

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1439
Land:	Afghanistan
Kilde:	US Department of State
Titel:	Afghanistan 2022 Human Rights Report
Udgivet:	20. marts 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	31. marts 2023

AFGHANISTAN 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

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 Islamic Republic 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.

Prior to August 15, 2021, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan had a directly elected president, a legislative branch, and a judicial branch. The country last held presidential elections in September 2019, and a dispute over election results was mediated by political leaders resulting in a compromise in which Ashraf Ghani retained the presidency, Abdullah Abdullah was appointed to lead the High Council for National Reconciliation, and each of them was to select one-half of the cabinet members. The Taliban, which had ruled over most parts of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, took control of the country again in August 2021. As of December, the group has not announced any plans to hold elections. The Taliban also declared themselves the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” and appointed dozens of so-called acting ministers who reportedly hold cabinet meetings and provide direction on various administrative activities. In October Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid publicly indicated work would soon begin to draft a new constitution to replace the 2004 constitution. The group said it intended to eliminate secular governance and claimed to govern in accordance with their own interpretation of sharia (Islamic law). The Taliban took expansive measures to bar women and girls from participation in public and political life, including restricting their access to education at all levels beyond primary school, employment, and freedom of movement and dress. The Taliban did not respond to repeated requests for updates and information on subjects addressed in this report.

After August 15, 2021, security forces of the Islamic Republic disbanded. The Taliban oversee an armed force that reports to the Ministry of Defense. Police forces report to the Ministry of Interior. Both the so-called General Directorate of Intelligence and the so-called Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention

of Vice and Complaints oversee armed personnel who surveil the public and monitor compliance with Taliban-issued edicts and directives. There is ineffective civilian oversight of these groups. The Taliban did not formally change existing laws as legislated by the Islamic Republic; however, they promulgated edicts that contradicted the laws of the Islamic Republic and international conventions and used violence to enforce their edicts. There were reports that members of the Taliban police and militia committed numerous abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary killings, including targeted killings; forced disappearance; torture, or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment by the Taliban; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; 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, enforced disappearances and abductions, torture, and unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media by the Taliban, including arrests of and violence against journalists and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; severe 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; lack of investigation of and accountability for 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; violence or threats of violence targeting members of ethnic and religious minority groups; trafficking in persons; violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons; existence and enforcement of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct; severe restrictions on workers' freedom of association; and the existence of the worst forms of child labor.

Widespread disregard for the rule of law and official impunity for those responsible for human rights abuses was common. After taking over the country,

the Taliban formed a commission to identify and expel from their ranks “people of bad character,” but details of its work remained unclear. The Office of the Prosecutor for the International Criminal Court stated in September 2021 that the Taliban takeover represented a significant change of circumstances affecting the ongoing assessment of the pre-August 2021 government’s request to defer the investigation of alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes. The prosecutor’s office received authorization to resume its investigation in October and stated intent to focus efforts on crimes allegedly committed by the Taliban and ISIS-K, a regional syndicate of the international Islamic State terrorist group active in South and Central Asia.

The Taliban and ISIS-K reportedly engaged in child recruitment and used child soldiers younger than age 12 during the year. Armed groups threatened, robbed, kidnapped, and attacked foreigners, medical and nongovernmental organization workers, and other civilians. The Taliban reportedly engaged in targeted killings of perceived opponents and in reprisal killings. After August 2021, senior Taliban leaders announced a wide-ranging general amnesty that prohibited reprisals, including against officials and others associated with the pre-August 2021 government, for actions before the Taliban takeover; however, there were credible reports of retaliatory acts, including targeted killings and disappearances. While Taliban representatives said that they do not endorse such actions, they did not consistently take steps to hold perpetrators accountable for these abuses.

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 reprisals against officials associated with the pre-August 2021 government, according to reports published by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Special Rapporteur (Special Rapporteur) about human rights in Afghanistan, and human rights groups. ISIS-K disproportionately targeted Hazara community members.

Between August 2021 and June, UNAMA Human Rights Service (HRS) recorded

160 targeted killings, 178 arbitrary arrests and detentions, 23 instances of incommunicado detentions, and 56 instances of torture and mistreatment of former security and pre-August 2021 government officials carried out by the Taliban. Between June and December, UNAMA documented at least 55 targeted killings, 102 arbitrary arrests and detentions, and 20 cases of torture and mistreatment. Reports of Taliban reprisal killings most often involved the targeting of individuals, many of them former government officials. For example, on February 22 in Laghman Province, a former local police officer was found dead from bullet wounds after being detained by the Taliban the prior day. The Taliban also targeted those holding lower-level positions in the pre-August 2021 government. For example, on May 18 in Takhar Province, the Taliban reportedly killed three men, all of whom had served as bodyguards for the former district governor.

There were also reports the Taliban arbitrarily killed civilians in Panjshir and Baghlan Provinces, allegedly as collective punishment against communities where the opposition group National Resistance Front (NRF) was active. UNAMA HRS reported that on January 20, Taliban forces entered a private home where they shot and killed eight NRF fighters and four civilians. The victims included a woman, two men, and one child.

According to local reports, on June 21, the Taliban beheaded a reported member of the NRF and then dumped his body into a river. The sources said the Taliban detained, physically abused, and then killed the man, allegedly because of his collaboration with the NRF in Panjshir Province.

On February 15, Taliban representatives publicly stoned a man and woman to death in the Nusay district of Badakhshan Province, accusing them of having an extramarital relationship. The decision to stone them was reportedly made by the Taliban district leader.

The Special Rapporteur said on June 27 that there were disturbing reports of targeted killings, civilian displacement, property destruction, and other human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law in Balkhab District. Verification of the incidents was not possible due to an information blackout, internet stoppage, and denial of access to media and human rights monitors.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on July 7 that “Taliban security forces have summarily executed and forcibly disappeared alleged members and supporters of an Islamic State offshoot in eastern Afghanistan. Residents have discovered the bodies of more than 100 men dumped in canals and other locations.” Shabnam Salehi, former Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) commissioner, tweeted: “This is, regrettably, the reality of Afghanistan. They carried out similar actions in Panjshir, Balkhab, Ghazni, and Spin Boldak.”

The Taliban did not report formal efforts to hold their police or militia accountable for these abuses. In September anonymous sources leaked a recording of the Taliban’s Minister of Interior Sirajuddin Haqqani criticizing Taliban members for failing to honor their amnesty pledge for pre-August 2021 officials and former ANDSF members. In the recording, Haqqani criticized the Taliban’s leadership for promising amnesty, which ultimately undermined their authority when “rogue” members violated this pledge.

b. Disappearance

The Taliban were responsible for forced disappearances.

A *New York Times* opinion video estimated that approximately 500 former government officials and military personnel were either killed or disappeared within six months of the Taliban occupation of the country. Early in the year, the Taliban detained women activists and their families in Kabul in retribution for participating in protests. Tamana Zaryab Paryani and Parwana Ibrahimkhel were detained on January 19 and Zahra Mohammadi and Mursal Ayar disappeared weeks later. The Taliban consistently denied detaining these four activists, who were released in mid-February, according to UNAMA. Forced disappearances continued throughout the year, and the Taliban detained three female human rights activists, Zarifa Yaqoubi, Farhat Popalzai, and Humaira Yusuf, in November. Yaqoubi’s release was confirmed by local media outlet Khaama Press in December, although no additional information was provided regarding the fate of fellow protesters Popalzai and Yusuf.

In March the NRF reported that the Taliban abducted two former government employees in Zabul Province, a former police battalion commander, Mirwais

Khoshhal, and a former national security officer, Mohammad.

On June 8, local news outlets reported that the Taliban had kidnapped a physician from the Mohammad Ali Jenah hospital. Obaidullah Rahmani's relatives did not receive any updates regarding him after his kidnapping. Local news reporting suggested Rahmani's kidnapping appeared to have been a part of a pattern of detentions and kidnappings targeting Panjshiris.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses

Although the 2004 constitution and law under the pre-August 2021 government prohibits such practices, there were numerous reports of 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. The Special Rapporteur report to the UN Human Rights Council noted that the incidence and types of abuse worsened during the year. The Taliban reportedly held detainees in poor conditions and subjected them to forced labor. UNAMA also reported that senior Taliban representatives held human rights defenders and journalists in private detention centers where they were abused and sometimes killed.

Local news agencies reported that on April 21, seven Afghan men were flogged and sentenced to prison by the Taliban's so-called supreme court after confessing to the sale and consumption of alcohol and car theft. According to the reports, this was the first application of *hudood* (flogging) since the Taliban's takeover. The men were each lashed 35 times and sentenced to up to six months in prison.

On July 27, Amnesty International reported that a female student was detained, threatened, and physically abused because she had traveled without a *mahram* (male relative escort). She said that the Taliban called her a prostitute, abused her with an electric taser, and threatened to kill her and then hide her body.

On August 7, in their first public acknowledgement of implementation of their sharia-based justice system, a Taliban spokesperson announced that the Taliban flogged two women and four men for adultery and robbery charges in Zabul's

provincial capital of Qalat.

Impunity was a significant problem among Taliban police and militia. The Taliban had not established a formal system of accountability for abuses or killings. On May 17, the Taliban disbanded the AIHRC, which had investigated abuses and killings. No domestic 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 the United Nations, the overall prison population decreased significantly to fewer than 10,000 persons as of August, yet the number of persons in pretrial detention increased. The Ministry of Interior and so-called General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) were responsible for most detentions.

There were some reports that the Taliban physically abused prisoners affiliated with the pre-August 15 government.

There were reports that the Taliban maintained separate detention facilities for political prisoners throughout the country, with credible reports describing beatings at these makeshift prisons.

Abusive Physical Conditions: On September 14, the UN secretary-general reported that problems persisted with the provision of adequate food and hygiene supplies, vocational educational training, and health needs in prisons for children and juveniles alike.

According to the Special Rapporteur's September report, the Sarposa Prison in Kandahar Province had "poor conditions including overcrowding, inadequate access to water, sanitation, sufficient and quality food, and medical services."

On December 7, UNAMA reported that children remained incarcerated alongside adults in most provincial prisons, often in a different wing or section, owing to insufficient funding to maintain separate juvenile facilities. In some locations, girls were held with women detainees. Subsequently, two additional separate

juvenile facilities started operating in Paktia and Baghlan Provinces, bringing the total to four.

Administration: UNAMA's HRS reported in July that Taliban representatives had taken over the administration of more than 41 prisons. On September 14, the UN secretary-general reported that the Taliban Office of Prison Administration – with technical advice provided by UNAMA – had taken concrete steps to strengthen the oversight of prison conditions and the protection of detainee rights with the creation of a monitoring committee in June. The secretary-general also reported that the committee conducted visits to more than 15 provincial prisons around the country to assess conditions and hear from detainees.

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 they arrived unannounced. In May the Taliban ended independent prison monitoring in the country by disbanding the AIHRC.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The 2004 constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The Taliban generally did not observe these requirements. Numerous reports indicated that the Taliban continued to detain citizens arbitrarily without a clear legal basis and without regard to substantive procedural legal protections. Local Taliban police reportedly detained persons capriciously on charges without a clear connection to any law. In its July report, UNAMA reported that the Taliban engaged in arbitrary and prolonged detention throughout the country. The public and justice-sector professionals lacked widespread understanding of the Taliban's policies for arrest and detention since the group took control.

In June the Taliban's so-called GDI posted a video showing four detained Afghan vloggers confessing to and apologizing for offensive acts, including stating that they "insulted" the Quran and would accept any punishment. Local media assessed these statements appeared staged and forced due to the appearance of bruises on the detainees (see also section 1.g.).

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Arbitrary Arrest: Despite the general amnesty announcement by the Taliban in August 2021, there were widespread reports of arbitrary detentions of individuals associated with the pre-August 2021 government for undefined periods. UNAMA reported 178 arbitrary detentions of former ANDSF and pre-August 2021 officials.

The Afghanistan Independent Journalists Association released a statement on June 13, stating that the association's provincial representative had gone missing from the Hessa Awal area of Kapisa. The same day, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) issued a tweet denouncing the "increase in arbitrary arrests of journalists," while asking the Taliban "to provide explanations." According to local news outlets, the representative was released in late September, after being detained by the Taliban for approximately four months. In July BBC News reported the Taliban confirmed detention of Australian journalist Lynne O'Donnell for "falsifying reports." O'Donnell claimed she was detained, abused, and forced to post a series of tweets falsely admitting her articles were untrue. On July 20, she tweeted: "Tweet an apology or go to jail, said #Taliban intelligence. Whatever it takes: They dictated. I tweeted. They didn't like it. Deleted, edited, re-tweeted. Made video of me saying I wasn't coerced. Re-did that too. #TwoTakesTaliban (I'm out now) #Afghanistan #journalism."

Also in July, UNAMA reported the Taliban had engaged in 22 arbitrary detentions and seven incidents of torture and mistreatment against those alleged to have ISIS-K affiliation between August 2021 and June. UNAMA also reported 113 arbitrary arrests and 23 cases of incommunicado detention. Most incidents were recorded in Baghlan and Panjshir Provinces, where the NRF was active.

In September U.S. engineer and Taliban hostage Mark Frerichs, a contractor captured in January 2020, was released in exchange for Haji Bashir Noorzai, a Taliban ally and heroin trafficker serving a life sentence in New York.

In December 2021, the Taliban released some of the Ahmadi Muslims they had detained, physically abused, and coerced into confessing to be ISIS-K members. The remaining detainees were released in July.

Pretrial Detention: The 2004 constitution provides a defendant the right to object

to his or her pretrial detention and receive a court hearing on the matter. Nevertheless, lengthy pretrial detention was the norm.

UNAMA reported that the total detained population, including those in custody, pretrial detention, and prison increased under the Taliban.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The 2004 constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but the Taliban did not uphold judicial independence. In 2021, the Taliban replaced most judges with sharia-trained judges, many of whom were not properly educated. Local press indicated that most courts were in effect defunct. According to UNAMA reports, the few operational courts run by the Taliban were not conducted transparently or in accordance with the law. As an example, judges often refused to hear complaints filed by women. In many rural areas, local elders and *shuras* (consultative gatherings, usually of men selected by the community) were the primary means of settling both criminal matters and civil disputes. They also often imposed punishments not consistent with formal laws. UNAMA and NGOs reported several cases where perpetrators of violence against women reoffended after their claims were ineffectually addressed by local-level mediation.

Trial Procedures

The 2004 constitution provides for the right to a fair and public trial, but the judiciary did not enforce this right. Criminal defendants were denied the right to a presumption of innocence; be informed promptly of the charges; a fair, timely, and public trial; be present at their trial; communicate with an attorney of their choice; have adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense; receive the free assistance of an interpreter; confront prosecution witnesses and present one's own witnesses and evidence; not be compelled to testify or confess guilt; and appeal. After August 2021, the Taliban changed the structure of the court system, removed judges across the country, replaced them with graduates of Taliban *madrassahs* (Islamic 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 or legal code but did not

produce any new formal laws or legal standards.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

The Taliban detained pre-August 2021 government officials, individuals allegedly spying for the pre-August 2021 government, and individuals allegedly affiliated with the pre-August 2021 government.

Amnesty: In August 2021, the Taliban announced a general amnesty for those who worked for or were associated with the pre-August 2021 government and those who had fought against the Taliban, saying they had been pardoned. Nonetheless, there were numerous reported incidents of Taliban reprisal killings of these persons throughout the year (see section 1.a.).

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Taliban changes to the judicial system largely denied citizens' access to justice for human rights abuses. In May the Taliban dissolved the AIHRC, which reviewed and submitted credible complaints to the Attorney General's Office for further investigation and prosecution. The Taliban did not announce any plans to replace it.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The 2004 constitution prohibits such actions, 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. These actions defied instructions from a December 2021 decree by the so-called acting minister of the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice and Complaints that Taliban members should not violate anyone's privacy, including through unnecessary searches of phones, homes, and offices. The decree stated that any Taliban who committed these privacy violations would be punished; however, there were no indications that this order was upheld.

In February Kabul residents told Reuters the Taliban searched homes

indiscriminately. In one example, the Taliban conducted an unannounced search of the house of a formerly licensed lawyer twice, took pictures of his license, and inquired regarding his work with the U.S. military.

In early March *The New York Times* reported that the Taliban searched the home of Ghulam Farooq Alim, a Kabul resident and university professor, claiming to be in search of weapons and threatening to impound a vehicle for improper registration.

In October as part of the group's ban on girls attending secondary school, reports surfaced that Taliban members were mandating "puberty checks" on girls as young as 10 in primary schools and expelling those who appeared to have reached puberty.

g. 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. According to the International Crisis Group, the Taliban's attempts to suppress actual or suspected armed opponents created conditions that may drive individuals to extremism.

Killings: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) data pointed to at least 1,163 attacks on civilians resulting in 1,008 fatalities during the year. The Taliban were responsible for 840 of these attacks and 645 of the fatalities, followed by ISIS-K with 30 attacks with 85 fatalities. UNAMA recorded 2,106 civilian casualties between August 2021 and June 15 (700 killed, 1,406 wounded), resulting from indiscriminate improvised explosive device (IED) attacks claimed by ISIS-K. Among the casualties were 88 women (37 killed, and 51 wounded) and 441 children (159 killed and 282 wounded). UNAMA recorded an additional 1,089 civilian casualties (243 killed, 846 wounded) between June 15 and December 7. A lull in the frequency and severity of ISIS-K attacks on civilians between December 2021 and March was followed by a series of IED attacks in April deliberately targeting religious and ethnic minorities, especially Hazaras.

The attacks also targeted Shia communities in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, as well as Sufi gatherings in Kabul and Kunduz, killing scores.

On June 20, HRW announced that Taliban fighters in the Panjshir Province in the northern part of the country detained, tortured, and killed persons suspected of having links to armed opposition groups. In response to these conflicts, according to HRW, the Taliban sent thousands of its fighters to Panjshir and began door-to-door search operations to find suspected opposition group sympathizers. Similar Taliban search operations in other provinces resulted in the Taliban summarily executing prisoners and other detainees. Media reports in June indicated the Taliban beheaded four civilians in Baghlan Province and shot and killed a family with two young children on charges of cooperating with the NRF. In September in an audio message, NRF leader Ahmad Massoud expressed condolences for alleged Taliban execution-style killings of NRF fighters in Panjshir.

On April 19, ISIS-K orchestrated the bombing of a large public school in Dasht-I-Barchi, a working-class neighborhood in the center of Kabul's Hazara community. The attack reportedly killed nine and wounded 19. On September 30, a suicide bomber attack on Kaaj Higher Educational Center in the same neighborhood killed more than 60 persons.

Abductions: The UN secretary-general's *2021 Children and Armed Conflict Report*, released in June, cited 25 verified incidents of the Taliban abducting children in 2021. Of those, 20 children were released, and the whereabouts of five children remained unknown. According to HRW, Taliban security forces detained approximately 80 residents in Panjshir's Khenj district and beat them to compel them to provide information regarding the NRF. After several days, the Taliban released most of the detainees but continued to hold 10 whose relatives they accused of being members of the group.

Child Soldiers: Under the pre-August 2021 government's law, recruitment of children in military units carried a penalty of six months to one year in prison. On March 27, Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada issued a decree banning child recruitment by Taliban members, and the Taliban claimed that they did not allow children younger than 18 to join any of their forces. The *Children and Armed Conflict Report* verified the recruitment and use in the country of at least 58 boys,

of whom 34 were attributed to the Taliban.

According to findings by the All Survivors Project, 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 remain involved in bacha bazi and child soldiering. In at least four cases across the country, boys ages 14-16 reported being abused by the Taliban. Reports indicated that child soldier recruitment by the Taliban and bacha bazi incidents increased during the year, despite their prohibition. The UN Special Rapporteur’s September report stated that the killing and maiming of children, mostly by explosive remnants of war, accounted for 72 percent of the recorded 636 violations affecting 489 children between January and June. The UN Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting verified 522 grave violations against 269 children (including 47 girls) from September 14 to December 7. The killing and maiming of children remained the most prevalent violation, affecting 267 children (64 killed, 203 maimed).

The U.S. government has determined that children were recruited or used as child soldiers in the country from April 2021 to March. Please see the Department of State’s annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Other Conflict-related Abuses: There were several border clashes between actors in the country and its neighbors. According to the BBC, a December 12 dispute between the Taliban and Pakistan at the Chaman-Spin Boldak border crossing resulted in a Taliban attack that killed six civilians and injured 17 others in Pakistan.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

The 2004 constitution provides for freedom of speech, including for the press, but the Taliban did not respect this right. The Taliban made public statements indicating that press protections remain in place, but the group announced a series

of edicts restricting the media's operation in November 2021 in line with their interpretation of sharia. These edicts 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 chilling effect on civil society. In October an RSF survey showed that in the year since August 12, 2021, the country had lost approximately 40 percent of its media outlets and an estimated 60 percent of its journalists, especially women journalists, three quarters of whom became unemployed.

On March 27, the Taliban barred private TV stations from presenting Voice of America (VOA) and BBC programming, with Pashto, Persian, and Uzbek programming ordered off air.

On May 7, the Taliban decreed that Afghan women must cover themselves head to toe, an expansion of restrictions on female dress. The Taliban "Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice" suggested the burqa as the preferred garment and said failure to abide by hijab in public would result in the summoning of male family heads to the "ministry." Defiance would result in jail time for the male head of household. The "ministry" also ordered all female presenters on TV channels to cover their faces on air according to TOLONews.

On June 12, a local print media outlet published an editorial expressing the need for critical journalism to prevent the Taliban from radicalizing the country and to expose pro-Taliban media outlets that manipulated the truth in exchange for Taliban favors. The editorial stressed that critical journalism must be factual and uncensored and should resist collusion and corruption. The editorial was published on the same day RSF released a report describing the rise in journalist detentions, with at least 12 journalists arrested in May. The report claimed that despite the Taliban-controlled "Ministry of Information and Culture" reestablishing the pre-August 2021 government's Media Offenses Verification Commission and the Commission for the Right of Access to Information, the commissions had failed to prevent arbitrary detention of journalists in the country.

On September 26, local media persons told *Hasht-e Subh Daily* newspaper that the Taliban had imposed new restrictions on the presenters of television programs. According to the persons, the Taliban told managers of media outlets that male and

female presenters would not be able to present joint programs, effective immediately. The Taliban reportedly said that only Taliban-approved panelists would be able to appear on television shows discussing politics, and that women's interviews would be broadcast with their faces covered. Media contacts in the country said that television presenters and media officials were told of these new restrictions verbally by a representative from the Taliban's "Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice." The "ministry" announced additional restrictions that bar men and women from watching television together, prohibit women television presenters from interviewing men, mandate that women wear black inside television studios, and require gender-segregated seating in media offices.

In October international journalists reported that the Taliban had increasingly impeded journalists' ability to work in the country by controlling entry into the country. Journalists were being denied visa renewals when they were in country; denied visas to enter if they apply outside of the country; and if they were able to receive permission to enter, they were limited to 30-day stays, when previously it was at least 90 days.

Freedom of Expression: Following the Taliban's announcement of strict edicts on media operations, 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 of the Taliban also holding male family members responsible for the actions of their female relatives, including for criticism of the group.

Violence and Harassment: There were numerous reports that journalists were subjected to violence, harassment, and intimidation by the Taliban. RSF registered 50 cases of Taliban violence against journalists from August 2021 to July. Reporting from RSF indicated the so-called GDI was primarily responsible for detaining journalists, often violently.

According to RSF, a senior Taliban member told several media outlets in February to stop covering certain subjects "if you don't want me to rip your tongue out." On

June 13, the Afghanistan Independent Journalists Association reported that the association's provincial representative went missing from the Hessa Awal area of Kapisa the previous day.

On June 15, Taliban members beat Ikram Esmati, a former reporter of Kabul News TV, for disobeying their edicts by trimming his beard and wearing a suit. According to social media and local news reports, the Kabul chief of police committed to investigating the case but had not done so as of December.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: Prior to the Taliban's takeover, independent media outlets were active and expressed a wide variety of views. The Taliban's so-called Supreme Leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada issued a decree on July 22 warning that "defaming and criticizing government officials without proof" and "spreading false news and rumors" are forbidden under Islam and that those who "slander" government employees are unwittingly collaborating with the enemy and will be "punished."

Taliban censorship and threats of detention and violence against journalists drove several media organizations to close and journalists to flee. Since August 2021, the Taliban had detained at least 80 journalists for varying lengths of time. According to RSF, Khalid Qaderi, a poet and journalist with Herat-based Radio Noroz, Mirza Hassani, owner of Radio Aftab in Daikundi Province, and Abdul Hanan Mohammadi, a Kapisa-based reporter for Pajhwok News remained in detention as of November.

On October 3, the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology said it shut down the websites of *Hasht-e Subh Daily* and *Zawia News* due to the outlets publishing alleged "false propaganda" against the Taliban, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. In August the Taliban admitted it blocked 23 million "immoral" websites, which it said broadcast un-Islamic content. In the previous 12 months, four new media outlets were created by Taliban while more than 200 had closed, according to RSF. Overall, the country had lost nearly half of its media outlets since August 2021. In addition, more than 7,000 journalists became unemployed, most of them women.

In September 2021, the Taliban issued a set of 11 media directives including a requirement that media outlets prepare detailed reports in coordination with a new so-called governmental regulatory body and prohibited media from publishing reports that were “contrary to Islam,” “insult national figures,” or “distort news content.” The directives also included prohibitions on “matters that could have a negative impact on the public’s attitude or affect morale [and] should be handled carefully when being broadcast or published.” The Taliban’s enforcement of these restrictions resulted in widespread self-censorship among the domestic media due to of Taliban retribution.

On March 18, Al Jazeera reported that TOLO TV staff were arrested after the channel broadcasted a report on the Taliban’s ban of foreign TV drama series.

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 their own messages. The Taliban instituted internet blackouts – or severe slowdowns – in locations of active dissent and following periods of political discord in the population. The group also shut down two news websites in October.

During intermittent fighting in Panjshir, the Taliban shut down the internet in the province to restrict the transmission of information regarding fighting and communication between residents and the outside world.

Restrictions on Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The Taliban announced in 2021 it would review subjects to be taught to ensure compliance with the Taliban’s interpretation of sharia, while also committing to not change the curriculum to a madrassah-style religious education. In December a local media outlet published the Taliban’s proposal to significantly modify the education curriculum, which recommended removing several textbooks and subjects. The main specific proposals included removing images of all living beings, propagating Jihad (a struggle against the purported enemies of Islam),

opposition to women's education and freedom, and propagating the Taliban's narrative of history that focuses on the Islamic world and largely ignores the non-Islamic world.

Public universities reopened in February to both men and women, six months after the Taliban takeover. The Taliban required universities to enforce gender segregation, including staggered operating hours and separate classes for men and women, requiring women to wear hijabs, forbidding women to give presentations or speak to male teachers, and prohibiting women from learning certain subjects. The Taliban allowed men and women to continue attending private universities together until late December, when an edict prohibiting female attendance at both public and private universities was issued. In June the Taliban forbade the teaching of Jafari (Shia) jurisprudence at the University of Bamyan, according to media reports, instead requiring that Hanafi jurisprudence be taught.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Taliban restricted freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The 2004 constitution provides for the right of peaceful assembly, but the Taliban did not respect it. A limited number of public protests occurred during the year compared with 2021, when there were numerous small-scale protests by women demanding equal rights, participation in decision making, and access to education and employment. In 2021, Taliban members suppressed several women's protests using force, including live ammunition, batons, whips, pepper spray, and tear gas. According to the Special Rapporteur, the Taliban also conducted house raids targeting protesters, likely heightening the public's fear of reprisals for expressing dissent. According to HRW, three Afghan women who were detained for protesting Taliban abuses in February described receiving torture and other severe mistreatment by the Taliban while in custody.

On August 13, Taliban members opened fire on approximately two dozen women who were leading a protest in Kabul demanding "bread, work, freedom," and political participation. Taliban members reportedly seized the mobile phones and cameras of local journalists covering the protest before detaining them.

On September 29, Taliban forces used gunfire to disperse a women's rally in Kabul that was held in support of protests in Iran regarding the death of woman in police custody. The United States Institute of Peace reported that since the onset of women's protests in Iran, women in Kabul had experienced additional abuses by the Taliban, including being subjected to beatings.

Freedom of Association

The 2004 constitution provides 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 their takeover.

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 provides 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 they prevented certain political figures associated with previous administrations from travelling abroad. Women were prohibited from freely moving around the country or internationally without a mahram.

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 without a mahram. 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 the ability of most women to access 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 the right to travel is guaranteed by Islam. Enforcement of these regulations was inconsistent. Citizens with valid passports and visas for third countries were generally permitted to depart the country. Reports indicated that applications for passports surged during the year, which, combined with a confirmed overall shortage of passports, led to approximately a six-month backlog before passport issuances stopped altogether.

Anecdotal reports suggested passports were not always issued impartially but rather reserved for individuals whom the Taliban deemed “unproblematic” or who could pay substantially higher prices for their passports. Some individuals associated with the pre-August 2021 government reported being detained and beaten following their visit to passport offices.

Reports also suggested the inconsistent application of Taliban instructions to airlines that women departing on flights do so only with a mahram.

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.

Abuse of Migrants and Refugees: The IOM estimated that all returning migrants required humanitarian assistance. Between January and September, the IOM recorded a total of 866,889 undocumented Afghans returning or being deported from Iran and Pakistan. From August 2021 to August, the IOM provided direct assistance to more than 64,000 returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) across 11 provinces. Between January and September, UNHCR reported that the number of registered Afghan refugees returning to the country had increased to more than 3,500, surpassing the approximately 1,300 returns from 2021. Returnees stated that the main reasons for return movements from Iran and

Pakistan were the cost of living and lack of employment opportunities in host countries, reunification with family, and an improved security situation.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

The IOM and UNHCR estimated there were more than five million IDPs in the country displaced by both conflict and natural disasters, including both newly displaced individuals and those that had experienced protracted displacement. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated a total of 30,205 persons were displaced between January and September 25. In June UNHCR estimated that 158,000 displaced persons returned to the country after fighting subsided following the August 2021 Taliban takeover.

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 female head, faced difficulty obtaining basic services because they did not have identity documents. Many IDPs in urban areas reportedly faced discrimination, lacked 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.

Protection concerns were increasingly reported to humanitarian agencies, with growing protection needs for persons with disabilities, the elderly, female-headed households, and sexual and gender minorities. The economic and liquidity crisis since the Taliban takeover, lower agricultural yield due to drought conditions, unreliable electricity supply, and deteriorating infrastructure combined to worsen the humanitarian crisis.

g. Stateless Persons

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

In September 2021, after the Taliban takeover, the Taliban’s so-called chief justice stated the country would follow the 1964 constitution with modifications until it drafted a replacement document. There was no specific clarification regarding whether there would be future elections or other representative processes, but the Taliban announced in December 2021 that it was disbanding the Independent Election Commission, the Electoral Complaints Commission, and the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, stating they were “unnecessary for current conditions.” The Taliban’s restrictions on women’s participation in public life largely prohibited women from contributing to any political processes.

Elections and Political Participation

Elections and Political Participation in Recent Elections: Elections were last held in 2019, and President Ghani’s second five-year term began in April 2020. President Ghani fled the country on August 15, 2021. In September 2021, the Taliban’s spokesperson said future elections would be considered in the process of establishing a new constitution, but there was no subsequent indication of plans to hold a national election.

Political Parties and Political Participation: Since August 2021, the Taliban effectively consolidated all political power within its group and disenfranchised all non-Taliban ethnic groups by prohibiting the legal formation and participation of additional political parties. Political parties that were active in 2021 ceased operations after the Taliban’s takeover of Kabul. The Taliban held a Ulema Gathering, formally known as The Grand Assembly of Ulema, in Kabul from June 30 to July 2. This gathering of exclusively male Taliban hand-picked religious leaders and elders – known as “ulema” – in Kabul aimed to lend legitimacy to the rule of the “Islamic Emirate.” In a September press conference, the Taliban’s so-

called Deputy Minister of Justice Abdul Karim Haidar claimed that political parties were useless because they divide citizens into different groups.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority 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 political discourse.

Since the Taliban's takeover, women were largely excluded from political participation and electoral opportunities. In June and July, the Grand Assembly of Ulema convened by the Taliban included only male clerics and public figures. While most Taliban members are ethnic Pashtuns, some members of other ethnic groups have supported the Taliban and were included in these *loya jirgas* (great councils).

In many regions, traditional societal practices, and a December 2021 ban on women travelling outside of the home without a mahram, limited women's participation in politics and activities outside the home and community, including the need to have a male escort or permission to work. The 2016 electoral law mandated that 25 percent of all provincial, district, and village council seats "shall be allocated to female candidates." Neither district nor village councils were established by year's end. Women active in government and politics before August 2021 continued to face threats and violence and were targets of attacks by the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

In September 2021, the Taliban announced a caretaker government, dominated by ethnic Pashtun members with no women and only a few members of minority groups. In late December 2021, the Taliban announced that a second member of the Hazara minority had been appointed to the so-called government, this time as deputy minister for economic affairs. In September 2021, the Taliban closed the Ministry of Women's Affairs and announced that their reconstituted so-called Ministry of the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice would be housed in its building.

According to media reports, the Taliban repressed members of the lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) community and would not allow members of historically marginalized minority groups to participate in its so-called ministries and institutions (see section 6). LGBTQI+ persons reported intimidation from Taliban members as a significant deterrent to generally go in public spaces, keeping them from participating in any political process.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law under the pre-August 2021 government provides criminal penalties for corruption by government officials.

The Anti-Corruption Justice Center (ACJC) had jurisdiction over corruption crimes allegedly committed by high-ranking government official of pre-August 2021 government. The Taliban's so-called supreme court disbanded the ACJC and other special courts such as Counter Narcotics Justice Center and Elimination of Violence Against Women Court. The Taliban's so-called Public Security and the Military Courts adjudicated the corruption cases under the so-called supreme court.

Taliban members reportedly used public property for personal purposes. For example, Taliban commanders used cars and helicopters in wedding parties.

Corruption: There were numerous reports of corruption by the Taliban. There were reports of corruption within the Taliban's passport offices, with applicants paying between \$1,000 to \$3,500 to obtain a passport, according to local sources. In an August VOA article, Shirshah Quraishi, the so-called deputy director of the Taliban's passport department, acknowledged the corruption, urging media to help report it. He claimed the Taliban had arrested more than 350 corrupt individuals.

There also 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, although several noted that some of these Taliban-affiliated families were also legitimately in need. Local representatives who oversaw compiling lists for aid recipients reportedly received names from Taliban commanders or mullahs instead of conducting needs surveys.

According to local and social media reports, in September thieves stole \$800,000

from the Taliban-appointed finance minister's residence, leading news organizations to question why he had such a large sum at his home.

The Taliban announced anticorruption policies following their takeover of Kabul in August 2021, including the creation of commissions to identify corrupt or criminal Talibs. The Taliban also launched a commission through their so-called Ministry of Defense to identify members who were flouting the movement's directives. A spokesman for the group said 2,840 Taliban members were dismissed on charges of corruption and drug use in January. Cross-border trading had reportedly become much easier under Taliban stewardship with elimination of the "gifts" usually required for Customs officials.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental 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 previous government, as well as targeted killings and forced disappearances of journalists and activists.

Since their takeover of Kabul, the Taliban closed most official bodies responsible for protecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens, including the Electoral Commission and the Ministry for Women's Affairs. The United Nations sharply criticized the Taliban's closure of the AIHRC in May, calling it a "deeply retrograde step." The Taliban routinely interfered in the operations of international and nongovernmental organizations. In September UNAMA released a statement that called on the group to stop intimidating its local female staff, after three of its Afghan female employees were temporarily detained by Taliban

representatives. In the statement, UNAMA noted “there has been an emerging pattern of harassment of Afghan UN female staff by the de facto authorities.”

In December the Taliban issued two decrees that further curtailed the rights of women; the first decree prohibits women from accessing education at the college and university level, and the second decree prohibits women from working in NGOs, leading many groups to cease operations across the country. The mahram decree also greatly constrained female humanitarians’ ability to carry out their work. There were reports in August that the so-called Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice had recruited additional female staff to enforce its interpretation of Islamic law more effectively, especially its mahram decree.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders (HRDs): Women organizing for women’s and girls’ rights, civil society activists, and others who publicly dissented Taliban policy were subject to arbitrary detentions or disappeared. Amnesty International reported a girl, age 13, was one among several who disappeared after protesting the Taliban’s edicts limiting the rights of women and girls. According to persons who spoke with Amnesty International, those who faced arbitrary detention had no access to a lawyer, and their cases remained with the so-called General Directorate of Intelligence or the Taliban’s so-called Ministry of Interior. As of March, only one case had been sent to the Taliban’s prosecutor’s office. Notable disappearances included activist Tamana Zaryab Paryani, activist Parvama Ibrahimkhel, and three of Paryani’s sisters, who disappeared in January. Unknown users posted a video to social media that alleged they had been abducted by Taliban members. All the women were released in February. The Taliban consistently denied responsibility for their disappearances.

According to interviews conducted by Amnesty International, the Taliban discouraged victims’ families from publishing information on their cases or talking to the media. They also reported fear of speaking out because of potential Taliban reprisal. A lack of clear accountability within the Taliban rank and file also contributed to the intimidating environment for the victims’ families.

Forced disappearances of women human rights activists continued throughout the year. On November 4, the Taliban arrested journalist and human rights activist Zarifa Yaqoubi while she was attending a press conference in a Hazara

neighborhood in West Kabul. During the press conference to announce the formation of the Afghan Women's Movement for Equality, the Taliban disrupted the event by arbitrarily arresting women journalists and activists and taking them to an undisclosed location. Amnesty International reported that prominent young activist Farhat Popalzai, one of the founders of the Spontaneous Movement of Afghan Women, was arrested by the Taliban on November 8. Amnesty International also noted that on November 13, another woman human rights defender, Humaira Yusuf, was taken into custody by the Taliban. Yaqubi's release was confirmed by local media outlet Khaama Press in December, although no additional information was provided regarding the fate of her fellow protesters Popalzai and Yusuf.

Government Human Rights Bodies: Under the 2004 constitution, the government is required to support the AIHRC. The AIHRC highlighted human rights problems, but it received minimal government funding and relied almost exclusively on international donor funds. The Taliban curtailed almost all AIHRC operations after they occupied Kabul in August 2021 and dissolved the AIHRC in May.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

After August 2021, the Taliban issued a series of repressive edicts effectively barring the participation of women and girls from most education, employment, recreational activities, and independent travel. These edicts, and their sometimes violent enforcement, severely reduced the ability of women and girls to participate in the economy and society. Opportunities for redress for abuses were slim to nonexistent under the Taliban.

Nearly all protection shelters for women and girls were closed after the Taliban takeover of Kabul. The shelters were looted, assets confiscated, and staff were harassed and abused. Taliban members stated survivors of abuses should resolve issues within their family unit. Since August 2021, Taliban police held women in detention centers after they reported gender-based violence.

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape against both women and men. The de facto dismantling of the justice system by the Taliban severely eroded enforcement of these laws.

The support system for survivors of rape and most protection services were dismantled following the Taliban's takeover. Since August 2021, UNAMA's HRS received 87 reports of killing, rape, suicide, forced marriages including child marriage, assault and battery, and honor killings. None of the cases were processed through the formal justice system.

On January 12, representatives of a large provincial hospital in the country said they recorded 150 to 200 cases involving injuries from gender-based violence in a 10-day period, compared with approximately 70 to 100 cases a day before August 2021. There were reports that restricted access to health care and an unwillingness of women to report domestic violence severely decreased the number of cases reported to hospitals.

Domestic violence is 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. Following August 2021, the AIHRC, Afghanistan Independent Bar Association, and specialized judicial infrastructure aimed at ending violence against women were dismantled. Women who previously served as judges, lawyers, and prosecutors fled or were replaced by former Taliban fighters and madrassah graduates, who often lacked legal training or expertise.

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

The law criminalizes forced gynecological exams, which acted as "virginity tests," except when conducted pursuant to a court order or with the consent of the subject. Awareness and enforcement of the restrictions on forced gynecological exams remained limited. There was insufficient information to determine whether the practice of forced gynecological exams continued under the Taliban.

Few women and family protection centers remained operational under the Taliban. When the shelters closed, many clients were reintegrated with their families or

relocated. The Taliban reportedly intimidated and abused staff of some shelters before they closed.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence: Under the 2004 constitution, the law criminalizes 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 reaffirmed the criminality of forced marriages in a decree issued on December 3, 2021. The practice of exchanging brides between families was not criminalized and remained widespread. "Honor killings" reportedly continued throughout the year.

A December 2021 Taliban decree concerning women's rights states the following protections: women have the right to consent to marriage and cannot be forced; a widow has *miras* (inheritance rights) in relation to the property of her husband, children, father, and relatives; widows also have the right to receive a *mahar* (dowry) from a new husband; women in a polyamorous marriage are afforded rights in accordance with sharia; and the so-called supreme court must ensure courts consider applications involving women.

While these protections are stated in the decree, there were reports that judges and provincial governors were involved in upholding forced marriages. For example, a woman and her brother were summoned to court in Uruzgan Province on February 15 because of a marriage proposal she repeatedly refused. The so-called judges attempted to force her to accept the proposal and beat her and her brother severely when she refused. She and her brother fled their home, fearing further retribution, and her other brother was detained to compel her to accept the proposal. In another example, a girl, age 15, was sold by her father to marry a man she did not want to marry. She married another man to avoid the marriage supported by her father, which led to the father filing a complaint against her with the so-called authorities. She was arrested, imprisoned for 10 days, and then transferred to a provincial prison for further investigation.

Sexual Harassment: The law criminalizes all forms of harassment of women and children, including physical, verbal, psychological, and sexual harassment. The Taliban did not enforce the law.

After the Taliban takeover, most women-led businesses suspended operations due to the liquidity crisis and fear of violating Taliban edicts against women in the marketplace.

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

Women faced new barriers to receiving health care due to Taliban restrictions on male-female interactions, work, and travel. According to a study conducted by HRW, 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 have a male chaperone. Women can see female doctors, but it was difficult to find them because of restrictions the Taliban placed on women working. Additionally, there were reports of women facing difficulties entering health clinics because they were not accompanied by a mahram. In an interview with the magazine *Foreign Policy*, a midwife recounted that two unaccompanied women who came to her clinic were forced out of the clinic by Taliban fighters and beaten with the butts of the fighters' rifles.

Having a child outside of wedlock is a crime, but the punishment was unclear. In early February, a local doctor reported a woman in labor arrived alone, gave birth, and fled without her child because she was not married and feared retribution. Three days later, the Taliban reportedly detained the midwife and her husband and were moving to prosecute all 18 employees of the clinic. Mothers faced severe social stigma for having a child out of wedlock, even when the pregnancy was a result of rape. Abortion or ending a pregnancy was classified as a crime under the law and was punishable by three months to one year's imprisonment.

Women must obtain their husband's consent to use contraception under the law. Persons with disabilities faced increased barriers to reproductive health resources because of decreased access to transportation, education, and social support. HRW and Outright International, an LGBTQI+ rights NGO, conducted interviews with 60 members of the LGBTQI+ community from October to December 2021. The interviewees reported being attacked, sexually assaulted, or directly threatened by members of the Taliban because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Widespread discrimination and abuse prevented most members from seeking reproductive or sexual-health assistance from all but the most trusted confidants.

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. The World Health Organization reported that the country had 638 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2017 (the most recent year of reported data). A survey conducted by the Central Statistics Organization in the provinces of Bamyan, Daikundi, Ghor, Kabul, Kapisa, and Parwan concluded that many factors contributed to the high maternal death rate, including early pregnancy, narrowly spaced births, and high fertility. Some societal norms, such as a tradition of home births and the requirement for some women to be accompanied by a male relative to leave their homes, led to negative reproductive health outcomes, including inadequate prenatal, postpartum, and emergency obstetric care.

The World Bank reported an adolescent fertility rate of 162.8 births per 1,000 women ages 15-19 in 2021 (the most recent data available).

The Taliban permit women to continue their roles as health practitioners, but many women were reportedly afraid to work due to safety and security concerns related to the Taliban's stated policies restricting women in the workplace. The ever-smaller number of qualified female health practitioners steeply increased the risk of poor health outcomes for women.

Discrimination: The Taliban's edicts formalized discrimination and exclusion of women and girls from most aspects of society and at a nationwide level. After the Taliban takeover, most female judges fled the country or went into hiding.

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

In September 2021, the Taliban regulated dress codes for female journalists and

banned women from acting in films. In December 2021, Taliban edicts stated women were not allowed to travel further than 50 miles unless accompanied by a mahram and are required to wear a hijab when in a vehicle.

In February the Taliban allowed resumption of classes at public universities for men and women. It was reported that 123,000 women had returned in varying capacities to public and private universities. All classes were gender-segregated, and Taliban monitors required women to wear head coverings. On December 20, the Taliban issued an edict prohibiting female attendance of both public and private universities.

A long-anticipated resumption of secondary schools did not materialize in March, and the Taliban ban on female attendance remained in effect in most of the country. In April the Taliban prohibited female professors and students from attending meetings with male instructors. The same announcement also required male and female students to attend separate graduation ceremonies and advised female students to fully cover themselves and not to share any photographs or videos of their graduation ceremonies on social media.

In a press conference on February 27, Taliban so-called spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid stated that women cannot travel abroad unless accompanied by a mahram. This edict was reinforced on March 24, when the Taliban ordered travel agencies across the country to not sell airplane or travel tickets to women without a mahram. Officials at the Kabul International Airport were instructed through a letter from the Taliban that unaccompanied women must not be allowed to travel.

On March 27, the Taliban issued a directive to owners of all Kabul entertainment parks, gardens, and picnic venues to ensure gender-segregated use of these areas by specific days, and for women to strictly adhere to hijab requirements. The Taliban expanded this edict in November, when they banned women from using public parks, gyms, and baths.

On May 7, the Taliban held a press conference to announce the new hijab requirements. The Taliban issued a decree that requires women to wear hijabs that cover their head, face, and full body in public. The decree also set out an “encouragement and punishment” process whereby male family members would

be informed of a woman's violation of the decree and the male family member would be punished with prison time after multiple offenses. The decree noted that female employees who do not abide by the regulation will be immediately dismissed, and male employees whose spouses and daughters do not comply will be suspended.

Women were able to continue in some Taliban roles, including at passport offices, airports, and women's prisons, but the majority were relegated to their homes in what activists described as de facto house arrest. Many female employees of the pre-August 2021 government, besides those working in health and education services, remained at home.

Female students initially allowed to attend university faced further restrictions because of the mahram requirement. In an interview conducted by Rakhshaneh media, female students reported that the Taliban's mahram policy forced their families to prevent them from continuing their education away from home. The students reported that they wanted to transfer to closer universities to make the travel restriction easier on their family.

The Taliban issued a December 20 edict with immediate effect prohibiting female attendance of 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 female dormitories, failure of females to observe the Islamic veil, continued interactions between men and women on campus, and women studying subjects not appropriate for women's dignity. A December 21 letter from the Ministry of Education created confusion regarding the Taliban's policy on girls' access to education and may have impeded girls' ability to attend private schools, religious schools, and tutoring centers to include the levels of grades 1-6 in the final days of the year.

On December 24, the Taliban ordered all local and international NGOs to stop their Afghan female employees from coming to work, citing the nonobservance of Islamic dress rules and other laws and regulations as reasons for their edict.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

Religion and ethnicity in the country are often closely linked, making it difficult to

attribute many incidents to religious identity alone. Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, Ahmadi Muslims, and other non-Muslim minorities reported continued harassment and repression under the Taliban.

Religious minorities were at risk and faced numerous violent attacks. In November and December 2021, the Taliban arrested 28 members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Kabul. According to the members of this community, the Taliban falsely accused them of being members of ISIS-K. Some of the detainees were released in December 2021, while the remaining detainees were released in July.

The Baha'is also faced abuse in the country and began concealing their religious identity.

Ethnic tensions continued to result in conflict and killings. Societal discrimination against Hazaras continued in the form of extortion of money through illegal taxation, forced recruitment and forced labor, physical abuse, and detention. There were many reports that Taliban fighters, ISIS-K members, and other unknown actors targeted and killed members of the Hazara community. ISIS-K claimed responsibility for at least 16 attacks against Hazaras that killed and injured more than 700 individuals, including attacks at mosques and schools in Hazara neighborhoods.

On April 22, ISIS-K bombed a mosque with Hazara worshippers and killed at least 33 and injured more than 43. A September 30 attack at the Kaaj Education Center in Dasht-e-Barchi Kabul, a Hazara neighborhood, killed at least 60 persons. Many Hazaras considered Taliban policies – marginalizing Hazara civil servants, heavily restricting the commemoration of Ashura – and Taliban failure to prevent violent ISIS-K attacks against their communities as a concerted effort to eradicate the Hazara community altogether.

Following his May visit to the country, the Special Rapporteur called for investigations into a series of attacks claimed by ISIS-K on places of worship and schools in Kabul, Kunduz, and Balkh Provinces. He said such attacks specifically targeting members of the Hazara, Shia, and Sufi communities were becoming increasingly systemic in nature and reflect elements of an organizational policy.

Sikhs and Hindus faced discrimination, reporting unequal access to government jobs, harassment in school, and verbal and physical abuse in public places. Most of the Sikh and Hindu community sought to depart the country. Religious representatives estimated that fewer than 100 Hindus and Sikhs remained. Only a small number of them desired to remain in the country, generally to care for their temples.

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

Children

Birth Registration: A citizen father transmits citizenship to his child. Birth in the country or to a citizen mother alone does not bestow citizenship. Adoption is not legally recognized.

Education: Education is compulsory through the ninth grade, generally six to 15 years old. In March the Taliban announced secondary schools would remain closed to girls. This restriction directly and systematically excludes 1.1 million girls from secondary school. Despite this restriction, in April UNAMA assessed 25 percent of girls were attending secondary school across nine provinces of the 34 provinces. There was significant variability within the district and individual school level on how many girls attended secondary school. Poverty was a major factor suppressing enrollment across gender and grades. Additionally, there are reports that the Taliban converted some public school buildings into madrassahs.

On December 20, the Taliban issued an edict prohibiting female attendance of both public and private universities.

The United Nations verified 53 terrorist attacks on schools during the year.

Child Abuse: The law criminalizes child abuse and neglect, but the Taliban did not enforce the law. UNAMA recorded 441 child casualties (159 killed, 282 wounded) between August 2021 and June. Many of the casualties resulted from attacks on civilians and explosive remnants of war.

Children were frequently jailed alongside adults. The Taliban allowed continued

operation of shelters for boys who were survivors or at risk of abuse or trafficking in persons, but not for girls.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age for marriage is 16 for girls, or 15 with the approval of their father or a judge. The legal minimum age for marriage for boys is 18. Child, early, and forced marriage was common across the country and was exacerbated by the economic crisis. A 2021 UNICEF study found that 28 percent of women ages 15 to 49 were married by age 18. In March UNICEF said that their implementing partners were reporting elevated rates of child marriage in cities, rural areas, and among internally displaced families.

There were reports of families accepting marriage proposals for their underage daughters to afford food for their other children. VOA interviewed a widow who accepted a marriage proposal on behalf of her daughter, age 14, to feed her other four children. The daughter's husband, age 28, paid \$2,300 for the daughter after pursuing her for months. Taliban spokesman Sadiq Akif told VOA that according to sharia, a girl can be ready for marriage once she reaches puberty.

There were also cases of girls being married young because of the systemic exclusion of girls from secondary education. A girl, age 17, from Ghor Province reported that her father ordered her to marry because she had no other life prospects (due to her exclusion from secondary school). A teacher from Sar-e-Paul Province reported that families were forcing their daughters to marry because they no longer saw another future for them. A woman with six children reported marrying off her daughter, age 13, to her neighbor, age 30, and was considering marrying off her other daughter, age 10, because it was the only way for them to provide for the family.

In December 2021, Taliban so-called supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada announced a public decree banning the forced marriage of women. The decree sets out the rules governing marriage and property for women, stating that women should not be forced into marriage and widows should have a share in their late husband's property. The decree mandates that courts should consider these rules when making decisions, and religious affairs and information ministries should promote these rights.

Reports of child and forced marriages increased. Reported drivers included economic pressures, lack of educational and professional prospects for girls, and Taliban fighters forcing women and girls to marry them, which families tried to avoid by marrying their daughters at a younger age.

Societal pressures and the Taliban practice of arranging marriages for widows forced women into unwanted marriages.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The Taliban had long insisted that bacha bazi is against Islamic law; however, multiple human rights groups reported its prevalence in many parts of the country, including by Taliban members.

Institutionalized Children: There were no recent reports on the state of orphanages; however, there was a report of the Taliban detaining more than 10,000 beggars in October, 2,505 of whom were children. The Taliban categorized just over half of the children as entitled to beg, just under half as professional beggars, and 50 as orphans. There was no additional information on where the Taliban sent these children or if they arranged for adequate care.

Antisemitism

There were no known reports of antisemitic acts. There are no confirmed Afghan 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 criminalizes consensual same-sex sexual activity, and representatives routinely enforced this position through violence, intimidation, harassment, and targeted killings. Under sharia, conviction of same-sex sexual conduct is punishable by death, flogging, or imprisonment. Individual Taliban

members made public statements reiterating that their interpretation of sharia includes the death penalty for homosexuality.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: The Taliban takeover of the country increased fears of repression and violence among LGBTQI+ persons, with many individuals going into hiding to avoid being captured by the Taliban. Many fled the country after August 2021. LGBTQI+ persons faced increased threats, attacks, sexual assaults, and discrimination from Taliban members, strangers, neighbors, and family members.

OutRight International and HRW conducted interviews with 60 members of the LGBTQI+ community from October to December 2021. The interviewees reported being attacked, sexually assaulted, or directly threatened by members of the Taliban because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Others reported abuse from family members, neighbors, and romantic partners who supported the Taliban or believed they had to abuse LGBTQI+ persons close to them to ensure their own safety. Some LGBTQI+ persons fled their homes because of attacks by Taliban members or Taliban supporters pursuing them. LGBTQI+ persons reported that discrimination included sexual violence, child and forced marriages, physical violence from their families and others, expulsion from schools, blackmail, and nonconsensual outing. According to the interviews, Taliban members assaulted individuals at checkpoints for wearing clothes that did not conform to accepted gender norms and searched their cell phones and belongings for evidence that they were LGBTQI+. Two gay men reported they were raped or blackmailed into sex by Taliban members. Several interviewees reported that they knew of LGBTQI+ persons who had gone missing or were believed to have been killed.

In another example, a man had to pass through Taliban checkpoints to collect his paycheck from his former office. Armed Taliban fighters shouted a derogatory term for gay persons at him, hit his throat to silence him, and then punched him in the stomach and kicked him in the back. He was then loaded into a car and moved to a new location, where four men whipped him and then gang-raped him over the course of eight hours. When they released him, the Taliban members told him they would come for him again.

A woman who identified as a lesbian was reportedly discovered with her female partner before the Taliban takeover and was subjected to a forced marriage. Initially, when she refused to marry, Taliban soldiers beat her until she complied. After her marriage, someone told her new husband that she was a lesbian, leading to her husband reportedly beating her nearly every day.

A transgender woman was confronted by a group of more than 20 of her neighbors, who called her slurs while beating and stripping her. She was then kidnapped and detained by the Taliban for 10 days. While the Taliban detained her, they forced her to be naked, mocked her body, and beat her until she was covered with bruises and had a broken nose. Her head and eyebrows were roughly shaved, which created several cuts. She judged her injuries were meant as a warning for other members of the LGBTQI+ community.

In October it was reported that Hamed Sabouri, a gay medical student, age 22, was shot and killed by the Taliban. Sabouri's execution was filmed by the Taliban, and the video was sent to members of his family and friends. Sabouri's boyfriend was arrested by the Taliban twice and sexually assaulted while in prison. Upon escape, he went into hiding but served as part of the leadership of a collective for LGBTQI+ persons in the country. He told the media: "The Taliban didn't only kill Hamed Sabouri. They buried the aspirations of 1,250 Afghan LGBTQ+ who are part of Behesht Collective and the hundreds of thousands of LGBTQ+ outside of our network who remain stuck in Afghanistan."

There was no sufficient documentation of the killings of and violence against suspected LGBTQI+ persons because of stigmatization and fear of being identified through reporting. The by Outright International and HRW report noted the Taliban prohibited women from traveling without male relatives, so lesbians and bisexual women could not escape on their own, which forced them to stay in violent situations and restricted their ability to report abuses.

Discrimination: LGBTQI+ individuals reported facing arrest by Taliban police and militia as well as rampant discrimination, assault, and rape. There were reports of harassment and violence of LGBTQI+ individuals by society and police. Same-sex sexual conduct is 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 said 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 is no legal pathway for transgender or gender nonconforming individuals to change their gender identity. According to local and regional medical experts, dozens of gender reassignment surgeries were performed before the Taliban takeover. One doctor, possibly the only in the country, who performed gender affirming surgeries for transgender persons before the Taliban takeover has been threatened by the Taliban and forced to cease providing this care.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: The country's culture insists on compulsory heterosexuality, which forced LGBTQI+ individuals to acquiesce to life-altering decisions made by family members or society. According to an OutRight Action International and HRW report, LGBTQI+ Afghans were often forced into child or arranged marriages by family members. Once married, LGBTQI+ individuals were under intense pressure from family members to have sex with their spouse and have children.

One gay man reported being asked repeatedly by his parents to perform ablutions after having sex with his wife, which he found "intrusive." After finding it "hard to have sex with his spouse," a doctor prescribed medicine to him. Another gay man, who was forced to marry at age 16, reported that his parents brought his wife to the city he had relocated to and forced them to have sex. A transgender woman reported that even before the Taliban takeover, she "had been brutally raped" for three days by men who vocalized their objection to the makeup and clothes she wore. Lesbian and bisexual women and transgender men also faced high levels of violence within marriage and were impacted by societal pressure to marry, but

Outright and HRW reported that data was difficult to obtain due to the Taliban's prohibitions on women and general fear of reprisal.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:

LGBTQI+ individuals could not assemble, associate, or express themselves publicly due to fear of being killed, attacked, or outed by the Taliban. According to local LGBTQI+ individuals, the Taliban takeover "shattered" a hidden but present LGBTQI+ community. There were no legally registered LGBTQI+ rights organizations, and there were scant informal networks.

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.

HRW estimated that 90 percent of persons with disabilities were unemployed because of entrenched social biases and faced barriers to accessing public services, including health and education.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The pre-August 2021 government's law provides for the right of workers to join and form independent unions and to conduct legal strikes and bargain collectively. The Taliban did not officially rescind these laws, but their actions indicated they were not enforcing 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

The pre-August 2021 law narrowly defined forced labor and does not sufficiently criminalize forced labor and debt bondage. Men, women, and children were subjected to bonded labor, a form of forced labor by which traffickers offer loans and manipulate the debts to coerce workers into continued employment. The pandemic, economic crisis, drought, and food insecurity increased the risk of exploitation by traffickers, particularly in bonded labor, as individuals took out loans to cover expenses and paid increasing prices to migrant smugglers. Many persons may have been at risk of forced labor in fields or as mules to transport drugs. In previous years, NGOs confirmed reports of children used to support opium poppy cultivation and harvesting, as well as drug production and smuggling. Many individuals subjected to forced labor were children, who were forced to work in carpet making, brick kilns, domestic servitude, sex trafficking (including bacha bazi, see section 1.g.), domestic work, herding livestock, begging, poppy cultivation and harvesting, salt mining, drug smuggling, weapons trafficking, and truck driving. Some parents with substance use habits reportedly forced their children into labor, namely street begging. After August 2021, restrictions on the movement of women and girls severely diminished access to employment and education opportunities and increased their vulnerability to forced labor. Also see the Department of State's *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/>, the Department of Labor's *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* at <http://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods/>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The 2004 constitution prohibits discrimination and notes that citizens, both "man

and woman,” have equal rights and duties before the law. It expressly prohibits discrimination based on language.

The Taliban explicitly discriminated against the employment of women through the imposition of onerous restrictions upon the movement, dress, and enjoyment of freedom of expression of women (see section 2.a.). Taliban representatives also stated women were banned from most employment opportunities while also claiming women could keep their jobs only if they were in a role a man could not fill. On July 18, *The Guardian* reported that women were asked to nominate a male family member to replace them in their jobs, but that this was voluntary. On December 24, the Taliban expanded this prohibition to ban women from working in NGOs.

There were reports the Taliban dismissed women from most civil service jobs outside of health, education, and a few other fields. Some female civil servants who approached their supervisors to discuss their pay and employment were told to communicate their concerns via male family members. The Taliban’s gender-segregation standards, which effectively barred women from obtaining a secondary education, were disenfranchising them from professional employment. In December 2021, Taliban representatives put the country’s Independent Bar Association under the control of the Ministry of Justice, dismissing female employees and revoking the credentials of female lawyers and declaring only Taliban-approved lawyers may represent clients at Islamic courts. Since then, female law students reported they were unable to take law examinations or renew their licenses. Meanwhile, men took their oral re-examinations and reported that exam questions were taken from religious subjects.

As of December 2021, OCHA mapped the agreements between aid agencies and the Taliban in each of the country’s 34 provinces, showing where female staff members would be permitted to work. The document, reviewed by HRW, indicated that as of October 28, Taliban representatives in only three provinces had provided a written agreement unconditionally permitting women aid workers to do their jobs. The Taliban’s December 24 ban on women working for NGOs subsequently placed a ban on female aid workers across the country. Ethnic Hazaras, Sikhs, and Hindus faced discrimination in hiring and work assignments, in addition to broader social discrimination (see section 6, Systemic Racial or

Ethnic Violence and Discrimination).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: Since August 2021, the Taliban did not have enforced minimum wage, overtime, or wage or hour standards.

The law provides 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 has 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 enforce minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws.

Informal Sector: In October the World Bank reported that self-employment was the most prevalent form of employment in the country, composed mainly of vulnerable informal positions in the agriculture and services sectors. The private sector contributed significantly to the economy but was largely informal. Overall, the private sector was estimated to contribute to more than half the country's GDP.