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Country Policy and Information Note

Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation

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Preface

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and policy guidance to Home Office decision makers on handling particular types of protection and human rights claims. This includes whether claims are likely to justify the granting of asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave and whether – in the event of a claim being refused – it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under s94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers must consider claims on an individual basis, taking into account the case specific facts and all relevant evidence, including: the policy guidance contained with this note; the available COI; any applicable caselaw; and the Home Office casework guidance in relation to relevant policies.

Country information

COI in this note has been researched in accordance with principles set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#) and the [European Asylum Support Office’s research guidelines, Country of Origin Information report methodology](#), namely taking into account its relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity, currency, transparency and traceability.

All information is carefully selected from generally reliable, publicly accessible sources or is information that can be made publicly available. Full publication details of supporting documentation are provided in footnotes. Multiple sourcing is normally used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, and that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided. Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source is not an endorsement of it or any views expressed.

Feedback

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The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to make recommendations to him about the content of the Home Office’s COI material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office’s COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Policy guidance

Updated: 15 August 2017

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 That the general humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is so severe as to make removal to this country a breach of Articles 15(a) and 15(b) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 (the Qualification Directive) / Articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. and/or
- 1.1.2 That the security situation presents a real risk to a civilian's life or person such that removal would be in breach of Article 15(c) (serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence) of the Qualification Directive.

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 Anti-government elements (AGEs) and pro-Government armed groups have been responsible for serious human rights abuses (see the country policy and information note on [Afghanistan: fear of anti-government elements \(AGEs\)](#)).
- 2.2.2 If there are serious reasons for considering that the person has been involved with these groups then decision makers must consider whether one of the exclusion clauses is applicable.
- 2.2.3 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection.
- 2.2.4 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the guidance on [Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 Assessment of risk

a. Refugee convention

- 2.3.1 A state of civil instability and/or where law and order has broken down does not of itself give rise to a well-founded fear of persecution for a Convention reason. However, decision makers must first consider if the person faces persecution or serious harm for a Refugee Convention reason. This might include, but is not limited to, being targeted because the person is perceived to support the government and/or international forces (see the country policy and information notes on [Afghanistan: fear of anti-government elements](#); [Afghanistan: women fearing gender based harm/violence](#); [Afghanistan: sexual orientation and gender identity](#); and [Afghanistan: Hindus and Sikhs](#)).
- 2.3.2 Where the person qualifies under the Refugee Convention, decision makers do not need to go on to make an assessment of the need for protection firstly under Articles 15(a) and 15(b) of the Qualification Directive/ Articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and if that is unsuccessful, under Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive.
- 2.3.3 It is only if the person does not qualify under the Refugee Convention that decision makers need to make that assessment.

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b. Humanitarian situation

- 2.3.4 In the country guidance case of [AK \(Article 15\(c\)\) Afghanistan CG \[2012\] UKUT 00163\(IAC\)](#) (18 May 2012), which was heard on 14-15 March 2012 having considered evidence up to early 2012, the Upper Tribunal held that there was little evidence of significant numbers of the urban poor and IDP population in Kabul suffering destitution or inability to survive at subsistence levels (paragraph 225). It also noted that, whilst the importance of return and reintegration packages for UK returnees to Kabul should not be exaggerated, they did, nevertheless, place returnees in a better position than that of other IDPs (paragraph 224).
- 2.3.5 The armed conflict in Afghanistan continues to contribute to a significant number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Newly internally displaced persons in 2016 were recorded as 651,751 in 32 of 34 provinces. On average, 1,500 people were forced to leave their homes each day to escape violence. Increasing numbers of IDPs live in informal settlements in Afghanistan's major urban centres (see [internally displaced persons \(IDPs\)](#) and Repatriations and socio-economic conditions – [Kabul](#)).
- 2.3.6 However, since [AK](#) was promulgated in 2012, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has not deteriorated to the extent that it represents, in general, a real risk of harm contrary to Article 15(b) of the Qualification Directive/Article 3 of the ECHR (see [Humanitarian situation](#)).
- 2.3.7 Decision makers must consider on the facts of the case whether a returnee, by reason of their individual vulnerability, may face a real risk of harm contrary to Article 15(b) of the Qualification Directive/Article 3 of the ECHR as a result of the humanitarian situation.
- 2.3.8 For further guidance see the [Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection](#).

b. Security situation

- 2.3.9 Unlike Article 3 ECHR, Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive applies only to civilians, who must be genuine non-combatants and not those who are party to the conflict. This could include former combatants who have genuinely and permanently renounced armed activity.
- 2.3.10 In the country guidance case of [AK \(Article 15\(c\)\) Afghanistan CG \[2012\] UKUT 00163\(IAC\)](#) (18 May 2012), which was heard on 14-15 March 2012 having considered evidence up to early 2012, the Upper Tribunal held that despite a rise in the number of civilian deaths and casualties and an expansion of the geographical scope of the armed conflict in Afghanistan, the level of indiscriminate violence in the country taken as a whole was not at such a high level as to mean that, within the meaning of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive, a civilian faces a real risk to his life or person solely by being present in the country (paragraph 249B(ii)).
- 2.3.11 The Upper Tribunal in [AK](#) held that those parts of Kabul city where returnees are most likely to live are 'the poorest areas of the city or its environs' and have been less affected by indiscriminate violence, stating that the 'great majority [of attacks] have concentrated on areas where the government or international organisations have their offices or where their employees frequent' (paragraph 226).
- 2.3.12 The Tribunal further held that, even in the provinces worst affected by violence, 'which may now be taken to include Ghazni but not to include Kabul', the level of indiscriminate violence did not reach the Article 15(c) threshold (paragraph 249B(ii) and (iii)).
- 2.3.13 In regard to Kabul city, the UT found that
'... given the fact that this has a reported population of around 5 million and that Kabul province does not feature in any list of the most violent provinces, the argument for any engagement of the Article 15(c) threshold, if based primarily on civilian deaths, is even weaker [than Kandahar and Helmand, the provinces with the highest number of civilian deaths, and Ghazni, a province with a significant rise in violent incidents]' (paragraph 219).
- 2.3.14 Since the promulgation of [AK](#) in May 2012 the overall number of civilian deaths and injuries in Afghanistan documented by UNAMA has increased. The number of civilian casualties in 2016 (11,418 – 3,498 deaths and 7,920 injured) has increased by 32% compared to 2011 (7,842) – the highest since recording began in 2009; and a 3% increase in total civilian casualties compared to 2015 (see [casualties in the conflict](#)).
- 2.3.15 The worst affected areas were the southern and eastern provinces of Helmand, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Kunar and Ghazni, which experienced 50% of all security related incidents. The Taliban increased their activities in northern and north-eastern Afghanistan and Farah in the west, as well as putting pressure on the Government's control of the provincial capitals of Farah (Farah province), Kunduz (Kunduz province), Lashkar Gah (Helmand province) and Tirin Kot (Uruzgan province) (see [Geographical distribution of violence](#)).

- 2.3.16 Reflecting the worsening security situation, the first six months of 2017 saw the highest numbers of civilian casualties recorded in Kabul province due to suicide and complex attacks in Kabul city. However, nearly 60% of civilian casualties in Kabul city were caused by a single suicide attack in May 2017, and the number of high profile attacks in the city in 2016 decreased from 2015 (see [Geographical distribution of violence](#) and [Kabul](#)).
- 2.3.17 The proportion of civilian casualties in Afghanistan remains low with around 0.03% of the population injured or killed each year (taking the 2016 UNAMA numbers against a population estimate of around 30 million). The proportion of civilian casualties recorded in Kabul city in the first six months of 2017 equates to 0.02% of the city's population (see [Population](#) and [Kabul](#)).
- 2.3.18 In addition, the Government retains control of Kabul, other major population centres, most key transit routes, provincial capitals, and a majority of district centres. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) continue to maintain control of, and are generally able to protect, all major population centres (see [District control](#)).
- 2.3.19 UN data shows the number of overall returns to Afghanistan increased in 2016 by 85% compared to 2015. The three most common destinations for returnees from Western countries, who sought support from the International Organization for Migration, were Herat, Kabul and Balkh province (Mazar-e-Sharif) (see [Repatriations and socio-economic conditions](#)).
- 2.3.20 In the judicial review of [HN & Ors, R \(on the application of\) v Secretary of State for the Home Department \(JR - scope - evidence \(IJR\) \[2015\] UKUT 437 \(IAC\) \(27 July 2015\)](#) the Upper Tribunal held that 'Within the limitations of a judicial review challenge and the hearing which has taken place we find no warrant for departing from the current country guidance promulgated in [AK](#). In particular, we find that the evidence falls short of satisfying the stringent Article 15(c) test' (paragraph 98). This finding was upheld by the Court of Appeal on 3 March 2016 in the case of [HN & SA \(Afghanistan\) \(Lead Cases Associated Non-Lead Cases\), R \(on the application of\) v The Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2016\] EWCA Civ 123](#).
- 2.3.21 Even though there is no general Article 15(c) risk, decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors relevant to the person's individual circumstances which might nevertheless place them at risk.
- 2.3.22 For guidance on humanitarian protection and Article 15(c), including consideration of enhanced risk factors, see the [Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection](#).
- 2.3.23 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#)

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2.4 Internal relocation

See also [Repatriations and socio-economic conditions](#)

a. Kabul

- 2.4.1 In [AK](#), when assessing whether Kabul city was a viable internal relocation alternative, the Upper Tribunal found that in general, return to Kabul was neither unsafe nor unreasonable (para 249B (iv)).
- 2.4.2 The Upper Tribunal qualified the above point, holding that it would be unreasonable to expect lone women and female heads of household to relocate internally without the support of a male network (para 249B (v)).
- 2.4.3 The evidence continues to support this position (see [Impact on women and children](#) and the country policy and information note on [Afghanistan: Women fearing gender-based harm/violence](#)).

b. Outside Kabul

- 2.4.4 In [AK](#), the Upper Tribunal observed that ‘In relation to Ghazni... we note that it is accepted that there are significant numbers of districts in that province under Taliban control (although not the city itself) and we do not exclude that, for most civilians in such districts that is a factor that may make it unreasonable for them to relocate there, although that is not to say that a person with a history of family support for the Taliban, would have difficulties; much will depend on the particular circumstances of the case. Outside Taliban controlled districts, however, we do not find that internal relocation would in general be unreasonable’ (paragraph 244).
- 2.4.5 Although not making a finding, the Upper Tribunal made the following observation concerning internal travel: ‘... we are bound to say that nothing in the evidence before us indicates that the main routes of travel from Kabul to other major cities and towns experience violence at an intensity sufficient to engage Article 15(c) for the ordinary civilian. The position may be different when it comes to travel from the main cities and towns to villages: we note in this regard that Dr Giustozzi...said that “[m]ost indiscriminate violence occurs in the shape of pressure mines, which are indiscriminate by nature. The risk is mainly on the roads connecting the provincial and district cities to the villages.” Routes of this kind may be under the control of the Taliban and/or other insurgents and hence will require a case-by-case approach. It is true that the FCO, among others, has issued travel guidance warning against travel to certain parts of Afghanistan (including Ghazni) but they have not done so seeking to apply legal criteria’ (paragraph 245).
- 2.4.6 The evidence still supports this position. Internal relocation is generally likely to be reasonable (see also [geographical distribution of violence](#)).
- 2.4.7 For further guidance on internal relocation and factors to consider, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Certification

- 2.5.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.5.2 For further information and guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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3. Policy summary

- 3.1.1 The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has not deteriorated to the extent that it represents, in general, a real risk of harm contrary to Article 15(b) of the Qualification Directive/Article 3 of the ECHR, although individual factors must be taken into account.
- 3.1.2 Country guidance caselaw has established that the level of indiscriminate violence in Afghanistan taken as a whole is not at such a high level as to mean that, within the meaning of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive, there are substantial grounds for believing a civilian faces a real risk to his life or person solely by being present in the country.
- 3.1.3 Despite a 32% increase in civilian casualties since 2011, the violence varies significantly from province to province and is not at such a level that there is a general Article 15(c) risk. However, a person's individual circumstances might nevertheless place them at risk and each case must be considered on its facts.
- 3.1.4 Whilst return or relocation to Kabul is, in general, considered reasonable, decision makers must take account of the city's current humanitarian and security situation. It is unreasonable to expect lone women and female heads of household to relocate internally in the city.
- 3.1.5 The Afghan government remains in control of all major population centres. Internal relocation outside of Taliban-controlled areas is considered, in general, to be reasonable, although individual factors must be taken into account.

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Country information

Updated 15 August 2017

4. Geography and demography

4.1 Population

- 4.1.1 The CIA World Factbook estimated the population of Afghanistan to be 33,332,025 (July 2016)¹. Afghanistan's Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) estimated the population in 2017-2018 to be approximately 29.7 million (15.2 million male; 14.5 million female)².
- 4.1.2 Afghanistan is divided into 34 provinces; sub-divided into 398 districts³. By regions, the provinces are⁴ (CSO estimated population in brackets⁵):
- Centre:** Kabul (4,679,648); Kapisa (455,574); Panjshir (158,548); Parwan (687,243); Wardak (615,992); Logar (405,109);
- Central Highlands:** Bamyán (462,144); Daykundi (475,848);
- South:** Nimroz (170,790); Helmand (955,970); Kandahar (1,279,520); Uruzgan (362,253); Zabul (314,325);
- South-East:** Ghazni (1,270,192); Paktika (449,116); Paktya (570,534); Khost (593, 691);
- East:** Nangarhar (1,573,973); Laghman (460,352); Kunar (465,706); Nuristan (152,845);
- North-East:** Baghlan (943,394); Kunduz (1,049,249); Takhar (1,017,575); Badakhshan (982,835);
- North:** Faryab (1,032,765); Jawzjan (559,691); Sar-e Pul (578,639); Balkh (1,382,155); Samangan (401,134);
- West:** Herat (1,967,180); Badghis (512,518); Ghor (713,158); Farah (524,657).
- 4.1.3 See the [Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, 'Afghanistan'](#) for a map of Afghanistan's administrative divisions.

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¹ CIA World Factbook, 'Afghanistan', (People and society), updated 19 June 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>. Accessed: 30 June 2017

² Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Central Statistics Organisation, Population, (page III), <http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/%D8%AA%D8%AE%D9%85%DB%8C%D9%86%20%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B3/Final%20Population%201396.pdf>. Accessed: 30 June 2017

³ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Central Statistics Organisation, Population, (page III), <http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/%D8%AA%D8%AE%D9%85%DB%8C%D9%86%20%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B3/Final%20Population%201396.pdf>. Accessed: 30 June 2017

⁴ European Asylum Support Office (EASO), 'EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (page 17), November 2016, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_security_report.pdf. Accessed: 30 June 2017

⁵ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Central Statistics Organisation, Population, (page 2), <http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/%D8%AA%D8%AE%D9%85%DB%8C%D9%86%20%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B3/Final%20Population%201396.pdf>. Accessed: 30 June 2017

5. Conflict in Afghanistan

- 5.1.1 For a brief history on conflict in Afghanistan, from Soviet intervention to the US-led invasion and onwards, see the [BBC News timeline of events](#)⁶, the European Asylum Support Office [EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation](#)⁷, and the [Congressional Research Service ‘Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy’](#)⁸.

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6. Actors in the conflict

- 6.1.1 For an overview of actors in the conflict, including pro-government forces, pro-government militias, international military forces, and anti-government elements (AGEs), see the country policy and information note on [Afghanistan: fear of anti-government elements \(AGEs\)](#)⁹ and the [EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation](#)¹⁰.

- 6.1.2 The Security Council Report (SCR), an independent and impartial organisation, whose mission is to advance the transparency and effectiveness of the UN Security Council, reported in its June 2017 Monthly Forecast for Afghanistan that:

‘With NATO assistance, Afghan security forces have continued to counter the activities of the Taliban, Al-Qaida, and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the eastern parts of the country. The US Central Command announced on 13 April [2017] that US forces had dropped the most powerful non-nuclear bomb (GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast) ever used in military operations in Afghanistan. The bomb targeted a series of underground tunnels used by ISIL fighters in Achin district in Nangarhar province. The strike was aimed at minimizing the risk to Afghan and US forces conducting clearing operations in the area. According to Afghan officials, the strike killed at least 36 ISIL fighters and did not cause any civilian casualties. On 7 May, the US military confirmed that the leader of the ISIL branch in Afghanistan was killed in a joint US-Afghan military operation conducted in April in Nangarhar province.

‘In late April, the Taliban announced the start of the annual spring offensive, vowing attacks on the government and foreign forces in Afghanistan. During the past few months, the Taliban has claimed responsibility for a series of

⁶ BBC News, ‘Afghanistan profile – Timeline’, 8 March 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12024253>. Accessed: 30 June 2017

⁷ EASO, ‘EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation’, (Sections 1 and 1.1), November 2016, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_security_report.pdf. Accessed: 30 June 2017

⁸ Congressional Research Service, ‘Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy’, 19 May 2017, <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>. Accessed: 7 July 2017

⁹ Home Office, ‘Country Policy and Information Note: Afghanistan: Fear of anti-government elements (AGEs)’, December 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghanistan-country-policy-and-information-notes>. Accessed 3 July 2017

¹⁰ European Asylum Support Office, ‘EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation’, (Section 1.2), November 2016, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_security_report.pdf. Accessed: 30 June 2017

deadly attacks throughout the country... In May, Taliban and ISIL fighters intensified their attacks, targeting Afghan security forces and civilians throughout the country...¹¹

- 6.1.3 The UN Secretary General's (UNSG) quarterly report of March 2017 stated: 'There has been no discernible progress towards a peace process between the Government and the Taliban. The implementation of the peace agreement of 29 September 2016 with Hizb-i Islami Gulbuddin advanced with the removal of the group's leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, from the list of individuals sanctioned under resolution 1267 (1999)...
- 'Representatives of Hizb -i Islami Gulbuddin continued negotiations with the Government on issues such as the release of prisoners and accommodation arrangements for affiliates expected to return from Pakistan. The prospect of Mr. Hekmatyar's return to Kabul has been cause for concern among his political rivals, who believe that a united Hizb -i Islami Gulbuddin under his leadership could become the country's largest political party. Human rights advocates have expressed their concern about the agreement, given its failure to fully address victims' grievances and suspected human rights violations.'¹²
- 6.1.4 The SCR added 'On 29 April [2017], Hekmatyar made his first public appearance in Afghanistan after 20 years of hiding when he spoke at a rally for his supporters in Laghman province. He called on the Taliban and other opposition groups to join the reconciliation efforts. Hekmatyar repeated that message on 4 May during a ceremony hosted by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in the presidential palace in Kabul.'¹³
- 6.1.5 In its Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict for 2016 the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) noted 'The increased capacity of Daesh/ISKP to strike beyond its perceived areas of influence and presence in eastern Afghanistan exacerbated the escalation in conflict and deteriorating security environment. The nature of attacks perpetrated by Daesh/ISKP is indicative of attempts to expand the conflict along sectarian lines, further compounding concerns for the protection of civilians.'¹⁴

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¹¹ Security Council Report, 'June 2017 Monthly Forecast – Afghanistan', 31 May 2017, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2017-06/afghanistan_21.php. Accessed: 3 July 2017

¹² UN Secretary-General (UNSG), 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security', (paragraph 9), 3 March 2017, A/71/826–S/2017/189, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/58c276634.html>. Accessed 6 July 2017

¹³ Security Council Report, 'June 2017 Monthly Forecast – Afghanistan', 31 May 2017, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2017-06/afghanistan_21.php. Accessed: 3 July 2017

¹⁴ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016', (page 10), February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf. Accessed: 6 July 2017

7. Security situation

7.1 Overview

7.1.1 According to the Global Peace Index (GPI) 2017, Afghanistan ranks the second least peaceful country in the world after Syria. The GPI report noted that 'Afghanistan's overall score deteriorated for the sixth successive year as overall hostility continued to increase. Fierce rivalry within the political leadership, factionalism and growing discontent with government policy has ensured a deterioration in the number and duration of internal conflicts.'¹⁵

7.1.2 The UNSG reported in June 2017 that:

'The security situation remained very volatile, with an increase in security incidents in the first five months of the year over the same period in 2016. On 31 May [2017], Kabul witnessed a suicide attack, which killed at least 65 people and injured more than 300, further straining the already fragile political situation and leading to several days of public demonstrations, some of which became violent. High levels of violence against civilians and significant internal displacement continued to be recorded.'¹⁶

See also [Security incidents](#) and [Kabul](#).

7.1.3 The Security Council Report (SCR), an independent and impartial organisation, whose mission is to advance the transparency and effectiveness of the UN Security Council, reported in its June 2017 Monthly Forecast for Afghanistan that 'With no reliable agreement on the peace process and an ongoing Taliban offensive, the insurgency continues to take a heavy toll on the civilian population and Afghan security forces.'¹⁷

7.1.4 In a survey of 12,658 Afghan respondents from 16 ethnic groups in all 34 provinces, conducted in 2016 by the Asia Foundation, a non-profit international development organisation, 69.8% of respondents reported that they sometimes, often, or always felt fear for their personal safety, the highest level in over a decade. Fear for personal safety was most prominent in the south-west region, particularly Helmand province. The survey also indicated that 'Overall, perceptions of ISIS/Daesh as a security threat decreased, from 54.2% in 2015 to 47.9% in 2016.'¹⁸

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¹⁵ The Institute for Economics and Peace, 'Global Peace Index 2017', (page 19), June 2017, <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2017/06/GPI17-Report.pdf>. Accessed: 3 July 2017

¹⁶ UN Secretary-General (UNSG), 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security', (paragraph 3), 15 June 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_afghanistan_-_15_june_2017.pdf.

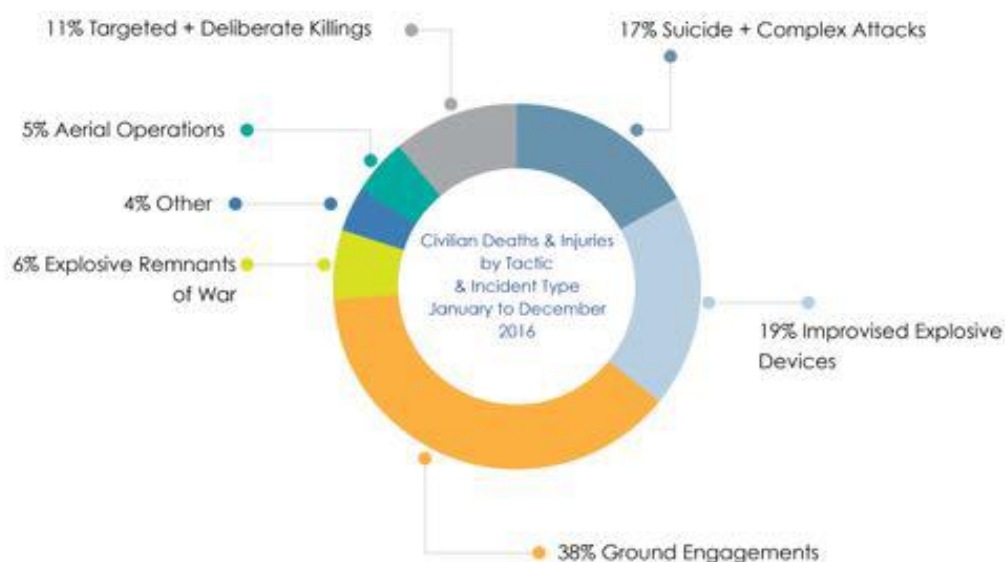
Accessed: 12 July 2017

¹⁷ Security Council Report, 'June 2017 Monthly Forecast – Afghanistan', 31 May 2017, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2017-06/afghanistan_21.php. Accessed: 3 July 2017

¹⁸ The Asia Foundation, 'A Survey of the Afghan People – Afghanistan in 2016', (page 7), December 2016, http://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016_Survey-of-the-Afghan-People_full-survey-Apr2017.pdf. Accessed: 14 July 2017

7.2 Nature of violence

- 7.2.1 UNAMA noted that, in 2016, ground engagements remained the leading cause of civilian casualties, accounting for 38% of conflict-related injuries and deaths¹⁹.



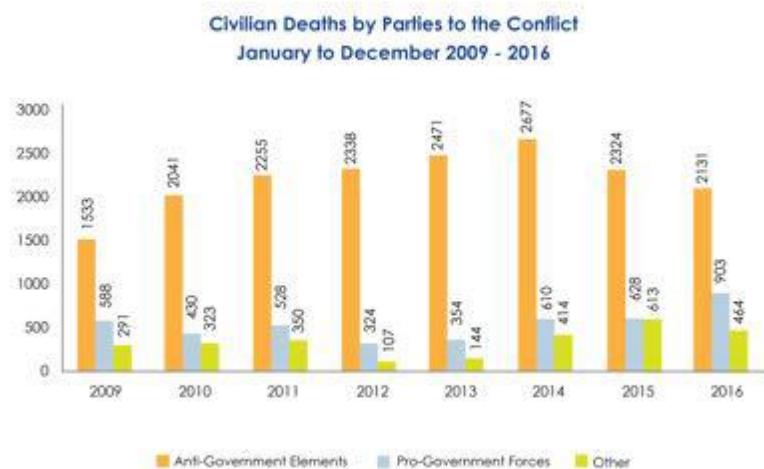
Casualties by tactic 2016 1

- 7.2.2 UNAMA attributed 61% of all civilian casualties to Anti-Government Elements (mostly Taliban, and mostly from the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs); 24% to Pro-Government Forces (20% to Afghan national security forces; 2% to pro-Government armed groups; and 2% to international military forces). Ground engagements in which neither party could be attributed accounted for 10% of civilian casualties. The remaining 5% could not be attributed to any party and were mainly as a result of explosive remnants of war²⁰.
- 7.2.3 UNAMA indicated a huge increase in civilian casualties attributed to Daesh/Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) – from 82 in 2015 (39 deaths and 43 injured) to 899 in 2016 (209 deaths and 690 injured). UNAMA noted that the groups' primary tactics were suicide attacks and targeted killings, particularly targeting members of the Shia Muslim religious minority²¹.

¹⁹ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016', (page 5 and 39), February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf. Accessed: 6 July 2017

²⁰ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016', (pages 6-7), February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf. Accessed: 6 July 2017

²¹ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Annual Report on



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7.3 Casualties in the conflict

- 7.3.1 In its Afghanistan Midyear Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, reporting on the first half of 2017 (1 January to 30 June), the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented a total of 75,443 civilian casualties (26,512 deaths and 48,931 injured) since 1 January 2009²³. In 2016 UNAMA documented the highest number of civilian casualties – 11,418 (3,498 deaths and 7,920 injured) – since recording began in 2009; a 3% increase in total civilian casualties compared to 2015²⁴. The focus of Taliban attacks continued to be government security forces and facilities, as well as media professionals, civilian Government workers, judicial staff, tribal elders and humanitarian de-miners²⁵.

Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016', (page 7), February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf. Accessed: 6 July 2017

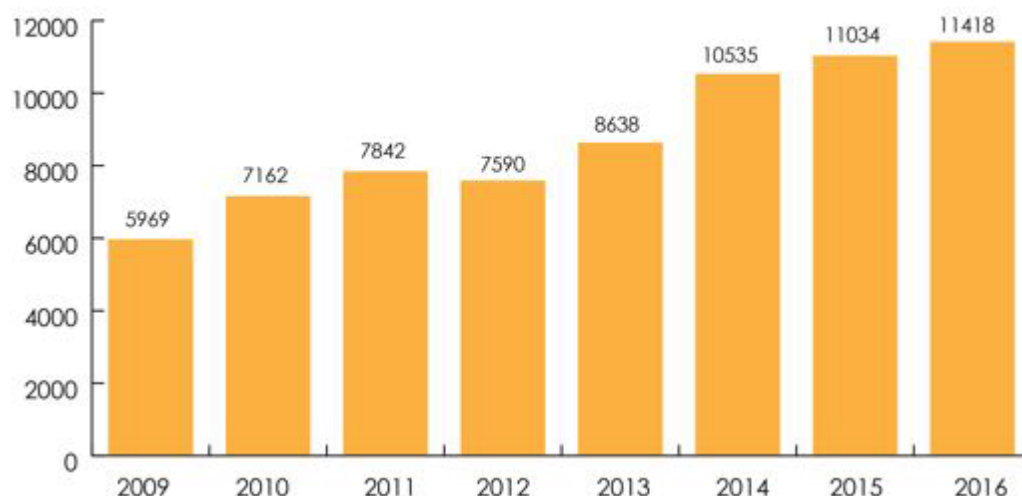
²² United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016', (page 9), February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf. Accessed: 6 July 2017

²³ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'UNAMA Afghanistan Midyear Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2017', (page 3), 17 July 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2017_july_2017.pdf. Accessed: 17 July 2017

²⁴ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016', (pages 3-4), February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf. Accessed: 6 July 2017

²⁵ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016', (page 51), February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf

Civilian Deaths and Injuries
January to December 2009 - 2016



Civilian casualties 2009-2016 1

- 7.3.2 During the first 6 months of 2017, UNAMA documented 5,243 civilian casualties, of which 1,662 were fatal. This represented a decrease of less than 1% compared to the same period in 2016 although civilian deaths increased by 2%. UNAMA noted that 40% of all civilian casualties in that period were killed or injured by anti-government forces using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), such as suicide bombs and pressure-plate devices. Suicide and complex attacks caused 1,151 civilian casualties (259 deaths and 892 injured), a 15 per cent increase compared to the first six months of 2016. The report added 'Key trends observed in the first six of months of 2017 include an overall decrease in civilian casualties from ground engagements and increases in civilian casualties from improvised explosive device (IED) tactics.'²⁶ (See also [Annex B](#) for a breakdown of civilian casualties by province between 1 January and 31 June 2017).
- 7.3.3 According to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2017 Annual Report, covering the year 2016 through February 2017, despite some progress being made in ousting the Taliban from areas it controlled in previous years, the Afghan government '... lacks the capacity to protect civilians from attacks due to its internal political instability; fragmented police, military, and intelligence forces; corruption; and weak economy.'²⁷

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[ort 2016 final280317.pdf](#). Accessed: 6 July 2017

²⁶ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'UNAMA Afghanistan Midyear Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2017', (pages 3-4), 17 July 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2017_july_2017.pdf. Accessed: 17 July 2017

²⁷ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 'USCIRF Annual Report 2017 - Tier 2 countries – Afghanistan', (Key findings), 26 April 2017, <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Afghanistan.2017.pdf>. Accessed: 13 July 2017

7.4 Impact on women and children

- 7.4.1 UNAMA documented a 2% increase in women civilian casualties in 2016 compared to 2015 – 1,218 women civilian casualties (341 deaths and 877 injured). The majority (46%) were caused by AGEs; 40% by pro-government forces; and the remainder caught in the cross-fire between both parties (13%) and explosive remnants of war (2%)²⁸.
- 7.4.2 UNAMA also documented 54 incidents of targeted and deliberate killings of women by AGEs in 2016, a 25% increase compared to 2015. According to UNAMA, 'Anti-Government Elements targeted women human rights defenders and women active in public life, as well as women employed in non-traditional sectors such as policing and security...' Some women were reportedly targeted purely because they worked outside their homes²⁹.
- 7.4.3 In its report on the first half of 2017 UNAMA recorded a rise in both child and women casualties. UNAMA documented a 23% increase in women casualties compared to the same period in 2016 – a total of 636 (174 deaths and 462 injured). Child casualties rose by 1% reaching 1,577 (436 deaths and 1,141 injured) with a 9% increase in child deaths³⁰.
- 7.4.4 The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that ISKP presence had increased the restriction and confinement of women and girls amid concerns about sexual violence³¹.

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7.5 Impact on Shia Muslims/Hazaras

- 7.5.1 The USCIRF 2017 Annual Report noted:
- 'During the last year (2016), Shi'a Muslims, especially ethnic Hazaras, fell victim to multiple violent and deadly attacks, as well as abductions that often ended in death. The attacks were overwhelmingly claimed by or attributed to U.S.-designated terrorist groups, including the Taliban and ISIS. Reportedly, more than 500 members of the Shi'a community were injured or killed between July and November 2016. There continue to be allegations that the government failed to provide adequate security in majority-Shi'a areas.'³²

²⁸ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016', (page 15), February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf. Accessed: 6 July 2017

²⁹ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016', (page 17), February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf. Accessed: 6 July 2017

³⁰ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'UNAMA Afghanistan Midyear Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2017', (page 5), 17 July 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2017_july_2017.pdf. Accessed: 17 July 2017

³¹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Humanitarian Needs Overview 2017 Afghanistan', (page 11), November 2016, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_2017_hno_english.pdf. Accessed 7 July 2017

³² United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 'USCIRF Annual Report 2017 - Tier 2 countries – Afghanistan', (Conditions for Shi'a Muslims), 26 April 2017,

- 7.5.2 UNAMA recorded 5 separate attacks against Shia Muslim mosques and gatherings in the second half of 2016. Daesh/ISKP claimed responsibility for 3 of those attacks – in Kabul city on 23 July (during a public demonstration in Deh Mazang square), 11 October (in Karte Sakhi shrine), and on 21 November (in Baqer-ol-Olum mosque) – which resulted in 691 civilian casualties (144 killed and 547 injured)³³.
- 7.5.3 During 2016 UNAMA documented that 85 Hazara civilians were abducted in 16 incidents either by AGEs or as a result of land disputes. This counted for 4% of the total number of civilians abducted in Afghanistan in 2016, and a 62% reduction from the 224 Hazara civilians abducted in 26 incidents in 2015³⁴.

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7.6 Healthcare and aid workers

- 7.6.1 As reported in the US Department of State Human Rights Report for 2016: 'The security environment continued to have a negative effect on the ability of humanitarian organizations to operate freely in many parts of the country. Insurgents deliberately targeted government employees and aid workers. 'Suspected Taliban members attacked NGO offices, vehicles, guesthouses, restaurants, and hotels frequented by NGO employees. Violence and instability hampered development, relief, and reconstruction efforts. NGOs reported insurgents, powerful local individuals, and militia leaders demanded bribes to allow groups to bring relief supplies into the country and distribute them. In April unidentified armed men abducted 15 members of a mine removal team from HALO Trust, a mine-clearing agency, in Herat Province. The men were released the next day during a military operation.'³⁵
- 7.6.2 In 2016 UNAMA reported that it: '... documented 119 conflict-related incidents targeting and/or impacting health-care or health-care workers that resulted in 23 civilian casualties (10 deaths and 13 injured) and 42 civilian abductions, consistent to figures documented in 2015. Threats, intimidation, and harassment and abduction of medical personnel comprised the majority of incidents, but the mission also documented cases of targeted killings and occupation and/or use of medical facilities for military purposes. UNAMA attributed responsibility for 95

<http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Afghanistan.2017.pdf>. Accessed: 13 July 2017

³³ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016', (pages 34-36), February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf. Accessed: 6 July 2017

³⁴ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016', (pages 66-67), February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf. Accessed: 6 July 2017

³⁵ US Department of State, 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2016, (Section 1g), 3 March 2017, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=265530>. Accessed: 12 July 2017

incidents to Anti-Government Elements, 23 incidents to Afghan national security forces and one incident to pro-Government armed groups.³⁶

7.6.3 In its half yearly update for 2017, UNAMA reported:

‘32 incidents targeting and/or impacting health-care and health-care workers during the first six months of 2017, resulting in 58 civilian casualties (27 deaths and 31 injured) and the abduction of 18 civilians compared to 67 incidents during the same period in 2016 that caused 11 civilian casualties (five deaths and six injured). Most civilian casualties from incidents targeting health-care facilities occurred during the complex attack on the Mohammad Sardar Daud Khan Hospital on 8 March that caused 48 civilian casualties (26 deaths and 22 injured).’³⁷

7.6.4 The UN OCHA recorded 200 incidents against NGOs in 2016 and the death of 15 aid workers [the report did not identify the nature of the incidents or the nationality of the aid workers]³⁸. Al Jazeera reported on 8 February 2017 that 6 Afghan aid workers, working for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), were killed after their convoy was targeted by Daesh/IS fighters in northern Jowzjan province³⁹.

7.6.5 The International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO), a British charity that ‘supports the safety of aid workers by establishing safety coordination platforms in insecure contexts’, noted that incidents where NGOs were directly targeted were ‘rare’, and added that ‘... there have been several prominent cases in which NGOs were targeted as a result of their activities being perceived as either non-neutral or in violation of Afghanistan’s cultural or religious customs.’⁴⁰

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8. Geographical distribution of violence

8.1 Overview

8.1.1 The [EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan Security situation](#) provided a regional description of the security situation in the provinces⁴¹. This Note also contains a brief overview of the security situation

³⁶ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), ‘Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016’, (page 27), February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf. Accessed: 6 July 2017

³⁷ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), ‘UNAMA Afghanistan Midyear Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2017’, (page 17), 17 July 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2017_july_2017.pdf. Accessed: 17 July 2017

³⁸ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan Issue 59’, (page 7), 1-31 December 2016, <http://www.acbar.org/upload/1484539454409.pdf>. Accessed: 14 July 2017

³⁹ Al Jazeera, ‘ICRC: Six Red Cross aid workers killed in Afghanistan’, 8 February 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/icrc-afghan-red-cross-workers-killed-missing-170208131532856.html>. Accessed: 13 July 2017

⁴⁰ International NGO Safety Organisation, ‘Afghanistan’, undated, <http://www.ngosafety.org/country/afghanistan>. Accessed: 13 July 2017

⁴¹ EASO, ‘EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation’, (Section 1.2), November 2016, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_security_report.pdf.

in Afghanistan's 3 largest cities – [Kabul](#), [Mazar-e Sharif \(Balkh province\)](#) and [Herat](#). See also [Annex B](#) for a breakdown of civilian casualties by province between 1 January and 31 June 2017.

- 8.1.2 According to the UN OCHA, as of 21 May 2017, 29 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces were affected by the conflict⁴². UNAMA noted that in the first 6 months of 2017, civilian casualties increased in 15 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, mainly due to increased attacks by Anti-Government Elements⁴³.
- 8.1.3 Urban areas are typically considered to be more secure than rural areas, although the Taliban has demonstrated an increased capability to threaten district centres⁴⁴. However, the Asia Foundation 2016 survey found that Afghans living in urban areas (73.5%) reported fearing for their safety more than those in rural areas (68.6%)⁴⁵. There has historically been an urban/rural divide in the security situation. Urban areas are generally viewed as more secure than rural areas and the majority have been controlled by the government. This has caused large numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) to resettle in urban areas. The main security problems in big cities are high-profile attacks, targeted killings and kidnappings⁴⁶. Most Afghans live in rural areas (73 per cent of the population in 2016)⁴⁷.

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8.2 Security incidents

- 8.2.1 In March 2017 the UNSG reported that the United Nations recorded 23,712 security incidents in 2016, a 3% increase compared to 2015. Of those security incidents, 50% occurred in the southern and eastern provinces of Helmand, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Kunar and Ghazni. The report noted that the Taliban increased their activities in northern and north-eastern

Accessed: 30 June 2017

⁴² UN OCHA, 'Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements (as of 21 May 2017)', 21 May 2017, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/59242bc34.html>. Accessed: 11 July 2017

⁴³ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'UNAMA Afghanistan Midyear Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2017', (page 5), 17 July 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2017_july_2017.pdf. Accessed: 17 July 2017

⁴⁴ Roggio, B., Long War Journal, 'US commander in Afghanistan downplays Taliban control of 10 percent of population', 23 September 2016, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/09/us-commander-in-afghanistan-downplays-taliban-control-of-10-percent-of-population.php>; EASO, 'EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (page 34), November 2016, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_security_report.pdf. Accessed: 11 July 2017

⁴⁵ The Asia Foundation, 'A Survey of the Afghan People – Afghanistan in 2016', (page 39), December 2016, http://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016_Survey-of-the-Afghan-People_full-survey-Apr2017.pdf. Accessed: 14 July 2017

⁴⁶ EASO, 'EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (pages 34-35), November 2016, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_security_report.pdf. Accessed: 30 June 2017

⁴⁷ The World Bank, 'Rural population (% of total population)', undated, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=AF>; European Asylum Support Office, 'EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (page 35), November 2016, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_security_report.pdf. Accessed: 30 June 2017

Afghanistan and Farah in the west, as well as putting pressure on the Government's control of the provincial capitals of Farah, Kunduz, Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province, and Tirin Kot, Uruzgan Province⁴⁸.

- 8.2.2 The International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) recorded 11,647 security incidents between January and May 2017⁴⁹. The Asia Foundation 2016 survey reported 'With the deterioration of security, fear of cross-province travel has reached an all-time high, with 81.5% of Afghans reporting some or a lot of fear when travelling to other parts of Afghanistan.'⁵⁰

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8.3 District control

- 8.3.1 The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) noted in his quarterly report to US Congress, dated 30 April 2017, that during the first 3 months of 2017 the number of districts under Afghan government and insurgent control both increased. The report noted that, according to US Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A), as of 20 February 2017

'[A]pproximately 59.7% of the country's 407 districts are under Afghan government control or influence ..., a 2.5 percentage-point increase from the 57.2% reported last quarter in mid-November, but a nearly 11 percentage-point decrease from the same period in 2016...

'The number of districts under insurgent control or influence also increased by four this quarter to 45 districts (in 15 provinces) under insurgent control (11) or influence (34). According to USFOR-A, 11.1% of the country's total districts are now under insurgent control or influence.'⁵¹

- 8.3.2 According to Bill Roggio of the Long War Journal (LWJ) 'Both USFOR-A and Resolute Support have underestimated and understated the Taliban's control of districts in the past.'⁵²

- 8.3.3 According to a Taliban report, cited on 28 March 2017 by Bill Roggio (LWJ):
- '[T]he Taliban fully controls 34 districts, including the district centers, and contests another 167 districts (these are districts where the Taliban claims it controls between 40 to 99 percent of the territory). The Taliban has a significant presence (10 to 39 percent) in another 52 districts, and a minimal presence in six more districts (1 to 9 percent). The Taliban said it has no

⁴⁸ UN Secretary-General (UNSG), 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security', (paragraph 13), 3 March 2017, A/71/826–S/2017/189, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/58c276634.html>. Accessed 6 July 2017

⁴⁹ International NGO Safety Organisation, 'Afghanistan', undated, <http://www.ngosafety.org/country/afghanistan>. Accessed: 13 July 2017

⁵⁰ The Asia Foundation, 'A Survey of the Afghan People – Afghanistan in 2016', (page 39), December 2016, http://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016_Survey-of-the-Afghan-People_full-survey-Apr2017.pdf. Accessed: 14 July 2017

⁵¹ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress', (pages 86-87), 30 April 2017, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2017-04-30qr.pdf>. Accessed: 5 July 2017

⁵² Roggio, B., Long War Journal, 'Taliban controls or contests 40 percent of Afghan districts: SIGAR', 1 May 2017, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/05/taliban-controls-or-contests-40-percent-of-afghan-districts-sigar.php>. Accessed: 5 July 2017

presence in 89 districts, however, in some of those provinces it says it is conducting “guerrilla activities.”

‘Additionally, the Taliban claims it controls areas in 16 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces. The percentages range from 10 in Maimana, Faryab to 97 in Tarinkot, Uruzgan.

‘According to the Taliban, it controls or contests nearly all of the districts in the southern provinces of Helmand, Nimroz, Uruzgan, Zabul, and Ghazni, and half of Kandahar. Eastern and northwestern Afghanistan look equally bleak, as do the northern provinces of Kunduz and Baghlan.’⁵³

8.3.4 According to the US Department of Defense (US DoD), reporting in June 2017, ‘The Afghan Government retains control of Kabul, major population centers, most key transit routes, provincial capitals, and a majority of district centers. Meanwhile, the Taliban continues to contest district centers, threaten provincial capitals, and temporarily seize main lines of communication throughout the country, especially in high-priority areas like Kunduz and Helmand Provinces.’⁵⁴

8.3.5 The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) noted in a report dated November 2016 that the presence of Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) remained ‘in a handful of Nangarhari districts’, with a small presence in Kunar, Laghman, and Logar⁵⁵.

8.3.6 The UNSG quarterly report of June 2017 noted that:

‘ISIL-KP maintained a presence in southern Nangarhar Province despite increased military operations carried out by the United States of America and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. International military forces continued operations, including the use of a “massive ordnance air blast” that killed a reportedly high number of ISIL-KP members in Achin district, Nangarhar Province, on 13 April [2017]. In early May, government and United States military officials confirmed that the ISIL-KP leader, Abdul Hasib, had been killed in a United States Special Forces raid conducted on 27 April. ISIL-KP continued its attacks against the civilian population and military and foreign military targets, and unverified local sources claimed that ISIL-KP reinforcements and recruitment continued. The group took responsibility for a complex attack on the National Radio Television of Afghanistan station in Jalalabad on 17 May.’⁵⁶

⁵³ Roggio, B., ‘Afghan Taliban lists ‘Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen’, 28 March 2017, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/03/afghan-taliban-lists-percent-of-country-under-the-control-of-mujahideen.php>. Accessed: 7 July 2017

⁵⁴ US Department of Defense, ‘Enhancing security and stability in Afghanistan’, (page 19), June 2017, https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/June_2017_1225_Report_to_Congress.pdf. Accessed: 7 July 2017

⁵⁵ United States Institute of Peace, ‘The Rise and Stall of the Islamic State in Afghanistan’, November 2016, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR395-The-Rise-and-Stall-of-the-Islamic-State-in-Afghanistan.pdf>. Accessed: 7 July 2017

⁵⁶ UN Secretary-General (UNSG), ‘The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security’, (paragraph 17), 15 June 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sq_report_on_afghanistan_-_15_june_2017.pdf. Accessed: 12 July 2017

- 8.3.7 Bill Roggio, Caleb Weiss, and Patrick Megahan created a [Map of Taliban controlled and contested districts in Afghanistan](#) for the Long War Journal, updated 1 March 2017.
- 8.3.8 As noted by the US Department of Defense (US DoD), reporting in June 2017, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) maintained control of all population centres and was generally able to protect them. The report added 'The Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) have proven to be effective at leading offensive clearing operations. While the ANDSF has had success in urban areas, the Taliban have experienced success in controlling some rural areas through exploiting opportunities to occupy cleared areas after the ANDSF failed to consolidate gains and establishing a persistent presence.'⁵⁷

(See also the country policy and information note on [Afghanistan: fear of anti-government elements \(AGEs\)](#)).

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8.4 Kabul

- 8.4.1 According to UNAMA data, during 2016, Kabul province recorded 1,758 civilian casualties (376 deaths and 1,382 injured), the most of any province in Afghanistan in 2016⁵⁸. In the first half of 2017 UNAMA recorded that 'Kabul province continued to record the highest number of civilian casualties, mainly in Kabul city. Of the 1,048 civilian casualties (219 deaths and 829 injured) documented in Kabul province, 94 per cent resulted from suicide and complex attacks carried out by Anti-Government Elements in Kabul city (209 deaths and 777 injured). After Kabul, the highest numbers of civilian casualties occurred in Helmand, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Uruzgan, Faryab, Herat, Laghman, Kunduz and Farah provinces.'⁵⁹
- 8.4.2 The US DoD reported in December 2016 that 'From June 1 to November 30, 2016, there were 10 high-profile attacks in Kabul, a modest decrease from the same time period in 2015.'⁶⁰ In its June 2017 report, the US DoD noted: 'From December 1, 2016 through May 31, 2017, there were eight high-profile attacks (HPAs) in Kabul and 42 elsewhere in Afghanistan. On April 21, 2017, insurgents killed 144 personnel and wounded another 65 people in a complex attack against the 209th ANA [Afghan National Army] Corps headquarters at Camp Shaheen in Mazar-e-Sharif. Further, on May 31,

⁵⁷ US Department of Defense, 'Enhancing security and stability in Afghanistan', (pages 1-2), June 2017, https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/June_2017_1225_Report_to_Congress.pdf. Accessed: 7 July 2017

⁵⁸ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016', (page 4, footnote 12), February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf. Accessed: 6 July 2017

⁵⁹ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'UNAMA Afghanistan Midyear Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2017', (page 5), 17 July 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_report_2017_july_2017.pdf. Accessed: 17 July 2017

⁶⁰ US Department of Defense, 'Enhancing security and stability in Afghanistan', (page 21), December 2016, <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Afghanistan-1225-Report-December-2016.pdf>. Accessed: 7 July 2017

2017, [a] vehicle explosion attack near the German Embassy killed approximately 50 people and wounded over 400 Afghan and coalition civilians. Nevertheless, the total number of HPAs decreased in Kabul 20 percent compared to the same period last year, and the number of HPAs for the remainder of the country decreased by 11 percent.⁶¹

8.4.3 The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office listed recent major attacks in Kabul in 2016 and into 2017, including:

- 23 July 2016 – at least 1 suicide bomber detonated among a crowd of Shia protestors in central Kabul, killing an estimated 81 in the largest single incident in the city since 2001;
- 24 August 2016 – a vehicle bomb was detonated outside the American University of Afghanistan campus in Kabul, gunmen then entered the campus; several people were killed and many more injured;
- 5 September 2016 – co-ordinated explosions killed over 30 outside the Afghan Ministry of Defence with staggered detonations including the targeting of first responders to the initial blast;
- 5-6 September 2016 – a complex attack which began with a vehicle borne explosive in the centre of Kabul and a subsequent 11-hour siege of a building used by an international NGO before security forces cleared the building;
- 11 October 2016 - a Kabul Shia Shrine was attacked by Daesh during the Ashura commemorations; 13 civilians were killed and more were injured alongside Afghan police; in another part of Kabul 2 suicide bombers were killed by Afghan forces at the Azrat Mosque where Shia civilians had been gathering; the group responsible for the second attack is unknown;
- 16 November 2016 - a suicide bomber attacked a National Defence Secretariat (NDS) bus carrying staff;
- 27 November 2016 - an attack on the Shia Baqir-Ul-Olum Mosque in Kabul killing 27 civilians and injuring over 30 was claimed by Daesh;
- 21 December 2016 - a complex attack involving a number of attackers against the residence of Helmand MP, Mualim Mirwali Khan in Kabul; the death toll was 10, including 3 attackers; the Taliban claimed responsibility;
- 28 December 2016 - an explosive device targeted a vehicle used by Bamyan MP Fakoori Behashti resulting in injuries to 3 people including the MP and the death of another passenger;
- 10 January 2017 – 2 explosions took place near the Parliament buildings in Kabul. The first was believed to be a body-borne suicide attack, followed shortly by a car bomb. The attacks took place at rush-hour killing about 50 and injuring more than 100;

⁶¹ US Department of Defense, 'Enhancing security and stability in Afghanistan', (page 20), June 2017, https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/June_2017_1225_Report_to_Congress.pdf. . Accessed: 7 July 2017

- 7 February 2017 - a suicide bombing at the Afghan Supreme Court compound killed around 20, with over 45 injured;
- 1 March 2017 – a complex attack involving a number of attackers resulted in the death of 5 civilians and 5 insurgents;
- 8 March 2017 – around 50 people were killed after an attack on the Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan military hospital in Kabul. The local Daesh affiliate, ISKP, claimed responsibility for the attack;
- 31 May 2017 – at least 80 people were killed and several hundred injured in a large car bomb attack in an area of the city close to many foreign embassies⁶².

8.4.4 The Taliban claimed responsibility for a suicide attack against a bus carrying civil servants in the Ghulayee Dawa Khan area of Kabul city on 24 July 2017⁶³. The blast killed at least 30 people and injured over 40 others⁶⁴.

8.4.5 The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) reported that '[M]ilitant attacks were concentrated in the western, central and eastern sections of the city where the international presence is most visible and where key highways link the city to the international airport and outlying provinces. The attacks targeted journalists, judicial workers, government employees and Afghan and international security personnel, and also caused extensive civilian casualties.'⁶⁵

See also [Casualties in the conflict](#).

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8.5 Mazar-e Sharif (Balkh province) and Herat

8.5.1 According to the EASO report on Afghanistan's security situation, in 2016, Mazar-e-Sharif recorded the lowest number of civilian casualties compared to other cities in Afghanistan⁶⁶. Trends from 2009-2015 show that Mazar-e Sharif consistently had significantly fewer civilian casualties than other cities⁶⁷. Between 2015-2016, the majority of security incidents (around 93 per cent) in Balkh province occurred outside Mazar-e-Sharif⁶⁸. An exception

⁶² Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'Foreign Travel Advice Afghanistan', (Safety and security), updated 31 May 2017, still current 7 July 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/afghanistan>. Accessed: 7 July 2017

⁶³ UNAMA, 'UNAMA urges restraint as violence takes heavy toll on Afghan civilians', 24 July 2017, <https://unama.unmissions.org/unama-urges-restraint-violence-takes-heavy-toll-afghan-civilians>. Accessed: 1 August 2017

⁶⁴ BBC News, 'Kabul suicide car bomb: 30 killed in Afghan capital', 24 July 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-40702010>. Accessed: 1 August 2017

⁶⁵ Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'DFAT Thematic Report on Security Conditions in Afghanistan: 1 January - 31 August 2016', (paragraph 2.5), 5 September 2016, Available on request. Accessed: 11 July 2017

⁶⁶ EASO, 'EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (page 35), November 2016, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_security_report.pdf. Accessed: 30 June 2017

⁶⁷ UN Habitat, 'State of Afghan Cities 2015 Volume One', (page 23), 2015, <https://unhabitat.org/books/soac2015/#>. Accessed: 12 July 2017

⁶⁸ European Asylum Support Office, 'EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (page 35), November 2016,

to the trend took place in April 2017, when the Taliban carried out a complex attack against the headquarters of the Afghan National Army in Mazar-e Sharif, which resulted in the death of at least 140 security forces and injured 60 others⁶⁹.

- 8.5.2 Similar to Mazar-e Sharif, Herat recorded lower numbers of civilian casualties than other cities across Afghanistan⁷⁰, with the exception of an attack on a mosque in Herat city, which took place in June 2017 and killed at least 10 people were killed⁷¹.

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9. Humanitarian situation

9.1 Internally displaced persons (IDPs)

9.1.1 The UNSG March 2017 report stated:

‘The humanitarian situation further deteriorated in 2016 and into 2017, with record numbers of new, conflict-induced internal displacements, a situation compounded by the return of more than 620,000 refugees and undocumented Afghans from Pakistan. The number of newly internally displaced persons in 2016 was recorded as 651,751 in 32 of 34 provinces, with more than 45 per cent of them displaced between October and December [2016]. This is the highest number of internally displaced persons recorded in the region, with 220 districts recording conflict induced displacement and a 38 per cent overall increase compared with 2015.’⁷²

- 9.1.2 The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons noted in his report of April 2017 that displacement affected every province, some more so than others, and that on average, 1,500 people were forced to leave their homes each day to escape violence⁷³.

- 9.1.3 The UN OCHA reported in its 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan that ‘Conflict displacement has continued into 2017 with 67,850 new IDPs in the first quarter. While this represents a 40 percent reduction on those displaced by fighting in the same period in 2016, a rising insurgency

https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_security_report.pdf. Accessed: 30 June 2017

⁶⁹ UN Secretary-General (UNSG), ‘The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security’, (paragraph 16), 15 June 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_afghanistan_-_15_june_2017.pdf. Accessed: 12 July 2017

⁷⁰ EASO, ‘EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation’, (page 35), November 2016, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_security_report.pdf. Accessed: 30 June 2017

⁷¹ Al Jazeera, ‘Deadly explosion strikes Afghanistan's Herat’, 6 June 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/reports-explosion-strikes-afghanistan-herat-170606105233269.html>. Accessed: 12 July 2017

⁷² UN Secretary-General (UNSG), ‘The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security’, (paragraph 39), 3 March 2017, A/71/826–S/2017/189, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/58c276634.html>. Accessed: 6 July 2017

⁷³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on his mission to Afghanistan, (paragraph 6), 12 April 2017, A/HRC/35/27/Add.3, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/593a98014.html>. Accessed 14 July 2017

and increased insecurity are exacerbating existing humanitarian needs while simultaneously generating new ones.⁷⁴

9.1.4 According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre:

‘People displaced by conflict and violence tend to make efforts to stay close to their homes, moving from rural areas to the provincial capital or a neighbouring province. Many seek shelter with host communities or, in the case of those who flee to urban areas, in informal or unplanned settlements. Those who flee to the cities from rural areas do so because they believe cities are relatively safe and provide better access to infrastructure, services and livelihoods.’⁷⁵

9.1.5 In June 2017 the UNSG report noted ‘Between January and mid-May, more than 100,000 individuals were newly internally displaced across the country, with 29 of 34 provinces having recorded some level of displacement. The north, south, east and west of the country were similarly affected, with the provinces of Kunduz, Baghlan, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Nangahar and Faryab all reporting more than 6,000 people displaced.’⁷⁶

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9.2 Humanitarian aid

9.2.1 For information on humanitarian aid provisions see the [UN OCHA Humanitarian Response Plan](#) and [ReliefWeb – Afghanistan](#).

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9.3 Health and healthcare

9.3.1 The UN OCHA 2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview published December 2016, which included data from various sources, reported ‘Recent estimates suggest over 9 million people have limited or no access to essential health services. Rates of infant and maternal mortality remain among the highest in the world at 73/1000 live births and 327/100,000 live births respectively with reports of maternal mortality ratio (MMR) rates as high as 417/100,000 in rural parts of the country. Severe food insecurity is on the rise with 1.6 million people severely food insecure.’⁷⁷

9.3.2 The UN OCHA reported in its Humanitarian Response Plan that:

‘The extensive population movements in the country exacerbate the circumstances with significant numbers of IDPs, returnees and refugees

⁷⁴ UN OCHA, ‘Humanitarian Response Plan – First Quarter Report (January to March 2017)’, (page 7), May 2017, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/afg_hrp_2017_q1_report_jan_mar_2017_0.pdf. Accessed: 11 July 2017

⁷⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, ‘Afghanistan’, (Patterns of displacement), undated, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/afghanistan>. Accessed 24 July 2017

⁷⁶ UN Secretary-General (UNSG), ‘The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security’, (paragraph 17), 15 June 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_afghanistan_-_15_june_2017.pdf. Accessed: 12 July 2017

⁷⁷ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘Humanitarian Needs Overview 2017 Afghanistan’, (page 5), November 2016, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_2017_hno_english.pdf. Accessed 7 July 2017

congregating in urban centres and the outskirts where basic service provision and infrastructure is unable to absorb the additional burden, and services are overwhelmed or simply not available to address mounting needs. The situation has been further compounded with the return of 600,000 returnees during 2016, and the expectation that over 1 million more will return by summer 2017.⁷⁸

- 9.3.3 The UN Special Rapporteur reported that access to health care for IDPs was basic and infrequent. Living conditions for many were cramped and unhygienic with acute shortages of water and sanitation services, and nutrition, which led to illness and water-borne diseases. The report added:

‘The health-care challenges facing the displaced included specialist physical or psychosocial treatment needs due to conflict or trauma, which was not commonly available. While some locations for internally displaced persons had dedicated clinics providing basic health services, these were frequently poorly equipped, lack doctors and could not treat serious or emergency health problems. Restrictions on the construction of clinics, due to a population threshold criteria and funding shortages, meant that some communities lacked local health-care facilities and had to travel long distances for access to regular services.’⁷⁹

- 9.3.4 Citing a New York Times article from 2014, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) report of May 2017 noted ‘The health care sector has made considerable gains in reducing infant mortality and giving about 85% of the population at least some access to health professionals. Still, according to some outside groups, nearly 20% of all Afghans have had a close relative or friend who died because of the inability to quickly reach medical care or unaffordable cost, even though health care technically should be free according to Afghan law and regulations.’⁸⁰

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9.4 Education

- 9.4.1 In January 2016, UNICEF estimated that 40% of school-age children in Afghanistan were out of school⁸¹. The Asia Foundation 2016 survey recorded that 52% of the respondents (66.4% of whom were women) reported having no formal or informal government or private education⁸².

⁷⁸ UN OCHA, ‘Humanitarian Response Plan – First Quarter Report (January to March 2017)’, (page 18), May 2017, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/afg_hrp_2017_q1_report_jan_mar_2017_0.pdf. Accessed: 11 July 2017

⁷⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on his mission to Afghanistan, (paragraph 33), 12 April 2017, A/HRC/35/27/Add.3, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/593a98014.html>. Accessed 14 July 2017

⁸⁰ Congressional Research Service, ‘Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy’, (page 56), 19 May 2017, <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>. Accessed: 11 July 2017

⁸¹ UNICEF, ‘One in four children in conflict zones are out of school’, 12 January 2016, https://www.unicef.org/media/media_89782.html. Accessed: 14 July 2017

⁸² The Asia Foundation, ‘A Survey of the Afghan People – Afghanistan in 2016’, (page 9), December 2016, http://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016_Survey-of-the-Afghan-People_full-survey.Apr2017.pdf. Accessed: 14 July 2017

- 9.4.2 The UN Special Rapporteur stated that the figure for displaced children was likely to be considerably higher, adding that:

‘A key barrier to education for internally displaced children is lack of a tazkira [national identity card], highlighted to the Special Rapporteur by internally displaced persons everywhere he visited. He was informed that the majority of internally displaced children and their parents had no tazkira, which restricted their access to education facilities. Other factors included lack of resources to buy school materials, distance from or availability of education facilities, and discriminatory practices that disadvantaged the displaced. Particularly poor levels of attendance of girls in education were reported, with one study reporting that 7 in 10 girls surveyed in informal settlements said they had never attended school.’⁸³

- 9.4.3 As noted in the CRS May 2017 report:

‘Continuing Taliban attacks on schools have caused some (“over 1,000” according to a January 2017 address by the acting Minister of Education) to close and hindered efforts to enroll Afghan students. While most sources give a figure of 9 million children enrolled in school, the January 2017 SIGAR report relays a December 18, 2016, interview with the Afghan Minister of Education, who said that “after adjusting numbers for more than three million permanently absent registered students from school records, only six million students were actually attending classes in Afghanistan.” Afghanistan’s university system is said to be highly underfunded, in part because Afghans are entitled to free higher education (to the B.A. level) by the Constitution, which means that demand for the higher education far outstrips Afghan resources. The shortfall is impeding the development of a large enough pool of skilled workers for the Afghan government. Afghanistan requires about \$35 million to operate its universities and institutes for one year.’⁸⁴

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9.5 Employment

- 9.5.1 As regards employment, the Asia Foundation 2016 survey stated ‘In cities, population growth has outpaced growth in jobs and industries, contributing to high rates of unemployment.’ The survey found that 45.0% of all respondents in 2016 – 80.6% of men and 9.4% of women – said that they were involved in an activity that generated money. 59.9% of respondents said that employment opportunities for their households had worsened, while 31.6% said they remained unchanged since 2015. Only 7.6% said employment opportunities had improved since 2015⁸⁵.

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⁸³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on his mission to Afghanistan, (paragraph 38), 12 April 2017, A/HRC/35/27/Add.3, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/593a98014.html>. Accessed 14 July 2017

⁸⁴ Congressional Research Service, ‘Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy’, (page 56), 19 May 2017, <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>. Accessed: 11 July 2017

⁸⁵ The Asia Foundation, ‘A Survey of the Afghan People – Afghanistan in 2016’, (pages 8 and 57), December 2016, http://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016_Survey-of-the-Afghan-People_full-survey.Apr2017.pdf. Accessed: 14 July 2017

10. Repatriations and socio-economic conditions

10.1 Overview

- 10.1.1 According to the Afghan Government, during 2016, more than one million Afghans returned to the country, primarily from Pakistan and Iran⁸⁶. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recorded 372,577 Afghan refugees returning to the country in 2016, the vast majority from Pakistan (99.3%), the remainder from Iran and other countries⁸⁷. This was an increase of 85% compared to the 58,000 who returned in 2015⁸⁸. In its 8 to 14 July 2017 weekly update on voluntary repatriations, the UNHCR recorded that it assisted 2,369 returnees (from a total of 37,384). Of 361 persons interviewed before departing Pakistan, 63% indicated their reason for return was to reunite with family/relatives in Afghanistan. Of 120 persons interviewed upon return to Afghanistan, 28% indicated their reason for return was due to the improvement in the security situation⁸⁹.
- 10.1.2 Also in 2016 and into the first four months of 2017, over 8,000, mostly young men, voluntarily returned from Europe. Of the returnees who availed themselves of International Organization for Migration (IOM) repatriation assistance from Western countries in 2016, the 3 most common destinations for return were Herat, Kabul and Balkh province (Mazar-e-Sharif)⁹⁰. UNHCR's 8 to 14 July weekly update indicated 26.9% of returnees intended to return to Kabul Province, 20% to Nangarhar Province, and 10.5 % to Logar Province⁹¹.
- 10.1.3 The UN Special Rapporteur noted the growing trend of urban displacement and highlighted the '...positive progress ... under way in Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif, where projects are securing landownership or occupation rights, providing homes, essential services and livelihoods.'⁹²

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⁸⁶ Voice of America, 'More Than One Million Afghan Refugees Returned Home in 2016', 19 December 2016, <https://www.voanews.com/a/over-one-million-afghan-refugees-returned-home-in-2016/3641761.html>. Accessed: 11 July 2017

⁸⁷ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Afghan Situation Update: Update No. 1', 3-8 April 2017, 8 April 2017, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/59070b674.html>. Accessed 11 July 2017

⁸⁸ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Tough choices for Afghan refugees returning home after years in exile', 3 February 2017, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/589466fa4.html>. Accessed 17 July 2017

⁸⁹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation, Weekly Update from 8 to 14 July 2017', 14 July 2017, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5971f7eb4.html>. Accessed 24 July 2017

⁹⁰ Afghanistan Analysts Network, 'Voluntary and Forced Returns to Afghanistan in 2016/17: Trends, statistics and experiences', 19 May 2017, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/voluntary-and-forced-returns-to-afghanistan-in-201617-trends-statistics-and-experiences/>. Accessed: 11 July 2017

⁹¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation, Weekly Update from 8 to 14 July 2017', 14 July 2017, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5971f7eb4.html>. Accessed 24 July 2017

⁹² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on his mission to Afghanistan, (paragraph 78), 12 April 2017, A/HRC/35/27/Add.3, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/593a98014.html>. Accessed 14 July 2017

10.2 Kabul

- 10.2.1 As indicated in Australia's DFAT Report on Conditions in Kabul, dated September 2015, Kabul's rapid growth has put pressure on its infrastructure, including roads, water, sanitation and electricity supply. Approximately 64 per cent of dwellings in the city are considered 'informal'. The quality of housing and infrastructure in informal areas varies greatly and has unreliable access to infrastructure. Rents in Kabul tend to be expensive compared to most other parts of Afghanistan. As a result, many residents of Kabul live in informal settlements⁹³.
- 10.2.2 The UN Special Rapporteur reported in April 2017 that 'Some estimates suggested Kabul grew by some 1,200 people per day owing to the influx of displaced and returnees. At the time of the visit [October 2016], more than 50 informal sites around Kabul housed an estimated 55,000 internally displaced persons.'⁹⁴
- 10.2.3 While wages and public services in Kabul tend to be somewhat higher than in other parts of Afghanistan, large parts of the city remain extremely poor. Industries that have a heavy reliance on the international community – including the service and construction industries, have experienced a sharp decline in growth rates. The concentration of international forces, international organisations and government ministries in Kabul has meant that the cost of living is relatively high compared to the rest of the country⁹⁵.
- 10.2.4 Although there are no reliable statistics, unemployment was estimated to be widespread in Kabul and underemployment is also common. The influx of IDPs and returnees to the city has put pressure on the local labour market. Over the last decade, employment growth has been strongest in Kabul's service sector, including small businesses such as family-owned markets, and in the construction industry. Due to the significant military and government presence in Kabul, there are also employment opportunities in the armed forces and the civil service⁹⁶.

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10.3 Mazar-e Sharif (Balkh province)

- 10.3.1 Mazar-e Sharif is the third largest city in Afghanistan⁹⁷ and has one of the largest commercial and financial centres in the country⁹⁸. The population of Mazar-e-Sharif city is ethnically diverse; comprised mostly of Tajiks and

⁹³ Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'DFAT Thematic Report on Conditions in Kabul', (pages 4-5), 18 September 2015, Available on request. Accessed: 11 July 2017

⁹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on his mission to Afghanistan, (paragraph 9), 12 April 2017, A/HRC/35/27/Add.3, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/593a98014.html>. Accessed 14 July 2017

⁹⁵ Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'DFAT Thematic Report on Conditions in Kabul', (pages 4-5), 18 September 2015, Available on request. Accessed: 11 July 2017

⁹⁶ Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'DFAT Thematic Report on Conditions in Kabul', (pages 4-5), 18 September 2015, Available on request. Accessed: 11 July 2017

⁹⁷ UN Habitat, 'State of Afghan Cities 2015 Volume One', (page 11), 2015, <https://unhabitat.org/books/soac2015/#>. Accessed: 12 July 2017

⁹⁸ EASO, 'EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (page 149), November 2016, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_security_report.pdf. Accessed: 30 June 2017

Pashtuns followed by Uzbek, Hazaras, Turkmen, Arab and Baluch. Balkh province has a tradition of high educational standards and has a comparatively high literacy rate, including for women. It is home to several universities including Balkh University, the second largest in Afghanistan⁹⁹. Mazar-e Sharif has the same levels of poverty as Kabul and other major cities in Afghanistan¹⁰⁰.

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10.4 Herat

- 10.4.1 Herat is the second largest city in Afghanistan¹⁰¹. It has a Tajik majority population with a sizable Hazara minority. In 2015, up to one in four of the urban population were Shia Hazaras¹⁰².
- 10.4.2 As indicated by the United States Institute of Peace report of March 2015, access to public services in Herat was better than in some provinces, but concerns remained about the quality, particularly in health care and education. Herat's urban landscape has been transformed by private investment, and has become increasingly cosmopolitan in the past decade due to the return of refugees along with internal migration. Investment in industry and real estate in the city has been significant. Compared to other Afghan cities, Herat has seen less squatting by homeless families on public or private land and the city has a relatively high proportion of residential owner-occupiers. All but a handful of IDP settlements in Herat have been removed or regularised¹⁰³.
- 10.4.3 Estimates of total employment in Herat province in 2015 ranged from 400,000 to 580,000, and nearly 26,000 of those worked in local government. Half of the working population in Herat city were day labourers, and as many as three-quarters of urban households were reliant on casual labour or clerical work for a primary livelihood¹⁰⁴. From an urban population of nearly 700,000 (in 2015)¹⁰⁵, some 30,000 people were estimated to be in need of employment¹⁰⁶.

⁹⁹ EASO, 'EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (p149), November 2016, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_security_report.pdf. Accessed: 30 June 2017

¹⁰⁰ UN Habitat, 'State of Afghan Cities 2015 Volume One', (page 21), 2015, <https://unhabitat.org/books/soac2015/#>. Accessed: 12 July 2017

¹⁰¹ UN Habitat, 'State of Afghan Cities 2015 Volume One', (page 11), 2015, <https://unhabitat.org/books/soac2015/#>. Accessed: 12 July 2017

¹⁰² United States Institute of Peace, 'Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat', (pages 8 and 13), March 2015, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW107-Political-and-Economic-Dynamics-of-Herat.pdf>. Accessed: 12 July 2017

¹⁰³ United States Institute of Peace, 'Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat', (pages 6 and 9-10), March 2015, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW107-Political-and-Economic-Dynamics-of-Herat.pdf>. Accessed: 12 July 2017

¹⁰⁴ United States Institute of Peace, 'Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat', (pages 19-20), March 2015, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW107-Political-and-Economic-Dynamics-of-Herat.pdf>. Accessed: 12 July 2017

¹⁰⁵ UN Habitat, 'State of Afghan Cities 2015 Volume One', (page 11), 2015, <https://unhabitat.org/books/soac2015/#>. Accessed: 12 July 2017

¹⁰⁶ United States Institute of Peace, 'Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat', (pages 19-20), March 2015, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW107-Political-and-Economic-Dynamics-of-Herat.pdf>.

Annex A: Provincial breakdown of civilian casualties

1 January to 31 June 2017

Province	Leading cause	Total civilian casualties	Compared to same period in 2016
Kabul	Suicide/complex attack	1,048 (219 deaths and 829 injured)	26% ↑
Helmand	Ground engagement	532 (238 deaths and 294 injured)	5% ↑
Kandahar	IED	395 (162 deaths and 233 injured)	10% ↓
Nangarhar	Ground engagement	377 (132 deaths and 245 injured)	7% ↓
Uruzgan	Ground engagement	312 (39 deaths and 273 injured)	16% ↓
Faryab	Ground engagement	289 (61 deaths and 228 injured)	5% ↑
Herat	IED	215 (107 deaths and 108 injured)	14% ↑
Laghman	Ground engagement	210 (53 deaths and 157 injured)	58% ↑
Kunduz	Ground engagement	190 (39 deaths and 151 injured)	7% ↓
Farah	Ground engagement	181 (73 deaths and 108 injured)	33% ↑
Ghazni	Ground engagement	165 (65 deaths and 100 injured)	26% ↓
Paktya	Targeted/deliberate killings	160 (47 deaths and 113 injured)	167% ↑
Zabul	Ground engagement	135 (50 deaths and 85 injured)	2% ↑
Baghlan	Ground engagement	105 (30 deaths and 75 injured)	36% ↓
Khost	Suicide/complex attack	104 (22 deaths and 82 injured)	58% ↑
Kunar	Ground engagement	100 (34 deaths and 66 injured)	47% ↓
Paktika	IED	88 (43 deaths and 45 injured)	9% ↓
Jawzjan	Ground engagement	70 (27 deaths and 43 injured)	19% ↑
Badghis	Ground engagement	67 (19 deaths and 48 injured)	16% ↑
Kapisa	Ground engagement	63 (16 deaths and 43 injured)	110% ↑
Logar	IED	60 (27 deaths and 33 injured)	54% ↓
Takhar	Ground engagement	53 (24 deaths and 29 injured)	10% ↓
Balkh	IED	46 (19 deaths and 27 injured)	56% ↓
Nimroz	Ground engagement	43 (19 deaths and 24 injured)	16% ↓
M. Wardak	Ground engagement	43 (20 deaths and 23 injured)	22% ↓
Parwan	Targeted/deliberate killings	40 (13 deaths and 27 injured)	40% ↓
Sar-i-Pul	Targeted/deliberate killings	40 (22 deaths and 18 injured)	20% ↓
Badakhshan	Ground engagement	31 (14 deaths and 17 injured)	74% ↓
Samangan	ERW	24 (eight deaths and 16 injured)	17% ↓
Daikundi	ERW	21 (seven deaths and 14 injured)	425% ↑
Ghor	Ground engagement	20 (10 deaths and 10 injured)	67% ↑
Nuristan	Ground engagement	15 (3 deaths and 12 injured)	25% ↑
Bamyan	ERW	1 injured civilian	75% ↓
Panjshir	n/a	no civilian casualties	100% ↓

¹⁰⁷ (IED – Improvised Explosive Device; ERW – Explosive Remnants of War)

Accessed: 12 July 2017

¹⁰⁷ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 'UNAMA Afghanistan Midyear Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2017', (page 73), 17 July 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_midyear_re

Version control and contacts

Contacts

If you have any questions about this note and your line manager, senior caseworker or technical specialist cannot help you, or you think that this note has factual errors then [email the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

If you notice any formatting errors in this note (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability, you can [email the Guidance, Rules and Forms Team](#).

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **4.0**
- valid from **17 August 2017**

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and review of policy position.

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