even when the pregnancy was a result of rape. The law classified abortion or ending a pregnancy as a crime punishable by three months to one year's imprisonment.

The law required women to obtain their husband's consent to use contraception. Persons with disabilities faced increased barriers to reproductive health resources because of decreased access to transportation, education, and social support.

Families and individuals in cities generally had better access to information than did those living in rural areas. According to the United Nations, the rate of contraceptive use among married women was 35 percent for those living in urban areas, compared with 19 percent in rural areas.

On January 30, the Kandahar provincial office of the Taliban's so-called Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (Amr-e Ba Maroof) instructed the local health department to require all of the province's 1,400 women healthcare workers to report to work with a mahram and starting on January 30 to forbid women workers from entering clinics or hospitals without a mahram.

SYSTEMIC RACIAL OR ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

Religion and ethnicity in the country were often closely linked. The population included a wide range of distinct ethnic groups. The Hazara, the third largest ethnic group in the country and predominantly Shiite Muslims, bore the brunt of systemic discrimination by the Taliban. Societal discrimination against Hazaras existed in the form of extortion through illegal taxation, forced recruitment, forced labor, physical abuse, property confiscation, and detention. There were many reports Taliban fighters, ISIS-K members, and other unknown actors targeted and killed members of the Hazara community, although ISIS-K attacks reportedly decreased during the year.

In Takhar Province, Taliban security forces reportedly arrested Tajik civilians from Abshar District, accusing them of having links with anti-Taliban elements based only on their ethnicity. Multiple reports from Badakhshan, Balkh, Bamyan, Faryab, Kabul, Kapisa, Panjshir, and Parwan provinces throughout the year accused the Taliban of discriminating against non-Pashtun ethnicities when allocating resources and administering social services. In two separate incidents, representatives from the Ministry of Public Health in Balkh Province and the Ministry of Education in Kabul Province reportedly refused to accept job applications from ethnic Uzbeks and Tajiks, saying they should go to Uzbekistan or Tajikistan to look for employment.

CHILDREN

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

Local sources from Kabul, Bamiyan, and Ghazni provinces said the Taliban issued and closed all education centers for secondary school-age girls, including private English language centers and university entrance exam preparation courses. Private education centers had been operating in the districts despite existing bans on secondary and higher education for girls.

On June 6, sources confirmed that the Ministry of Education had directed all provincial education departments to notify international NGOs to suspend education activities in all provinces. The directive gave international NGOs a one-month grace period to wrap up operations and indicated a new directive would be forthcoming. As of September 9, the ministry had not issued a new directive.

Child Abuse: The law criminalized child abuse and neglect, but the Taliban did not take actions consistent with the law. Between January 1 and March 31, the United Nations verified 315 grave violations against 165 children. Killing and maiming remained the most prevalent violations committed against children, representing 85 percent of all verified violations. Many of the casualties resulted from attacks on civilians and explosive remnants of war.

Children were frequently jailed alongside adults. The Taliban allowed a limited continued operation of shelters for boys and girls who were survivors or at risk of abuse or trafficking in persons.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age for marriage was 16 for girls, or 15 with the approval of their father or a judge. The legal minimum age for marriage for boys was 18.

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

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The Taliban publicly stated that bacha bazi was against Islamic law, but multiple human rights groups reported the practice’s prevalence in many parts of the country.

ANTISEMITISM

There were no known reports of antisemitic incidents. There were no confirmed Jews residing in the country.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

ACTS OF VIOLENCE, CRIMINALIZATION, AND OTHER ABUSES BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY OR EXPRESSION, OR SEX CHARACTERISTICS

Criminalization: The Taliban considered consensual same-sex sexual activity to be a criminal offense, and representatives routinely enforced this position through violence, intimidation, harassment, and killings. Under the Taliban’s interpretation of sharia, conviction of same-sex sexual conduct was punishable by death, flogging, or imprisonment. Individual Taliban members made public statements reiterating that their interpretation of sharia included the death penalty for homosexuality.

Violence and Harassment: LGBTQI+ persons faced increased threats, attacks, sexual assaults, and discrimination from Taliban members, strangers, neighbors, and family members. In a video interview broadcast on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty on August 30, a member of the LGBTQI+ community, age 19, said he had to quit school to protect his identity and the Taliban arrested and beat him and his boyfriend on two occasions. A separate interview recounted the story of four Taliban security personnel gang-raping a gay man, age 20, while holding him in custody.

Discrimination: The law did not prohibit discrimination by state and nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. Same-sex sexual conduct was widely viewed in the country's culture as taboo and indecent. LGBTQI+ individuals did not have access to certain health-care services and could be fired from their jobs because of their perceived or expressed sexual orientation or gender identity.

Organizations assisting LGBTQI+ individuals reported they had been contacted by hundreds of individuals seeking resettlement. Even if the option to settle internationally was available, LGBTQI+ persons faced additional barriers. Gender nonconforming individuals reported being afraid to go to the country's passport office or passing through routine checkpoints on public roads due to fear of being identified by Taliban members.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: There was no legal pathway for transgender or gender nonconforming individuals to change their gender identity.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: The country's culture insisted on compulsory heterosexuality, which forced LGBTQI+ individuals to acquiesce to life-altering decisions made by family members or society.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: There were no legally registered LGBTQI+ rights organizations. LGBTQI+ individuals could not assemble, associate, or express themselves publicly due to fear of being killed, attacked, or outed by the Taliban. In February, members of the Behesht Collective, an LGBTQI+ group, protested from a private residence against the Taliban's treatment of LGBTQI+ persons. The participants in the protest fled the country immediately afterwards to protect themselves, saying they were residing in a Muslim country that criminalized same-sex activity, but was still better than Afghanistan.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Persons with disabilities could not access education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. Persons with disabilities faced barriers such as limited access to educational opportunities, inability to access government buildings, difficulty in acquiring official identification required for many services, lack of economic opportunities, and social exclusion due to stigma.

In May, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Afghanistan stated that persons with disabilities in the country were disproportionately affected by the humanitarian crisis.

The so-called Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs cited unemployment and lack of income as a serious concern among the persons with disabilities in the country. The Taliban reportedly only provided services to its former fighters with disabilities resulting from the war with the United States and NATO, and persons born with disabilities or those who were not Taliban did not receive support.

Section 7.

Worker Rights

A. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The pre-August 2021 government's law provided for the right of workers to join and form independent unions and to conduct legal strikes and bargain collectively. The Taliban did not announce that these laws were rescinded, but their actions were not consistent with labor laws and regulations. The International Trade Union Confederation observed that there was no guarantee of rights due to the breakdown of the rule of law.

International NGOs noted that unions were largely absent from the informal and agricultural sectors, which accounted for most workers.

The Taliban's so-called interim minister of labor and social affairs had not made any statements on workers' unions since he assumed the office.

B. PROHIBITION OF FORCED OR COMPULSORY LABOR

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

C. PROHIBITION OF CHILD LABOR AND MINIMUM AGE FOR EMPLOYMENT

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

D. DISCRIMINATION (SEE SECTION 6)

E. ACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS OF WORK

Wage and Hour Laws: Since August 2021, the Taliban had not taken actions consistent with minimum wage, overtime, or wage or hour standards.

The law provided for reduced standard workweeks for children ages 15 to 17, pregnant women, nursing mothers, miners, and workers in other occupations that presented health risks.

Occupational Safety and Health: The country had no occupational safety and health (OSH) regulations or officially adopted standards. There were no government inspectorates to investigate unsafe conditions or respond to workers' complaints. Workers could not remove themselves from health-endangering situations without risking their employment.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The Taliban did not effectively take actions consistent with minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws in either the formal or the informal sectors. The International Labor Organization estimated that the informal sector accounted for more than 86 percent of the national economy.