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INFORMATION

on the socio-economic situation in Afghanistan

requested by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum

22 February 2024

1. Is IOM operating in Afghanistan at the moment?

1. If yes: In what regard?

Yes, IOM is operating in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. IOM's activities focus predominantly on lifesaving humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable populations such as the provision of non-food-items (NFIs), cash assistance, and health and protection services. IOM also carries out quick impact community infrastructure projects and emergency livelihoods to help prevent the collapse of communities most affected by the ongoing socio-economic crisis. Specifically, through its economic resilience and livelihood services, IOM currently operates in 24 provinces (out of 34). For a more detailed overview on the current operations, please refer to the latest situation reports and other documents on the IOM Afghanistan website: <https://afghanistan.iom.int/> (last accessed 21 February 2024).

2. What are the future plans of IOM work in Afghanistan?

Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, Afghanistan has been facing an extraordinary humanitarian crisis, a collapsing economy, cash shortages, disruptions in supply routes, human rights violations, hunger, and poverty. IOM Afghanistan is exponentially expanding its operations to respond to this multitude of challenges. It has secured funding from the Delegation of the European Union to Afghanistan (EUD), the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan, and other donors to support affected populations through area-based, multi-sectoral approaches aimed at providing life-saving humanitarian support to vulnerable populations and enhancing the resilience of affected communities.

IOM operates in several critical sectors in Afghanistan and is expanding its scope of operations since the Taliban takeover in August 2021. It has been a key provider of Emergency Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI), Migration Health (both at border crossing points and internally through Outreach Teams), Protection, Cross-Border Return, Stabilization, Reintegration, and Resilience. These include Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) and are expanding programmatically to include Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) activities.

IOM is working to strategically align with other actors in the region, both local and international, to promote complementarity of operations and activities while aligning with the national strategic frameworks of the IOM Afghanistan Crisis Response Plan 2023 and the Afghanistan Humanitarian



Response Plan 2024. IOM will continue to increase its scope of work to meet the rising demand for services.

3. What is the status of the IOM programs “Restart III” and “RADA”?

RESTART III

Due to the Taliban takeover in August 2021 and the resulting security concerns, the IOM issued a full suspension of all Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) movements to Afghanistan, effective since 16 August 2021. Therefore, no support for voluntary return within the project RESTART III has been provided since this time. Project participants who returned to Afghanistan before 16 August 2021 were supported with counselling and cash for in-kind assistance up to the outstanding eligible amount.

RADA

The RADA project has now been completed, spanning approximately six and a half years from March 2017 to September 2023. During this time, the project successfully achieved its goals and objectives, making a significant impact in its field.

The following targets were achieved & beneficiaries reached during the reporting period:

- Direct Beneficiaries households (HHs) of IOM Community Development Projects (under RADA umbrella project):
28,695 households or 200,867 individuals in communities of high need in Baghlan, Balkh, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunar, Laghman and Nangarhar provinces
- Direct Beneficiaries of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SME): 549 HHs representatives including business owners and their families
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET): 243 beneficiaries
- Apprenticeships: 493 apprentices received on the job training

The RADA project was implemented both before and after the Taliban takeover. While the immediate aftermath witnessed setbacks in the private sector—characterized by economic recession, trade barriers, and fear—an improved security situation and normalized business operations have paved the way for recovery. IOM's targeted support to SMEs has played a pivotal role in creating job opportunities for returnees. Those with specific skills were placed as employees within IOM-supported businesses, while IOM also offered support to returnees with business management skills, enabling them to embark on their respective entrepreneurial journeys. Similarly, unskilled returnees were supported through apprenticeships and TVET programs, enhancing their employability skills and empowering them to contribute to the local labour market.

4. Is IOM Afghanistan in contact with former assisted returnees in Afghanistan?

- a. If yes: How did their businesses far since the Taliban takeover? In particular: is IOM Afghanistan in contact with returnees who were assisted in their reintegration through the project RESTART III? How did their businesses far?

Yes, IOM Afghanistan maintains communication with former assisted returnees to offer humanitarian assistance, support community stabilization, and manage internal migration in collaboration with the de facto authorities (DfA), humanitarian partners, and local communities. IOM Afghanistan employs various methods to stay connected with former assisted returnees in Afghanistan, including community engagement, a centralized database (Displacement Tracking Matrix [DTM]), and direct communication as a follow up, particularly with beneficiaries directly supported by IOM with its services through monitoring and follow-up visits.

2. Medical Care and NGOs

1. What is the current situation in hospitals in Afghanistan? (resources/money to pay employees, medication, medical equipment)

The healthcare system in Afghanistan has been badly affected following the Taliban takeover in August 2021. According to the Human Rights Watch, there was a sharp reduction in funds for Afghan hospitals post-Taliban takeover as the funds were mainly provided by the former government's budget, leading to a loss of staff and to cuts in services. Additionally, medical staff also partly fled the country or stopped working out of fear. Due to these reasons, hospitals have faced downsizing and closures, resulting in increased strain on remaining facilities and a lack of primary healthcare access for many communities. Due to the decrease in staffing and funding, patients who would typically seek treatment at primary care centres are now turning to secondary and tertiary healthcare facilities for assistance. Out-of-pocket health spendings were estimated 77.2 per cent per capita in 2021, and government health spending was only 3.3 per cent.¹

A Human Rights Watch Report additionally highlights medicine supply shortages due to import challenges as well as a surge in patient numbers, whereas many conditions are linked to poor nutrition.² In this context, the World Food Programme stated in February 2023, that Afghanistan was at its highest risk of famine in the last 25 years, mainly due to people's lack of money to buy food.³ Additionally, other medical conditions have also burdened the healthcare system. In 2023,

¹ World Health Organization. Global Health Expenditure Database. Retrieved from https://apps.who.int/nha/database/country_profile/Index/en. Accessed 21 February 2024.

² Human Rights Watch. (2024, February 12). *Disaster in the Foreseeable Future: Afghanistan's Healthcare Crisis*. Retrieved from www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/12/disaster-foreseeable-future/afghanistans-healthcare-crisis#_ftn41. Accessed 21 February 2024.

³ World Food Program Afghanistan. (2023, February 5). *Situation Report*. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/wfp-afghanistan-situation-report-05-february-2023>. Accessed 21 February 2024.

there were 25,856 reported cases of measles, resulting in 64 deaths. Moreover, there were 6.8 million reported cases of diarrhea in 2023, which was three times higher than the previous year. Outbreaks of acute watery diarrhea with dehydration occurred in 334 districts, double the number of districts affected in 2022.⁴

As reported the IOM country update provided on 12 April 2022, the World Bank programme which provided funding for essential healthcare facilities and paid for the salaries of healthcare workers through the Sehatmandi Project for Afghanistan⁵ under the previous government halted its activities⁶ and did not resume them since.

Until August 2023, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) paid supplemental salaries for more than 10,000 doctors, nurses, and other staff at 33 hospitals serving 26 million people across Afghanistan. ICRC also paid for drugs and other medical supplies, as well as running costs of the hospitals, such as electricity, ambulance services, lab tests, and food for patients. The ICRC programme ended in August 2023.

Since the termination of the ICRC healthcare support activities, other actors have taken up donor-funded payments to the healthcare sector. Main donors include the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID),⁷ Global Fund,⁸ Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation,⁹ the Government of Canada,¹⁰ GAVI Alliance¹¹ and others.

On an operational level, UNICEF has taken over the responsibility of paying the salaries of more than 27,000 Afghan health workers, including 10,000 women.

Despite the presence of international donors, a pressing need for immediate donor assistance has been reported for at least 36 hospitals previously financed by the ICRC to sustain critical services. While the above listed donors have responded to the UN's calls for humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan, only 40 per cent of the required USD 412 million for critical health services in 2023 has been committed.

⁴ UNICEF. (2023). *Afghanistan: Humanitarian Situation Report No. 12 (1 January - 31 December 2023)*. Retrieved from www.unicef.org/documents/afghanistan-humanitarian-situation-report-no-12-1-january-31-december-2023. Accessed 21 February 2024.

⁵ World Bank Group. *Afghanistan Sehatmandi Project*. Retrieved from <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P160615>. Accessed 21 February 2024.

⁶ NPR. (2021, September 18). *Afghan Health Minister: Health Care Is 'On The Verge Of Collapse' [Press release]*. Retrieved from www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2021/09/18/1038068777/afghan-health-minister-health-care-is-on-the-verge-of-collapse-but-imoptimistic. Accessed 21 February 2024.

⁷ www.usaid.gov/afghanistan Accessed 20 February 2024.

⁸ www.theglobalfund.org/en/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

⁹ www.gatesfoundation.org/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹⁰ www.canada.ca/en.html Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹¹ www.gavi.org/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

The de facto Health Ministry officials refused to comment regarding the allocation of limited domestic resources for the health sector. The DfA does not publicly disclose its budget and national spending.

To underscore the crucial importance of ramping up investment in healthcare services provision in Afghanistan, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched an alert in August 2023. WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, stated in the alert: "The situation in Afghanistan is grave, and the lack of resources and funding to support health workers and facilities is putting countless lives at risk. Women and children are suffering the most. I call on donors to give generously so that we can continue our life-saving work".¹²

This WHO alert highlighted the dire consequences if the underfunding continues in Afghanistan's healthcare system. "The situation in Afghanistan is critical, and it demands urgent attention. For a country already affected by decades of conflict, underfunding of the healthcare system is a critical humanitarian concern. The consequences of this underfunding cannot be overstated. I want to thank our current partners who have provided support thus far, but also to call on them to redouble their efforts", said WHO Representative to Afghanistan, Dr. Luo Dapeng, in the alert.

2. Are there any hospitals / NGOs operating at the moment that take care of people with physical and psychological disabilities?

Some hospitals and NGOs are actively engaged in providing services to individuals affected by physical and psychological disabilities in Afghanistan. Presently, the International Psychosocial Organization¹³ operates in all 34 provinces of the country. Additionally, organizations such as Action Contre la Faim (ACF),¹⁴ INTERSOS,¹⁵ Premiere Urgence Internationale (PUI),¹⁶ HealthNet TPO¹⁷ and the International Medical Corps (IMC)¹⁸ offer psychosocial services. Moreover, the ICRC¹⁹ and Handicap International²⁰ provide assistance specifically tailored to people with disabilities.

¹² World Health Organization. (2023, August 18). *Afghanistan's Health System Suffers Critical Underfunding, Calls for Donor Support*.

Retrieved from www.who.int/news/item/18-08-2023-afghanistan-s-health-system-suffers-critical-underfunding--calls-for-donor-support.

¹³ <https://ipsocontext.org/> Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹⁴ www.actioncontrelafaim.org/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹⁵ www.intersos.org/en/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹⁶ www.premiere-urgence.org/en/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹⁷ www.healthnettpo.org/en Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹⁸ <https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/> Accessed 21 February 2024.

¹⁹ www.icrc.org/de Accessed 21 February 2024.

²⁰ www.handicap-international.de/ Accessed 21 February 2024.

3. Work and living conditions

1. What are the current average rents in the cities of Kabul/Herat/Mazar?

The dynamics of rental prices in urban centers like Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif are influenced by various factors, including location, furnishings, and the overall quality of accommodation. As illustrated in the table below, IOM provides a comparative analysis of average rents both within and outside the city center. The data, collected by IOM field staff on 28 January 2024, was predominantly sourced from rental companies and homeowners. It is organized according to the number of beds in the apartment, offering insights into the fluctuations in rental pricing across different residential settings.

Type	Kabul		Herat		Mazar Sharif	
	City Center (CC)	Outside CC	City Center	Outside CC	City Center	Outside CC
2 Beds	AFN ²¹ 10,000 (EUR 123.87)	AFN 7,000 (EUR 86.7)	AFN 7,000 (EUR 86.7)	AFN 5,500 (EUR 68.13)	AFN 6,500 (EUR 80.52)	AFN 4,500 (EUR 55.74)
3 Beds	AFN 13,000 (EUR 161.03)	AFN 9,000 (EUR 111.48)	AFN 10,000 (EUR 123.87)	AFN 7,000 (EUR 86.7)	AFN 9,000 (EUR 111.48)	AFN 6,000 (EUR 74.32)
4 Beds	AFN 17,000 (EUR 210.58)	AFN 12,000 (EUR 148.64)	AFN 15,000 (EUR 185.8)	AFN 10,000 (EUR 123.87)	AFN 12,500 (EUR 154.83)	AFN 8,500 (EUR 105.29)

2. Have food prices changed since the Taliban takeover? If possible, could you give examples of food prices in the cities of Kabul/Herat/Mazar at the moment?

The volatility in food prices remains a significant concern for residents in Afghanistan, with fluctuations driven by a complex interplay of factors.²² The country's economic stability is intricately tied to ongoing drought conditions, policy shifts by the DfA, and the exchange rate between the U.S. Dollar (USD) and the Afghan Afghani (AFN). These factors collectively contribute to the uncertainty surrounding food costs, impacting the overall well-being of the population. Ongoing droughts affect agricultural productivity, leading to shortages and increased prices for essential food items, while policy changes directly influence trade, production, and distribution channels.²³

Please see the requested food prices below. IOM staff interviewed retail shops in the local markets and collected firsthand information from the field on 28 January 2024, in the respective provinces.

²¹ AFN = Afghan Afghani; All exchange rates in this document have been calculated using OANDA Currency Converter (rate as of 21 February 2024): www.oanda.com/lang/de/currency/converter.

²² FAO Food Price Index | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (n.d.). *WorldFoodSituation*. Retrieved from www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/. Accessed 21 February 2024.

²³ Afghanistan | World Food Programme. (2023, March 31). Retrieved from www.wfp.org/countries/afghanistan. Accessed 19 February 2024.

Items	Kabul	Herat	Mazar
1 piece of bread	AFN 10 (EUR 0.12)	AFN 10 (EUR 0.12)	AFN 10 (EUR 0.12)
50 kg of flour	AFN 1,400 (EUR 17.34)	AFN 1,600 (EUR 19.82)	AFN 1,350 (EUR 16.72)
25 kg of rice	AFN 3,000 (EUR 37.16)	AFN 2,200 (EUR 27.25)	AFN 2,200 (EUR 27.25)
7 kg of beans	AFN 800 (EUR 9.9)	AFN 770 (EUR 9.54)	AFN 780 (EUR 9.66)
5 liters cooking oil	AFN 450 (EUR 5.57)	AFN 700 (EUR 8.67)	AFN 380 (EUR 4.7)
1 kg of chicken	AFN 250 (EUR 3.09)	AFN 220 (EUR 2.73)	AFN 220 (EUR 2.73)
1 liter of fuel	AFN 70 (EUR 0.87)	AFN 64 (EUR 0.79)	AFN 67 (EUR 0.83)

3. What is the current situation on the labor market? What changes have occurred since the Taliban takeover?

The Afghanistan labour market was paralyzed by COVID-19 and the change in administration.²⁴ Most of the sectors have been devastated; however, agricultural stability keeps a proportional pace. More than half a million people have lost or been pushed out of their jobs in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover.

The Afghan labour market faces significant challenges amidst the country's fragile economy and weak private sector. Following a 25 per cent economic contraction over the past two years, recovery prospects are further hindered by the DfA's restrictive policies on women's education and work.¹⁰

Numerous businesses are facing challenges in maintaining full operations. The primary constraint reported by businesses is reduced demand, followed by uncertainty regarding the future and limitations in banking system functionality. Private businesses face challenges in accessing financial services, further hampering economic stability and growth prospects. According to the second and third rounds of the World Bank Private Sector Rapid Survey conducted in May-June 2022 and in March-April 2023, slightly more than half of the surveyed firms in Afghanistan are operating at full capacity, while another third are operating below capacity. Employment in surveyed firms dropped by 61 per cent below pre-crisis levels by November 2021. By June 2022, although there was some recovery, employment in participating firms remained 50 per cent below pre-crisis levels.²⁵ Surveyed businesses also cited additional difficulties, including inefficiencies in the payment system, increased operating costs, limited availability of imported inputs, and difficulties in obtaining loans.²⁶

²⁴ Afghanistan: 500,000 jobs lost since Taliban takeover. (2022, January 21). *UN News*. Retrieved from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/01/1110052>. Accessed 21 February 2024.

²⁵ World Bank. (Last updated October 2023) *Afghanistan Overview*. Retrieved from [www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Afghanistan%20Welfare,\(garment%20and%20food%20processing\)](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Afghanistan%20Welfare,(garment%20and%20food%20processing)). Accessed 18 February 2024.

World Bank. (2022). *Afghanistan Private Sector Rapid Survey - Round 2*. Retrieved from <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/25bc69f199bac8b41cc393c9d964e40f-0310012022/original/AFG-PSRS-R2-Report-Final.pdf> Accessed 21 February 2024.

²⁶ Ibid.

Women's employment situation:

Female-owned businesses are particularly impacted, with twice the likelihood of reporting security issues compared to male-owned businesses.²⁷ Since the Taliban takeover, women's representation in the labour market is estimated to be at its lowest level in the last 20 years. Employment for women, in surveyed firms in the second round of the World Bank Private Sector Rapid Survey (conducted in May-June 2022), remained 62 per cent lower than before August 2021, indicating a disproportionate impact on women in the labor market.²⁸

Since the Taliban regained power in August 2021, they have issued over 50 decrees aimed at restricting women's public and private roles. On 24 December 2022, the DfA issued a decree aimed to restrict female employment with NGOs which was subsequently extended to UN agencies in April 2023. The DfA also announced that cosmetic work is against Islamic law, banning women's work in salons in summer 2023.

Girls can only go to school until grade six (6 years of primary education). Girls and women are banned from attending secondary education beyond grade six and are banned from attending all tertiary education, including universities. Despite an increase in primary school attendance and narrowed gender gaps, millions of children, especially girls, remain out of school due to limited access. After the prohibition on girls attending secondary school was enforced, merely 3 per cent of them are enrolled in secondary education. Meanwhile, among boys aged 13-18, the percentage receiving secondary education stands at 44 per cent.²⁹

4. What are the current average earnings of a daily wage earner?

Based on the IOM Economic Resilience Employee Report covering Kabul, Herat, and Mazar Sharif, findings reveal distinct patterns in the average daily wages earned by individuals in these cities. In Kabul, the average daily wage falls within the range of AFN 300 to 500 (EUR 3.71- 6.19), reflecting the diverse economic landscape and opportunities available in the capital city. For Herat, the report indicates that the average daily wage earner receives a slightly narrower range, spanning from AFN 250 to 350 (EUR 3.00-4.34). This could be indicative of the economic dynamics unique to Herat, which may differ from Kabul. Lastly, in Mazar-i-Sharif, the average daily wage is noted to be ranging around 200 (EUR 2.48). These variations in daily wages across the cities underscore the localized economic conditions, encompassing factors such as industry

²⁷ World Bank. (Last updated October 2023) *Afghanistan Overview*. Retrieved from [www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Afghanistan%20Welfare,\(garment%20and%20food%20processing\)](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Afghanistan%20Welfare,(garment%20and%20food%20processing)). Accessed 21 February 2024.

²⁸ World Bank. (2022). *Afghanistan Private Sector Rapid Survey - Round 2*. Retrieved from <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/25bc69f199bac8b41cc393c9d964e40f-0310012022/original/AFG-PSRS-R2-Report-Final.pdf>

²⁹ World Bank. (Last updated October 2023) *Afghanistan Overview*. Retrieved from [www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Afghanistan%20Welfare,\(garment%20and%20food%20processing\)](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Afghanistan%20Welfare,(garment%20and%20food%20processing)).

composition, demand for labour, and regional economic development, providing a nuanced understanding of the economic resilience in different urban centres.

5. Are telecommunication and internet services operating in all of Afghanistan at the moment? Are there any outages in areas which could have been reached via phone or internet before the Taliban takeover?

There are no outages in areas which could have been reached via phone or internet before the Taliban takeover. In fact, telecom and internet services have improved since the fall of the previous government, due to a decline in conflict nationwide and the ease with which telecom businesses can expand their service offerings. In Afghanistan, the availability of internet and telecommunication services is widespread, covering the majority of the country except for a few isolated and sparsely inhabited settlements situated outside major towns.

The Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority (ATRA) asserts that telecommunication services in the country have witnessed improvement, returning to a level comparable to that before the collapse of the former government. This suggests a concerted effort to restore and maintain essential communication infrastructure crucial for various aspects of daily life, economic activities, and nationwide connectivity. The comprehensive coverage of internet and telecommunication services, barring a few remote areas, underscores the commitment to ensuring connectivity and communication accessibility for the Afghan population, even amidst challenges and changes in the political landscape. Currently, five telecommunication companies are active in Afghanistan, including the state-owned fixed-line operator Afghan Telecom, and the four mobile (GSM) operators: Afghan Wireless Communication Company (AWCC), Roshan, MTN Afghanistan, and Etisalat Afghanistan.

While traditional media platforms such as TV and radio continue to operate, their content faces censorship and self-censorship, resulting in a decline in public trust in information sources and reduced access to reliable and dependable information. Afghans have begun to exercise self-restraint on social media and in their daily interactions due to uncertainty and fear regarding their speech.³⁰

³⁰ Internews. (2024, January 2). *The Information Ecosystem in Afghanistan and Implications for Humanitarian Action: Format Analysis*. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/information-ecosystem-afghanistan-and-implications-humanitarian-action>. Accessed 19 February 2024.

4. Travel in Afghanistan

1. Which airports in Afghanistan are currently in operation?

i. At which airports do international / national flights land?

Kabul, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, and Kandahar airports are currently operating international flights to and from Iran, Qatar, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Meanwhile, Jalalabad, Khost, Lashkargah, Farah, Kunduz, Faiz Abad, Kandahar, and Balkh airports are currently facilitating only domestic flights within Afghanistan.

2. Are all provinces of Afghanistan accessible by car / taxi / bus?

Yes.

i. What are the current costs for a trip from Kabul to Mazar by bus / cab?

- Costs for a trip from Kabul to Mazar by bus: AFN 850 (EUR 10.53)
- Costs for a trip from Kabul to Mazar by cab: AFN 1,300 (EUR 16.10)

3. Are there currently Taliban roadblocks / checkpoints?

i. If so, where are they? Are they concentrated in urban areas or also in rural areas?

The Taliban continues to stop and search vehicles for various reasons. Most of the time, these checks are routine. However, if a checkpoint is established for a specific reason, the search could be aimed at locating particular items, such as drugs, weapons, or explosives. Checkpoints manned by the de facto Protection Service and other DfA authorities are widely distributed across Afghanistan, typically positioned along main supply routes and near access points to major cities. The posture and level of search conducted at these checkpoints vary depending on the security situation. Additionally, ad hoc checkpoints and road closures are set up as needed during search operations, security incidents, or VIP movements.

4. Are there reports of mistreatments / abductions / disappearances by certain groups on the roads in Afghanistan?

Abductions:

Organized crime groups are believed to be involved in abduction for ransom across Security Areas in Afghanistan, with 21 abduction incidents documented across Security Areas in 2023 and two so far in 2024.³¹ Anecdotally, it seems that not all abduction incidents are reported, and families

³¹ The data are shared thanks to the support of UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) Security Information and Operation Center.

often pay the ransom. The majority of abductions (where information was available) took place in or close to residences rather than on the roads. Of the 21 abduction incidents reported in 2023, four were in Kabul (two in PD9, one in PD5, and one in PD10), three in Security Area West (SA-W), two in Security Area East (SA-E), three in Security Area North (SA-N), one in Security Area South East (SA-SE), and five in Security Area South (SA-S). Two of the Kabul incidents involved the abduction of foreign nationals, although little detail was provided about the circumstances of the abductions.

The de facto security forces (dfSF) were active in responding to abduction incidents. In June 2023, in Kabul, the dfSF led a rescue operation to save a foreign national who had been abducted, successfully rescuing the individual. In Balkh Province in February 2023, a dfSF chase operation against the kidnappers resulted in the death of one kidnapper and the arrest of two others. Several abduction incidents involved former Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), including the two incidents reported in SA-E, as well as two additional incidents in SA-S. A number of abduction incidents involved children, including three out of the five in SA-S. In one incident in March 2023, the child of a national United Nations Security Management System (UNSMS) personnel was abducted, and later the body of the child was found.

The overall likelihood of an abduction of a UNSMS personnel being targeted while on a road mission in Afghanistan, after prevention and mitigation measures such as Department of Police and Security (dfPS) escort vehicles have been put in place, is relatively low. However, national UNSMS personnel are more at risk as they return to their residences.

Movement restrictions:

On 26 December 2021, the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice issued a directive that restricts women from traveling beyond 72 kilometres unless accompanied by a close male relative. Additionally, the decree advises taxi drivers to provide rides only to women wearing a hijab. As of now, the decree remains in effect. Authorities have also reportedly detained and lashed girls as young as 16 for violating hijab rules.³²

Regarding other movement restrictions for ordinary people, IOM Afghanistan has not received official reports. However, instances have occurred where citizens are mistreated for not complying with prevailing customary rules imposed by DfAs.

Additionally, there has been a rising number of incidents where UNSMS personnel are stopped and either temporarily prevented from moving or required to show additional documents to the dfSF. The attitude of dfSF varies greatly depending on the location. For instance, on December 19 2023, in SA-S, a UNSMS road mission escorted by dfPS was stopped by local dfSF and detained

³² Reporter, G. S. (2024, January 11). Afghan girls detained and lashed by Taliban for violating hijab rules. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/jan/10/afghanistan-girls-detained-beaten-taliban-hijab-rules. Accessed 20 February 2024.

overnight before being released. National UNSMS personnel are more likely to experience mistreatment at these checkpoints, especially when driving their own vehicles. Female UNSMS personnel are particularly vulnerable at checkpoints due to the December 2022 directive related to female employment and the later April 2023 verbal issuance of a ban on the UN.

5. Banking system and money transfer

1. Is it currently possible to transfer money to Afghanistan?

Yes, it is possible to transfer money both locally and from abroad in Afghanistan. Various partners and agencies facilitate fund transfers from international sources, and there are also Hawala companies operating in the country. Hawala is a Money or Value Transfer Service (MVTs) that has been used for centuries, originating in the Middle East and South Asia. It is primarily used for legitimate purposes, including personal and business financial transactions, as well as for sending remittances by migrants and refugees to family members. Cultural preferences, convenience, low-threshold accessibility, low processing fees, reliability, and faster value transfer services are some of the reasons for using Hawala.

Currently, IOM is utilizing three money service provider companies operating within Afghanistan to support beneficiaries through cash-based assistance.

2. Is it possible to transfer money via local banks?

Yes, it is possible to transfer money through local banks in Afghanistan; however, recipients in remote areas might encounter challenges in accessing banks due to coverage limitations and Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements. The KYC policy is a mandatory framework for banks and financial institutions to identify customers. Each customer is required to provide credentials to prove their identity and address.

IOM utilizes money transfer through local banks to reach beneficiaries; however, challenges have been encountered in terms of meeting KYC requirements.

3. What other ways of transferring money are currently possible?

Various money transfer methods are utilized in Afghanistan, including the Hawala system, Money Service Providers (MSPs), mobile money services (which are utilized by a limited number of people due to low technology usage), and traditional bank transfers.

4. Is there currently enough cash available in Afghanistan?

According to the UNDP report on Changes in Afghan Economy, Households and Cross-Cutting Sectors,³³ before the regime change, Afghanistan's banking system primarily focused on three key

³³ UNDP. (2023, December). *Changes in Afghan Economy, Households and Cross-Cutting Sectors* (August 2021 to August 2023). Retrieved from www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-01/tyir_0.pdf. Accessed 18 February 2024.

functions: facilitating money transfers, collecting deposits, and investing funds with the de facto Central Bank (DAB). Following the regime change, the banking system in Afghanistan experienced a significant deterioration, primarily attributed to bank runs (meaning a large group of depositors withdraw their money from banks at the same time) and a loss of public confidence. This crisis resulted in substantial withdrawals of deposits from banks, causing a sharp decline in both total deposits and outstanding loans. The abrupt halt in international aid, coupled with shrinking bank balance sheets, had a direct impact on the money supply, leading to a substantial reduction in real terms. The de facto DAB's inability to produce AFN banknotes, along with the freezing of foreign currency reserves, aggravated both domestic and foreign currency liquidity shortages within the economy.

The UNDP report³⁴ further states that the limited capacity of the de facto DAB to print new banknotes has left most of the circulating currency in poor condition, rendering it ineffective for transactions. It is important to note that currency in circulation has accounted for more than 60 per cent of the money supply in the last two years. However, since October 2022, the de facto DAB has initiated the transfer of new banknotes from abroad to replace the deteriorated ones, on a one-to-one basis. Yet, to bolster AFN liquidity and support economic activity, there is a pressing need for a net injection of new banknotes, to ensure that the currency in circulation aligns with the economy's requirements.

There is no reported significant cash shortage for UN agencies and other providers of humanitarian assistance. However, service providers are occasionally required to transport cash from one location to another, especially in emergencies where a high number of beneficiaries are targeted with Cash-Based Interventions (CBI). As of the latest information, millions of dollars, averaging USD 80 million per shipment, have been transported to Afghanistan in the past three months, with deliveries to Kabul occurring within 10 to 14 days. The cash is placed in designated UN accounts in private banks. While this may contribute to financial liquidity, broader economic challenges persist, with the UNDP reporting that 69 per cent of Afghans lacking access to basic resources.³⁵

6. Is it currently possible to obtain documents in Afghanistan?

1. Is it possible to obtain a passport? If yes, is this possible in every province?

Yes, it is possible to obtain a passport in Afghanistan; however, it is not available in every province. The DfA Ministry of Interior (Moi) has reopened passport department offices in 15³⁶ of the 34 provinces and requires applicants to obtain a passport in their province of origin. However, the functioning capacity of these departments remains unclear.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Farah, Nimruz, Badghis, Paktika, Samangan, Laghman, Uruzgan, Kunar, Takhar, Zabul, Jawzjan, Bamiyan, Panjsher, and Baghlan provinces

i. Can an existing passport be extended?

Yes, but with the same geographical restrictions as obtaining a new one.

ii. What are the requirements to obtain a new passport and what are the costs / waiting times?

The requirements for obtaining and extending a passport in Afghanistan include submitting a passport request letter, a filled passport application form, a Tazkira or national identity card (NID), a photo, and the old passport if there is one.

Regarding the passport fees or cost, there are two options available:

- a) The fee for a 5-year passport is AFN 5,900 (EUR 73.08).
- b) The fee for a 10-year passport is AFN 11,000 (EUR 136.26).

The waiting time for processing passports inside Afghanistan is usually between 1 to 2 weeks.

iii. Can passports be applied for / extended outside Afghanistan? If so, where is this possible and what are the requirements / waiting times?

A passport application or extension can be processed outside Afghanistan in the following countries:

- a) UAE: Dubai
- b) Pakistan: Islamabad and Peshawar
- c) Saudi Arabia: Riyadh. Please note that Afghans residing in Saudi Arabia can only renew or extend their existing passports; they cannot obtain a completely new passport.

The requirements for passport application or renewal from outside Afghanistan typically include submitting a passport request or renewal letter, a completed passport application form, a Tazkira or national identity card (NID), a photograph, and the previous or old passport if available. The waiting time for processing passports outside Afghanistan is usually between 1 to 2 weeks.

2. Is it currently possible to obtain a Tazkira or eTazkira? If so, is this possible in every province?

There are a total of 74 electronic ID card distribution centers in Afghanistan (all over the country). All 34 provinces have Tazkira (electronic ID card) distribution centers and different provinces vary regarding the number of these distribution centers. While some provinces have only three distribution centres, others may have ten. But the eTazkira can be obtained in all 34 provinces.

i. **What are the requirements to obtain a Tazkira or eTazkira and what are the costs / waiting times?**

The required documents for obtaining a Tazkira in Afghanistan include a filled application form and the Tazkira of paternal relatives. The applicant must provide a copy of the Tazkira of one of their paternal relatives, such as their father, grandfather, siblings, uncles, aunts, or cousins. Additionally, four photographs are required, along with a confirmation provided by the local council (Wakil Guzar) and a referral to the Civil Registration Office.

The cost for obtaining a Tazkira is AFN 700 (EUR 8.67). The waiting time for processing the Tazkira application is typically 1-2 weeks.

3. **Can other documents such as a marriage certificate be obtained in all provinces?**

No. Other documents such as a marriage certificate can also only be obtained only in 7 provinces: In Kabul, Nangarhar, Balkh, Herat, Paktia, Kandahar and Khost provinces. Residents from other provinces must travel to one of these provinces to receive official documents.

4. **Can passports be applied for / extended outside Afghanistan? If so, where is this possible and what are the requirements / waiting times?**

See answer to question 6.1.III. (doubled).

A final note on women's representation, advocacy, and engagement in Afghanistan:

According to reports, the current situation of women workers in Afghanistan is dire due to the policies enforced by the Taliban since their takeover in August 2021. The Taliban has systematically marginalized women and girls, seeking to erase them from public life. They have implemented bans on education, restricted access to employment, and imposed severe restrictions on women's freedom and mobility.

The current situation for women workers in Afghanistan is characterized by significant challenges and limitations. The Taliban's policies have restricted access to employment opportunities, preventing women from contributing to the workforce. Even in areas where women are allowed to work, they face numerous obstacles and limitations. The restrictions on women make it difficult for them to travel to workplaces or engage in certain occupations. Despite these challenges, Afghan women workers have demonstrated remarkable resilience and determination. Many have sought alternative ways to contribute to their families and communities, such as starting small businesses from home or engaging in informal work arrangements.

Following a 20 December 2022 decree banning Afghan women's higher education and a 24 December 2022 decree banning Afghan women from working for (I)NGOs, on 4 April 2023, the DfA issued a ban on Afghan women working with the United Nations (UN). This was followed by a review period, where the UNCT imposed a system-wide alternative work modalities (AWM) arrangement. At the end of this period, on 4 May 2023, the arrangement was



halted as actors were able to coordinate respective ways of working that upholds humanitarian commitments and imperatives.

Throughout 2023, IOM has remained committed to ensuring women’s meaningful engagement and participation throughout its programming and interventions. IOM has continued to advocate with the DfA at all levels to preserve women’s inclusion and participation—among both female staff and beneficiaries—promoting an all-principled response. IOM has also consistently adapted its ways of working to reflect the fluid operational context and prioritize staff safety, wellbeing, and mental health.

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