Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note
Afghanistan: security and humanitarian situation

Version 7.0

May 2020

Preface

Purpose

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

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

Assessment

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

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- The general humanitarian situation is so severe as to breach Article 15(b) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC (the Qualification Directive) / Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules
- The security situation presents a real risk to a civilian's life or person such that it would breach Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- A claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

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

Country of origin information

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

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

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

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

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

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

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

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

Feedback

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

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

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

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

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

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Assessment

Updated: 18 May 2020

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 Article 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, as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules.

and/or

1.1.2 A fear of serious harm because 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 in situations of international or internal armed conflict) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 (the Qualification Directive), as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules.

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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 Decision makers must consider whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses applies. If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.

2.2.2 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 Restricted Leave.

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2.3 Convention reason(s)

2.3.1 A state of civil instability and/or where law and order has broken down, which might exist in some places outside of government control, does not of itself give rise to a well-founded fear of persecution for a Convention reason.

2.3.2 Before considering whether a person requires protection because of the general humanitarian and/or security situation, decision makers must consider if the person is at a real risk of persecution and/or serious harm for a 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 also the Country Policy and Information Notes on Afghanistan).

2.3.3 Where the person qualifies under the Refugee Convention, decision makers do not need to make an assessment of the need for protection under Article 15(b) of the Qualification Directive/Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), or under Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive.

2.3.4 In the absence of a link to one of the five Convention grounds necessary for a grant of refugee status, the question is whether the person will face a real risk of serious harm sufficient to qualify for Humanitarian Protection (HP).

2.3.5 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

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2.4 Risk

a) Humanitarian situation

2.4.1 In the country guidance case AK (Article 15(c)) Afghanistan CG [2012] UKUT 00163(IAC) (18 May 2012), heard on 14-15 March 2012, having considered evidence up to early 2012, 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] (See Returnees).

2.4.2 Humanitarian needs are increased by chronic poverty, lack of development and access to quality basic services across the country. Over 51% of Afghans were reported to live in multidimensional poverty, in which people are affected by multiple and intersecting deprivations in health, education, living standards, employment, and security. Drought and conflict have exacerbated the situation (see Humanitarian aid and needs, Food security, Employment and financial security, Education and Health and healthcare).

2.4.3 The armed conflict in Afghanistan continues to contribute to a significant number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Although conflict-induced displacement decreased in 2018 compared to 2017, displacement due to drought brought the total number of people displaced in 2018 to more than 635,000, up from 512,000 in 2017. A total of 26 out of 34 provinces had recorded some level of forced displacement. Over 3.5 million IDPs lived in

host communities, 16% of whom lived in informal settlements. According to the UN Secretary General, there was no immediate prospect of many displaced families returning to their areas of origin (see Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and Returnees).

2.4.4 Since AK was promulgated in 2012, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has worsened but 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.

2.4.1 The country guidance case AS (Safety of Kabul) Afghanistan CG [2018] UKUT 118 (IAC) (28 March 2018), considered humanitarian conditions in the context of whether it was reasonable for healthy single men without connections or support in Kabul to relocate there. This case was reconsidered by the Upper Tribunal (UT) in the country guidance case AS (Safety of Kabul) Afghanistan (CG) [2020] UKUT 130 (IAC) (1 May 2020), heard on 19 and 20 November 2019 and 14 January 2020, who held that:

'The Panel in the 2018 UT decision found that much of Kabul's population lives in inadequate informal housing with limited access to basic services such as sanitation and potable water. They noted that healthcare provision, although poor, is better in Kabul than elsewhere [paragragh 224].

'The evidence before us indicates that the position is unchanged. As was the case when the Panel made its findings in the 2018 UT decision, most of Kabul's population is poor, lives in inadequate housing with inadequate sanitation, lacks access to potable water, and struggles to earn sufficient income to sustain itself in a society without any safety net [paragraph 225].

'However, it is also apparent, most notably from OCHA's 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview of Afghanistan, that, in terms of people in need, the situation in Kabul is significantly better than much of the rest of Afghanistan [paragraph 226].

'The position today is comparable to 2017. A departure from the findings of the Panel in the 2018 UT decision cannot be justified [paragraph 227]'.

2.4.2 When considering assistance available to returnees, the Upper Tribunal concluded 'We see no reason to depart from the finding of the [2018 Upper Tribunal] Panel that a returnee, generally, will be able to access sufficient assistance and funds so as to be in a position to accommodate and feed himself for the first 4 – 6 weeks in Kabul without earning an income [paragraph 245]'.

2.4.3 Decision makers must consider on the facts of the case whether a returnee, by reason of their individual circumstances or 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.

2.4.4 For further guidance see the Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection.

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b) Security situation

2.4.5 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, and where there is serious and individual threat to the civilian's life or person due to indiscriminate violence. This could include former combatants who have genuinely and permanently renounced armed activity.

2.4.6 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 gave country guidance 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)].

2.4.7 The Upper Tribunal in AK commented 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].

2.4.8 The Tribunal further gave country guidance 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(iii)].

2.4.9 Since the promulgation of AK in May 2012 (where the UT considered 2011 UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) figures, the overall number of conflict-related civilian deaths and injuries in Afghanistan documented by UNAMA has increased. According to UNAMA, in 2018 there were 10,993 civilian casualties (3,804 deaths and 7,189 injured), representing an increase of 40% compared to 2011 (7,842); and a 5% increase in overall civilian casualties and an 11% increase in civilian deaths compared to 2017 (see Civilian casualties).

2.4.10 In 2018 the highest number of civilian casualties occurred in Kabul, Nangarhar, Helmand, Ghazni, and Faryab provinces. Compared to 2017, Kabul saw a 2% increase, an 111% increase in Nangarhar, Ghazni 84%, and Faryab 1%. There was an 11% decrease in casualties in Helmand (see Civilian casualties). Most attacks in 2018 took place in the provinces of Badghis, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, and Herat, although there was a 5% decrease overall in security-related incidents compared to 2017. Between 16 November 2018 and 7 February 2019, UNAMA recorded an 8% decrease in security-related incidents and a 61% decrease in suicide attacks, compared with the same period the year before (see Security incidents).

2.4.11 According to NATO's Resolute Support, 63.5% of the population (21.2 million of an estimated 33.3 million total) lived in areas under Afghan government control or influence. The US Department of Defense noted that all provincial capitals and most of Afghanistan's population centres remain under the control of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces

(ANDSF). Large parts of Afghanistan's rural areas were controlled by the Taliban, who continue to attack poorly defended government checkpoints and rural district centres. The Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) was primarily active in the eastern provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar (see District control).

2.4.12 Kabul province and the capital saw an increase in civilian casualties in 2018 compared to 2015, 2016 and 2017. In 2018, 1,686 civilian casualties were caused in Kabul city due to 28 suicide and complex attacks, an average of 60 casualties per attack although, in January 2018, a single attack in Kabul city accounted for 343 civilian casualties, accounting for 20% of the total casualties in the city for 2018. According to UNAMA, attacks in Kabul mainly targeted civilians, including those in the civilian Government administration, places of worship, education facilities, election-related sites and other "soft" targets (see Kabul).

2.4.13 The proportion of conflict-related civilian casualties (deaths and injuries) in Afghanistan overall remains low with around 0.03% of the population injured or killed in 2018 (dividing the 2018 UNAMA numbers by a population estimate of 33 million). Similarly, the number of civilian casualties in Kabul (province and city) accounts for approximately 0.03% of an estimated 5 million population, or around 3.1 casualties per 10,000 people (see Civilian casualties).

2.4.14 The test/approach set out by the Court of Appeal in QD (Iraq) v SSHD [2009] EWCA Civ 620: 'Is there in [X Country] or a material part of it such a high level of indiscriminate violence that substantial grounds exist for believing that an applicant would, solely by being present there, face a real risk which threatens his life or person?' [paragraph 40].

2.4.15 Indiscriminate violence is taking place in Afghanistan, including in the province of Kabul and in Kabul City. However, as found by the Upper Tribunal in AK, it is not at such a high level that it represents, in general, a real risk of harm contrary to Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive.

2.4.16 In the country guidance case AS (Safety of Kabul) Afghanistan (CG) [2020] UKUT 130 (IAC) (1 May 2020), the Upper Tribunal, which considered evidence up to January 2020, held that 'There is widespread and persistent conflict-related violence in Kabul. However, the proportion of the population affected by indiscriminate violence is small and not at a level where a returnee, even one with no family or other network and who has no experience living in Kabul, would face a serious and individual threat to their life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence [paragraph 253(ii)].'

2.4.17 The Upper Tribunal found 'the level of indiscriminate violence in Kabul is not sufficient to meet the threshold in Article 15(c) QD [paragraph 255].' The Upper Tribunal held that the country guidance in AK, in relation to Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive, remained unaffected by its decision in AS [2020] UKUT 130 (IAC) (paragraph 253(vi)).

2.4.18 Following this assessment, if it is concluded that there is no general Article 15(c) risk, the decision maker must go on to consider whether there are particular factors relevant to the person's individual circumstances which might nevertheless place them at risk (e.g. a child or someone of advanced

age, disability, gender, ill-health, ethnicity or, for example, by virtue of being a perceived collaborator, medical professional, teacher or government official). The more the person is affected by factors specific to their personal circumstances, the lower the level of indiscriminate violence required for them to be eligible (see Security situation and Geographical distribution of violence) – this is sometimes referred to as 'a sliding scale'.

2.4.19 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status and for guidance on Article 15(c), including consideration of enhanced risk factors, see the Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection.

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2.5 Protection

2.5.1 If there were to be an Article 15(c) risk to the person (using the sliding scale analysis), decision makers must consider whether the Afghan authorities would be able to provide protection.

2.5.2 For information on the capabilities of the Afghan authorities and their ability to provide protection, see the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Anti-government elements (AGEs). For further information relating to particular groups, for example, women, children, LGBTI persons and ethnic and religious minorities, see the relevant Country Policy and Information Note.

2.5.3 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

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2.6 Internal relocation

a) Outside Kabul

2.6.1 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).

2.6.2 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].

2.6.3 In the country guidance case AK the Upper Tribunal qualified the position, in relation to the reasonableness of internal relocation outside Kabul, for certain categories of women (lone women and female heads of household) [paragraph 249B (v)]. (See Impact on women and children and the country policy and information note on Afghanistan: women fearing gender based harm/violence.

2.6.4 The available country information continues to be consistent with, and supports the UT's assessment and observation in AK. Internal relocation is generally likely to be reasonable to areas outside of Taliban control, and may be reasonable in some circumstances into areas under Taliban control. Decision makers must, however, consider whether there are particular factors relevant to the person's individual circumstances which might prevent them from internally relocating (see Geographical distribution of violence and Internal relocation).

2.6.5 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

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b) Kabul

2.6.6 In the country guidance case AS (Safety of Kabul) Afghanistan (CG) [2020] UKUT 130 (IAC) (1 May 2020), the Upper Tribunal, which considered evidence up to January 2020, including 2019 UNHCR Submissions, a 2019 COI UNHCR Report, both dated December 2019, and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Country Guidance Afghanistan (June 2019), held that:

'A person who is of lower-level interest for the Taliban (i.e. not a senior government or security services official, or a spy) is not at real risk of persecution from the Taliban in Kabul [paragraph 253(i)].

'There is widespread and persistent conflict-related violence in Kabul. However, the proportion of the population affected by indiscriminate violence is small and not at a level where a returnee, even one with no family or other network and who has no experience living in Kabul, would face a serious and individual threat to their life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence [paragraph 253(ii)].

'Having regard to the security and humanitarian situation in Kabul as well as the difficulties faced by the population living there (primarily the urban poor but also IDPs and other returnees, which are not dissimilar to the conditions faced throughout many other parts of Afghanistan) it will not, in general, be unreasonable or unduly harsh for a single adult male in good health to relocate to Kabul even if he does not have any specific connections or support network in Kabul and even if he does not have a Tazkera [paragraph 253(iii)].

'However, the particular circumstances of an individual applicant must be taken into account in the context of conditions in the place of relocation, including a person's age, nature and quality of support network/connections with Kabul/Afghanistan, their physical and mental health, and their language, education and vocational skills when determining whether a person falls within the general position set out above. Given the limited options for employment, capability to undertake manual work may be relevant [paragraph 253(iv)].

'A person with a support network or specific connections in Kabul is likely to be in a more advantageous position on return, which may counter a particular vulnerability of an individual on return. A person without a network may be able to develop one following return. A person's familiarity with the cultural and societal norms of Afghanistan (which may be affected by the age at which he left the country and his length of absence) will be relevant to whether, and if so how quickly and successfully, he will be able to build a network [paragraph 253(v)].'

2.6.7 The Upper Tribunal in AS held that 'The country guidance in AK (Article 15(c)) Afghanistan CG [2012] UKUT 163 (IAC) in relation to the (un)reasonableness of internal relocation to Kabul (and other potential places of internal relocation) for certain categories of women remains unaffected by this decision [paragraph 253(vii)].'

2.6.8 In AK, the Upper Tribunal held 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)). The June 2019 EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan made similar findings as regard women (See Impact on women and children) and the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: women fearing gender based harm/violence).

2.6.9 When considering the individual circumstances cited above, see also Humanitarian situation, Returnees, Internal relocation and the country policy and information note on Afghanistan: women fearing gender based harm/violence.

2.6.10 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

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2.7 Certification

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

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

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Country information

Section 3 updated: 11 July 2019

3. Demography

3.1 Population

3.1.1 Due to decades of conflict an official population census has not been conducted since 1979[1]. However, the CIA World Factbook estimated the population of Afghanistan to be 34,940,837 (July 2018)[2]. Afghanistan's Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) estimated the population in 2018-2019 to be approximately 31.6 million (16.1 million male; 15.5 million female)[3].

3.1.2 Afghanistan is divided into 34 provinces; sub-divided into 421 administrative units[4]. By regions, the provinces are[5] (CSO estimated population in brackets[6]):

Centre: Kabul (4,860,880); Kapisa (471,574); Panjshir (164,115); Parwan (711,621); Wardak (637,634); Logar (419,377);

Central Highlands: Bamyan (478,424); Daykundi (498,840);

South: Nimroz (176,898); Helmand (1,395,514); Kandahar (1,337,183); Uruzgan (420,964); Zabul (371,043);

South-East: Ghazni (1,315,041); Paktika (748,910); Paktya (590,668); Khost (614,584);

East: Nangarhar (1,635,872); Laghman (476,537); Kunar (482,115); Nuristan (158,211);

North-East: Baghlan (977,297); Kunduz (1,091,116); Takhar (1,053,852); Badakhshan (1,017,499);

North: Faryab (1,069,540); Jawzjan (579.833); Sar-e Pul (599,137); Balkh (1,442,847); Samangan (415,343);

West: Herat (2,050,514); Badghis (530,574); Ghor (738,224); Farah (543,237).

3.1.3 According to a European Asylum Support Office (EASO) report, dated April 2019, the estimated population of Kabul city varies considerably from 3.5 to 5.5 million[7].

3.1.4 See the Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, 'Afghanistan for a map of Afghanistan's administrative divisions[8].

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[1] CSO, 'Estimated population of Afghanistan', (page III), June 2018, url.
[2] CIA World Factbook, 'Afghanistan', (People and society), updated 24 May 2019, url.
[3] CSO, 'Estimated population of Afghanistan', (page III), June 2018, url.
[4] CSO, 'Estimated population of Afghanistan', (page III), June 2018, url.
[5] EASO 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (page 17), November 2016, url.
[6] CSO, 'Estimated population of Afghanistan', (pages 2-3), June 2018, url.
[7] EASO, 'Afghanistan: Key Socio-Economic Indicators', (page 12), April 2019, url.
[8] University of Texas, 'Perry-Castañeda Library – Afghanistan maps', n.d., url.

Section 4 updated: 11 July 2019

4. Conflict in Afghanistan

4.1.1 For a brief recent history of conflict in Afghanistan, from the Soviet intervention to the US-led invasion and onwards, see the BBC News timeline of events[9], the EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation[10], and the Congressional Research Service 'Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy'[11].

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Section 5 updated: 11 July 2019

5. Actors in the conflict

5.1.1 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)[12] and the EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Security Situation[13].

5.1.2 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 2019 Monthly Forecast for Afghanistan that:

'Several talks geared towards peace in Afghanistan are being pursued. Following the first round of talks in seven years between representatives of the US and the Taliban in late July 2018, the sixth such meeting was held in Doha, Qatar, from 1 to 9 May [2019]. The Taliban continue to insist on holding direct talks with the US government rather than the Afghan government, whose legitimacy they do not recognise, as they seek the withdrawal of US and international troops from Afghanistan. Also in Doha, Yamamoto [Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA] met on 25 April [2019] with the co-founder of the Taliban, Mullah Baradar Akhund, and the Taliban negotiating team, in line with established practice. Yamamoto addressed issues related to the peace process, humanitarian assistance, and human rights.'[14]

5.1.3 The International Crisis Group (ICG) reported in December 2018 'A three-day ceasefire in June, which the Taliban and the government enforced and which prompted joyous celebration by fighters and civilians alike, offered a short respite, though fighting resumed immediately afterwards. Taliban fighters now effectively control perhaps half the country, cutting off transport routes and laying siege to cities and towns.'[15]

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[9] BBC News, 'Afghanistan profile – Timeline', 31 January 2018, url.
[10] EASO, 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (Section 1.1), December 2017, url.
[11] CRS, 'Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy', 19 May 2017, url.
[12] Home Office, 'CPIN: Afghanistan: Fear of anti-government elements (AGEs)', December 2016, url.
[13] EASO 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (Section 1.1), June 2019, url.
[14] Security Council Report, 'June 2019 Monthly Forecast – Afghanistan', 31 May 2019, url.
[15] ICG, '10 Conflicts to Watch in 2019', 28 December 2018, url.

5.1.4 In its Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict for 2018, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) noted:

'Anti-Government Elements continued to cause almost two-thirds of civilian casualties in 2018, with increasing harm as a result of attacks deliberately targeting civilians and the indiscriminate use of IEDs [improvised explosive devices]. The use of suicide and non-suicide IEDs by Anti-Government Elements was the leading cause of civilian casualties, accounting for 42 per cent of the total civilian casualties throughout the country. Civilians continued to live in fear of being killed or maimed as a result of Anti-Government Elements' increasing reliance on suicide IED attacks. Civilians from all walks of life were affected, including journalists, first responders, teachers, religious leaders, elections workers and others.'[16]

5.1.5 The UN Secretary General's eighth report, dated February 2019, on the threat posed by the Islamic State (ISIL, also known as Da'esh) in Iraq and the Levant and associated individuals and groups, noted:

'At present, ISIL strongholds in Afghanistan are in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan and Laghman. The total strength of ISIL in Afghanistan is estimated at between 2,500 and 4,000 militants. ISIL is also reported to control some training camps in Afghanistan, and to have created a network of cells in various Afghan cities, including Kabul. The local ISIL leadership maintains close contacts with the group's core in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. Important personnel appointments are made through the central leadership, and the publication of propaganda videos is coordinated. Following the killing of ISIL leader Abu Sayed Bajauri on 14 July 2018, the leadership council of ISIL in Afghanistan appointed Mawlawi Ziya ul-Haq (aka Abu Omar Al-Khorasani) as the fourth "emir" of the group since its establishment.'[17]

See also District control.

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Section 6 updated: 11 July 2019

6. Humanitarian situation

6.1 Humanitarian need and aid

6.1.1 For information on humanitarian aid provisions see ReliefWeb – Afghanistan.

6.1.2 The UN OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) estimated 6.6 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance in 2018[18]. The OCHA's Humanitarian Response Plan added:

'Humanitarian needs are simultaneously exacerbated by chronic poverty, lack of development and access to quality basic services across the country. The most recent Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) estimates that 55 per cent of Afghans lived below the national poverty line in 2016-17

[16] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018', (page 18), February 2019, url.
[17] UN Security Council, 'Eighth report of the Secretary-General …', (para 38), 1 February 2019, url.
[18] OCHA, 'Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan', (page 3), 3 May 2019, url.

(compared to 34 per cent in 2007-08), which is measured as 93 cents per person per day. The situation is feared to have further deteriorated since that data was last collected, including as a result of drought and 17 years of conflict.'[19]

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6.2 Internally displaced persons (IDPs)

6.2.1 As noted in the UNHCR's eligibility guidelines for Afghanistan, published August 2018, 'Conflict and insecurity continue to be major drivers of internal displacement in Afghanistan, affecting all areas of the country. By the end of 2017 more than 1.8 million Afghans were estimated to live as internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a result of conflict or violence.'[20]

6.2.2 The OCHA Humanitarian Response Plan end of year report for 2018 noted 'While conflict-induced displacement in 2018 (382,627 people) was 21 per cent lower than in 2017 (483,946 people), displacement due to drought (251,000 people) brought the total number of people displaced in 2018 to more than 635,000, up from 512,000 in 2017.'[21]

6.2.3 The UN Secretary General's report of February 2019 stated:

'Between 1 November [2018] and 10 January [2019], 49,001 people were newly displaced by the conflict, bringing the total number of displaced in 2018 to 364,883 people. More than half of this figure (58 per cent) comprised children under the age of 18. Although conflict-related displacement in 2018 was down by more than a quarter compared with 2017, many displaced families continued to have no immediate prospect of returning to their areas of origin in safety and dignity. In 2018, humanitarian partners provided life-saving assistance to 114,697 people displaced by conflict.'[22]

6.2.4 According to the IDMC:

'People displaced by conflict and violence tend to try to stay as close as possible 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 from rural to urban areas tend to do so because they believe cities are relatively safer and provide better access to infrastructure, services and livelihoods.'[23]

6.2.5 The International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) for the period October to December 2018 noted that 3,529,971 IDPs resided in host communities, with Herat province hosting the most (15% - 544,500). 16% of IDPs lived in informal settlements[24].

6.2.6 The OCHA reported:

'From 1 January 2019 to 20 May 2019, 127,439 individuals fled their homes due to conflict. A total of 26 out of 34 provinces had recorded some level of

[19] OCHA, 'Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan', (page 8), 3 May 2019, url.
[20] UNHCR, 'Eligibility Guidelines', (page 32), 30 August 2018, url.
[21] OCHA, 'Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan', 3 May 2019, url.
[22] UN General Assembly, 'The situation in Afghanistan …', (para 43), 28 February 2019, url.
[23] IDMC, 'Afghanistan Overview', (Pattern), n.d., url.
[24] IOM, 'DTM', (page 4), Oct-Dec 2018, url.

forced displacement. Constrained humanitarian access hinders assessments, thus preventing verification of the full extent of displacement and undermining the provision of assistance and services. Displacement affects all individuals differently with needs, vulnerabilities and protection risks evolving over time due to exhaustion of coping mechanisms and only basic emergency assistance provided following initial displacement. Inadequate shelter, food insecurity, insufficient access to sanitation and health facilities, as well as a lack of protection, often result in precarious living conditions that jeopardises the well-being and dignity of affected families.'[25]

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6.3 Food security

6.3.1 The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (UN FAO) noted in its Response Plan 2019:

'Afghanistan is experiencing a major food security and livelihoods crisis, currently the world's third largest. According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Afghanistan Report #10 (2018), an estimated, an estimated 13.5 million people are facing severe acute food insecurity – 6 million more than this time last year. Of the total number, 3.6 million are facing emergency levels of food insecurity nationwide. In the past five years, the country has experienced a steady decline in wheat production mainly due to climatic factors and conflict. Without immediate livelihood support, in a country where more than 70 percent of the population is associated with crop production and livestock, the food security situation is expected to deteriorate further. This could result in the food insecurity situation becoming more acute as the lean season progresses during the spring and early summer.'[26]

6.3.2 As noted by OCHA, a joint needs assessment conducted in November 2015 across all of Kabul's 52 informal settlements found that 48% of the 7,892 households (approximately 55,000 individuals), were severely food insecure[27].

6.3.3 The EASO report on socio-economic indicators noted that, according to AAN analyst Foschini, 'Kabul does not rank at the top of the food emergency in Afghanistan, but the city imports much of its daily subsistence from the surrounding countryside and from foreign countries, and serious alterations to the inflow of goods shortages of certain food items occur.' The same EASO report added that, in December 2018, Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif were labelled as 'stressed' by the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS), meaning that even with humanitarian assistance at least one in five households had minimally adequate food consumption but was 'unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures without engaging in irreversible coping strategies'.[28]

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[25] OCHA, 'Afghanistan: Conflict Inducted Displacements', 2 June 2019, url.
[26] UN FAO, 'Afghanistan Emergency Livelihoods Response Plan 2019', 3 May 2019, url.
[27] OCHA, 'Kabul Informal Settlement', November 2015, url.
[28] EASO, 'Afghanistan: Key Socio-Economic Indicators', (pages 37-38), April 2019, url.

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6.4 Employment and financial security

6.4.1 Summarising the Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) for 2016-2017[29], the World Bank noted in a blog dated 7 May 2018 'A quarter of the labor force is unemployed, and 80 percent of employment is vulnerable and insecure. With half the population below the age of 15, each year, large numbers of young Afghans continue to enter the labor market, most with little education and few productive employment opportunities.'[30]

6.4.2 Afghanistan's National Statistics and Information Authority (NISA) estimated, in its Afghanistan Multidimensional Poverty Index (A-MPI) 2016–2017, that 51.7% of Afghans live in multidimensional poverty, defined as a situation in which people are affected by multiple and intersecting deprivations in health, education, living standards, employment, and security[31]. The A-MPI noted 'The urban poverty rate is 18.1%, whereas the rural rate is 61.1%. [...] 14.7% of the population in Kabul are poor, the poverty rate reaches 80.2% and 85.5% in Nooristan and Badghis. However, considering the size of the population in each province, Herat and Nangarhar are home to the highest number of poor people.'[32]

6.4.3 EASO noted regarding the economy 'The World Bank expects growth around 3.6 % by 2021. However, given the current 2.7 % population growth rate, a much faster progress would be needed to achieve significant improvement regarding incomes and livelihoods, not to mention the need for employment for the nearly 400 000 young Afghans entering the labour market every year. Otherwise Afghanistan is "unlikely to make major progress in reducing poverty".'[33]

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6.5 Education

6.5.1 A joint report by Afghanistan's Ministry of Education, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Samuel Hall, dated June 2018, estimated that '[A]s many as 3.7 million children in Afghanistan remain out of school, a total of 43.7 per cent of the primary aged population. Girls at all ages are less likely to attend school than boys. In addition, a further 300,000 children who currently access primary school are at risk of dropping out.'[34]

6.5.2 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

[29] CSO, 'ALCS 2016-17', 2018, url.
[30] World Bank, 'The latest poverty numbers for Afghanistan…', 7 May 2018, url.
[31] NISA, 'Afghanistan Multidimensional Poverty Index 2016–2017', (page vii), 2019, url.
[32] NISA, 'Afghanistan Multidimensional Poverty Index 2016–2017', (page vii), 2019, url.
[33] EASO, 'Afghanistan: Key Socio-Economic Indicators', (page 24), April 2019, url.
[34] Ministry of Education, 'All Children in School and Learning', (page ix), June 2018, url.

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.'[35] (See also Tazkera (identity card)).

6.5.3 UNAMA noted in its report for 2018:

'The armed conflict took a heavy toll on education in 2018. Between 1 January and 31 December, UNAMA recorded 191 incidents affecting education, including attacks targeting or incidentally damaging schools; the killing, injury and abduction of education personnel; and threats against education facilities and personnel. This is almost three times the number of incidents documented in 2017. This increase is attributed mainly to attacks by Anti-Government Elements on schools used as voter registration centres and polling centres for the 2018 parliamentary elections held in October.'[36]

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6.6 Health and healthcare

6.6.1 The UN OCHA 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview reported that 30% of Afghans lack access to basic health services[37]. Tolo News reported in April 2018 that, according to the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health, 60% of Afghans had access to health services across the country. However, a report by the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC) noted that the quality of health services remained poor[38].

6.6.2 The World Health Organization (WHO) stated, in its profile on Afghanistan 'Afghanistan's health system has been steadily progressing over the last 17 years, with increasing coverage of health services throughout the country. In 2018, a total of 3,135 health facilities were functional, which ensured access to almost 87% of the population within two hours distance.' However, WHO added some of the challenges in providing the best possible health care, including 'Sub-optimal utilization of services due to poverty and distance to health facilities; Inadequate access to priority health services due to distance, high cost, low awareness, insecurity and shortage of female health care providers.'[39]

6.6.3 The UN OCHA reported in its Humanitarian Response Plan that despite the impact of the drought, conflict remained the biggest driver of humanitarian need. The report added 'Ongoing hostilities across large parts of the country, including ground engagements, aerial operations, and use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) continued to cause extreme levels of physical and psychological harm to civilian populations.'[40]

6.6.4 The UN Special Rapporteur reported, in 2017, that access to health care for IDPs was basic and infrequent. Living conditions for many were cramped

[35] UNHRC, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur …', (paragraph 38), 12 April 2017, url.
[36] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2018', (page 14), February 2019, url.
[37] OCHA, '2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview', (page 38), November 2018, url.
[38] Tolo News, '60% Of Afghans Now Have Access To Health Services', 4 April 2018, url.
[39] WHO, 'Afghanistan', n.d., url.
[40] OCHA, 'Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan', (page 8), 3 May 2019, url.

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.'[41]

6.6.5 On healthcare, EASO noted that, whilst public and private health services in Kabul city were accessible, quality was poor. 'In a study on urban poverty, Samuel Hall found in 2014 that Kabul benefitted from easier access to health facilities than other cities. […] 47 health facilities in Kabul city were included in the Kabul Urban Health Project which aimed to improve access to health services in the capital.' Access to mental health care was limited, albeit free, though unofficial fees were often charged[42].

6.6.6 For further information on the humanitarian situation, see the EASO COI Report on Afghanistan: Key Socio-Economic Indicators.

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Section 7 updated: 11 July 2019

7. Security situation

7.1 Overview

7.1.1 The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) Global Peace Index (GPI) ranks 163 independent states and territories according to their level of peacefulness. Ranked the second least peaceful country in the world after Syria in 2017 and 2018[43], Afghanistan's scoring deteriorated to the least peaceful country in the GPI 2019[44].

7.1.2 Lifos, the Swedish Migration Board's centre for country information and country analysis, published a report in December 2018 on the security situation in Afghanistan. In its English summary, the report noted:

'There has been no significant change in the situation in the country as a whole in 2018, but the violence between the conflicting parties has intensified. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) has recorded significantly more conflict-related deaths (civilians and combatants) in the first eight months of 2018 than during the corresponding period of 2017. UNAMA, which only records civilian casualties (killed and injured) of the conflict, had by 30th September 2018 documented marginally fewer casualties in total compared to 2017. Likewise, the number of new conflict related internally displaced persons as well as the number of security incidents, has decreased in 2018 in comparison to 2017. However,

[41] UNHRC, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur …', (paragraph 33), 12 April 2017, url.
[42] EASO, 'Afghanistan: Key Socio-Economic Indicators', (page 51), April 2019, url.
[43] IEP, 'Global Peace Index 2018', (page 9), June 2018, url.
[44] IEP, 'Global Peace Index 2019', (page 2), June 2019, url.

according to Lifos' assessment, the decrease in these three conflict indicators cannot be explained by improved conditions for civilians, although some actions have been taken by the conflicting parties to avoid causing civilian harm. For example, UNAMA has received reports during the year that the parties of the conflict have warned the civilian population ahead of upcoming ground operations in some populated areas, and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) has also avoided the use of heavier weapons in such areas to a greater extent than before.'[45]

7.1.3 The UN Secretary General reported in December 2018:

'The security situation remained volatile, with incidents continuing at consistently high levels. While the number of security incidents in some categories decreased slightly, the overall number of casualties rose owing to an increase in the severity of certain attacks. The two contrasting exceptions to this trend were the Eid al-Adha holiday period and the first day of parliamentary elections on 20 October, which recorded exceptionally low and high incident levels, respectively.'[46]

7.1.4 Cedoca, the Documentation and Research Department of the Belgium Government's Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, noted in its report on the security situation in Kabul city, dated 15 May 2019, citing public sources:

'In October 2018, parliamentary elections took place in Afghanistan. Despite several measures taken by the Afghan government and its security forces to maintain the right of Afghan citizens to participate in the elections and to protect them from harm, from the start of the voter registration on the 14th of April the whole country witnessed unprecedented election-related violence. This included attacks on sites used as registration and polling centres (for example schools), attacks on election-related staff, parliamentary candidates and ANP officers providing security and threats against people wanting to vote. UNAMA and news agency Voice of America (VoA) report on "a deliberate campaign intended by the Taliban to disrupt and undermine the electoral process". From April to the end of 2018, UNAMA verified 1 007 election-related civilian casualties (226 deaths and 781 injured), with the first day of polling (20 October 2018) recording the highest number of civilian casualties on any single day in 2018. The UN Secretary General designates Kunduz and Kabul as the two cities that recorded the highest number of security incidents on election day, with Kabul counting 14 IED and high-profile attacks claimed by ISKP. Nevertheless, this high number of security incidents did not significantly disrupt the electoral process in the capital and other urban areas.'[47]

7.1.5 The International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO), an international charity that 'supports the safety of aid workers in high risk contexts', recorded 8,420 security incidents, which included conflict and criminal related incidents; serious (i.e. bombings) and non-serious events (i.e. demonstrations); and

[45] Lifos, 'Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan', (pages 5-6), 4 December 2018, url.
[46] UN General Assembly, 'The situation in Afghanistan …', (paragraph 18), 7 December 2018, url.
[47] Cedoca, 'COI Focus Afghanistan', (page 20), 15 May 2019, url.

both security improving (i.e. arrests/seizures) and security-deteriorating incidents (i.e. attacks), in Afghanistan between January and April 2019[48].

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7.2 Civilian casualties

7.2.1 According to the UNAMA 2018 report 'Civilians continued to live in fear of being killed or maimed as a result of Anti-Government Elements' increasing reliance on suicide IED attacks. Civilians from all walks of life were affected, including journalists, first responders, teachers, religious leaders, elections workers and others.'[49]

7.2.2 Cedoca noted in its report that targets of attacks were:

'… high-profile international institutions, both military and civil - including diplomatic personnel and western non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in addition to Afghan authorities, institutions and security forces. [However,] By using large amounts of explosions in populated areas, these suicide attacks – initially targeting government officials – result in the indiscriminate killing and injuring of civilians going about their daily lives in the city. Additionally several sources report on a pattern of continued intimidation and violence faced by media workers and journalists as well as medical personnel, both often being targeted when responding to these attacks. […] Other targets of insurgency attacks in Kabul mentioned by analyst Thomas Ruttig include religious and tribal leaders working with the government, mosques and clergymen and women's and human rights activists.'[50]

7.2.3 In its Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict for 2018, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented a total of 91,675 civilian casualties (32,114 deaths and 59,561 injured) since systematic recording began in 2009[51]. In 2018 UNAMA documented 10,993 civilian casualties (3,804 deaths and 7,189 injured) indicating a 5% increase in overall civilian casualties and an 11% increase in civilian deaths compared to 2017[52].

7.2.4 The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) of the United States stated, in its quarterly report dated April 2019, that 'RS [NATO Resolute Support] reported 9,214 civilian casualties in 2018 (2,845 killed and 6,369 wounded).'[53] According to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), civilian casualties reached 11,212 (3,032 killed and 8,180 injured) in 2018, an increase of 19% on the previous year[54].

7.2.5 SIGAR provided a tabled analysis of RS data on civilian casualties (deaths and injuries) by province from January to 16 November 2018[55]:

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[48] INSO, 'Afghanistan', n.d., url.
[49] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018', (page 18), February 2019, url.
[50] Cedoca, 'COI Focus Afghanistan', (pages 9-10), 15 May 2019, url.
[51] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018', (page 1, footnote 3), February 2019, url.
[52] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018', (page 1), February 2019, url.
[53] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report', (page 79), 30 April 2019, url.
[54] Kabul Times, 'Civilian casualties increase by 19pc: AIHRC', 25 April 2019, url.
[55] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report', (page 76), 30 January 2019, url.

RS-REPORTED CIVILIAN CASUALTIES: JANUARY–NOVEMBER 16, 2018

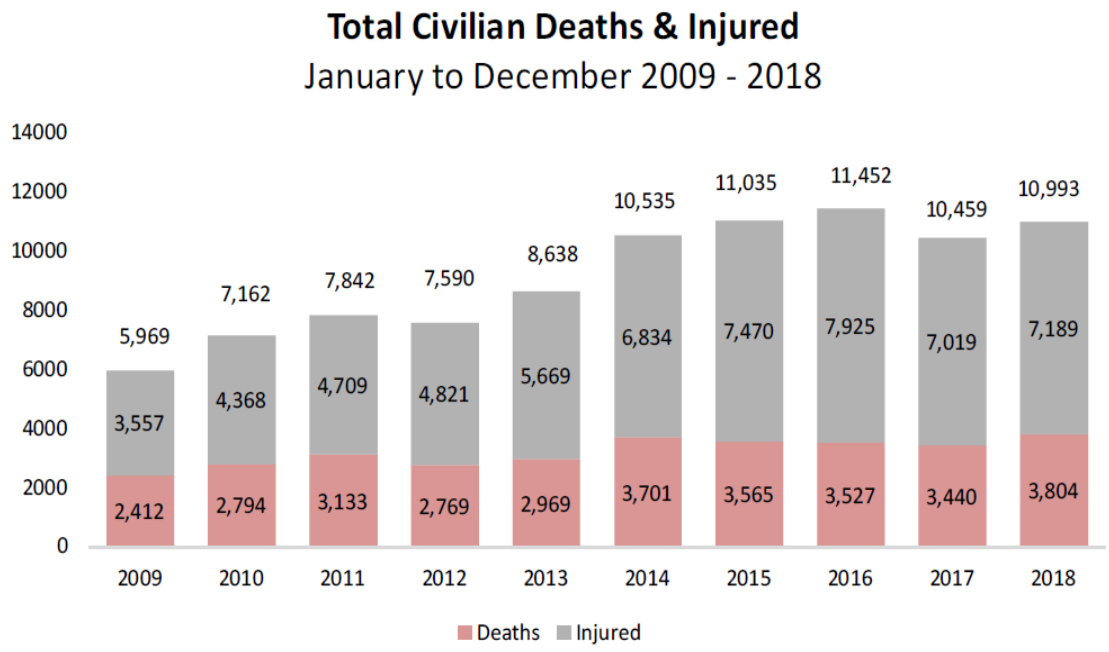
Province	Population	Total Casualties	Casualties Per Thousand
Badakhshan	1,165,960	46	0.04
Badghis	607,825	81	0.13
Baghlan	1,120,511	253	0.23
Balkh	1,633,048	141	0.09
Bamyan	549,243	0	0.00
Daykundi	561,651	9	0.02
Farah	620,552	187	0.30
Faryab	1,226,475	307	0.25
Ghazni	1,507,262	251	0.17
Ghor	845,018	90	0.11
Helmand	1,112,152	427	0.38
Herat	2,326,261	333	0.14
Jowzjan	656,187	72	0.11
Kabul	5,452,652	1,703	0.31
Kandahar	1,512,293	248	0.16
Kapisa	540,051	134	0.25
Khost	704,149	218	0.31
Kunar	551,469	287	0.52
Kunduz	1,237,001	240	0.19
Laghman	552,694	186	0.34
Logar	481,271	195	0.41
Nangarhar	1,864,582	1,517	0.81
Nimroz	202,488	22	0.11
Nuristan	173,222	28	0.16
Paktika	532,953	105	0.20
Paktiya	677,465	326	0.48
Panjshir	187,856	4	0.02
Parwan	817,955	78	0.10
Samangan	475,655	42	0.09
Sar-e Pul	690,566	56	0.08
Takhar	1,208,745	165	0.14
Uruzgan	429,415	218	0.51
Wardak	729,983	162	0.22
Zabul	374,440	129	0.34
Total	**33,329,050**	**8,260**	**0.25**

7.2.6 UNAMA attributed 63% of all civilian casualties to AGEs (37% Taliban, 20% to Daesh/ISKP (Islamic State Khorasan Province) and 6% to undetermined or other AGEs. AGEs caused 6,768 civilian casualties in 2017[56] and 6,980 in 2018, an increase of 3%, caused mainly by the indiscriminate use of suicide and other IED tactics in civilian areas[57]. 24% of casualties attributed to Pro-Government Forces (14% to Afghan national security forces; 6% to international military forces; 2% to pro-Government armed groups and 2% to undetermined or multiple pro-government forces)[58].

7.2.7 In 2018, UNAMA noted a 7% decrease in civilian casualties by the Taliban compared to 2017. However, there was a 118% increase in civilian casualties attributed to Daesh/ ISKP – 1,000 in 2017 (399 deaths and 601 injured)[59] to 2,181 in 2018 (681 deaths and 1,500 injured)[60].

7.2.8 The number of civilian deaths and injuries, January to December 2009-2018, are recorded in the graph below. Number of deaths and injuries in brackets: 2009 (5,969); 2010 (7,162); 2011 (7,842); 2012 (7,590); 2013 (8,638); 2014 (10,535); 2015 (11,035); 2016 (11,452); 2017 (10,459); 2018 (10,993)[61].

[56] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2017', (page 4), February 2018, url.
[57] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018', (page 4), February 2019, url.
[58] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018', (page 4), February 2019, url.
[59] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2017', (page 27), February 2018, url.
[60] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018', (page 4), February 2019, url.
[61] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018', (page 1), February 2019, url.



7.2.9 During the first 3 months of 2019, UNAMA documented 1,773 civilian casualties, of which 581 were fatal. This represented a decrease of 23% compared to the same period in 2018. The overall decrease in civilian casualties was largely driven by a 76% reduction in civilian casualties from suicide IED attacks although there was a 21% increase in non-suicide IED attacks[62].

7.2.10 The SIGAR report of April 2019 noted that:

'Civilians living in Kabul, Nangarhar, Helmand, Ghazni, and Faryab Provinces suffered the highest number of casualties in 2018. Of these five provinces, four experienced an increase in civilian casualties compared to 2017, including Kabul (2% increase), Nangarhar (111%), Ghazni (84%), and Faryab (1%), with Helmand seeing an 11% decrease. Two provinces had the most civilian casualties in 2018 by far: Kabul with 1,866 casualties (596 deaths) and Nangarhar with 1,815 (681 deaths).'[63]

See also Geographical distribution of violence.

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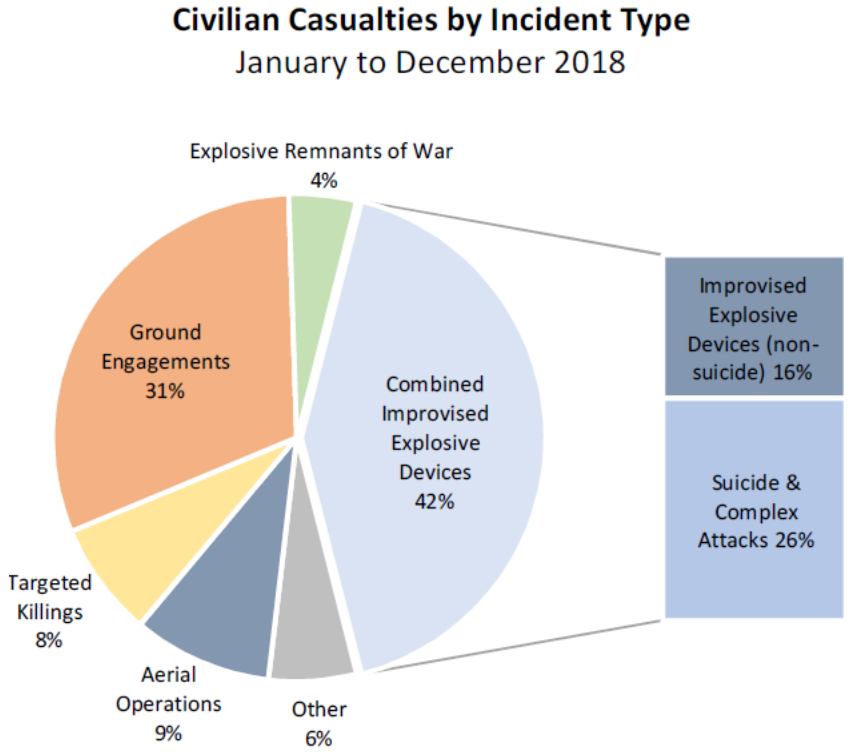
7.3 Nature of violence

7.3.1 UNAMA noted that, in 2018, suicide and complex attacks were the leading cause of civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements (AGEs). Such attacks increased by 22% compared to 2017. The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in both suicide and non-suicide attacks by AGEs accounted for 42% of civilian casualties[64].

7.3.2 The pie chart below, produced by UNAMA, indicates the number of civilian casualties by incident type from January to December 2018. Deaths and

[62] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Quarterly', (pages 1 and 3), 24 April 2019, url.
[63] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report', (page 78), 30 April 2019, url.
[64] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018', (pages 2 and 5), February 2019, url.

injuries were caused by combined improvised explosive devices (total 42%: IEDs (non-suicide) 16% and suicide and complex attacks 26%); ground engagements (31%); targeted killings (8%); explosive remnants of war (4%); aerial operations (9%); other (6%)[65].



7.3.3 SIGAR stated, in its report of April 2019, that:

'According to RS [NATO Resolute Support], "enemy-initiated attacks are defined as all attacks (direct fire, indirect fire, surface-to-air fire, IED and mine explosions, etc.) initiated by insurgents that are reported as [significant activities] (SIGACTs)." RS reported 22,669 enemy-initiated attacks (EIA) in Afghanistan in 2018, with 4,374 (19%) of them occurring in the last two months of the year (November 1 to December 31, 2018). RS reported 6,245 EIA this quarter (November 1, 2018–January 31, 2019). This reporting period's figures reflect an average of 2,082 EIA per month, a 19% increase in EIA compared to the average monthly EIA last reporting period (August 16 to October 31, 2018).'[66]

7.3.4 In the first quarter of 2019 (January to March), UNAMA reported that:

'Ground engagements were the leading cause of civilian casualties, causing approximately onethird of the total. A single mortar attack incident by Daesh/Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) on 7 March 2019 in Kabul caused approximately one-fifth of all civilian casualties from ground engagements ... The use of IEDs was the second leading cause of civilian casualties. Contrary to 2017 and 2018 trends, the majority of IED civilian casualties were caused by nonsuicide IEDs rather than suicide IEDs. Aerial operations were the leading cause of civilian deaths and the third leading

[65] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018', (page 2), February 2019, url.
[66] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report', (page 75), 30 April 2019, url.

cause of civilian casualties, followed by targeted killings and explosive remnants of war.'[67]

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Section 8 updated: 11 July 2019

8. Geographical distribution of violence

8.1 Overview

8.1.1 The EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) reports on the Afghanistan security situation of June 2019 provided regional descriptions of the security situation in the provinces[68] (to note EASO periodically updates these reports). This Country Policy and Information Note also contains a brief overview of the security situation in Afghanistan's 3 largest cities – Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif (Balkh province) and Herat. See also Annex A for a breakdown of civilian casualties by province in 2018.

8.1.2 Urban areas are typically considered to be more secure than rural areas, although the Taliban has demonstrated an increased capability to threaten district centres[69] [70]. 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 kidnappings[71]. Despite the displacement to towns and cities, most Afghans live in rural areas (nearly 75% of the population in 2017)[72]. However, the Asia Foundation 2018 survey found that Afghans living in urban areas (75.3%) reported fearing for their safety more than those in rural areas (69.7%)[73]. (See also District control).

8.1.3 The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported that conflict-induced displacement was recorded in 32 of the 34 provinces in 2018[74]. The OCHA reported that, between 1 January and 20 May 2019, 26 out of 34 provinces had recorded some level of forced displacement due to the conflict[75]. (See also Internally displaced persons (IDPs)).

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8.2 Security incidents

8.2.1 According to the SIGAR quarterly report dated April 2019:

'[M]ost of the attacks in 2018, (13,828, or 61%), occurred in eight of Afghanistan's 34 provinces: Badghis, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, and Herat. Of these provinces, Helmand and Badghis

[67] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Quarterly', (page 2), 24 April 2019, url.
[68] EASO, 'COI Reports', (website), url.
[69] Long War Journal, 'US commander in Afghanistan downplays Taliban …', 23 September 2016, url.
[70] EASO 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (page 34), November 2016, url.
[71] EASO 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (pages 34-35), November 2016, url.
[72] The World Bank, 'Rural population (% of total population)', n.d., url.
[73] The Asia Foundation, 'Afghanistan in 2018', (page 46), December 2018, url.
[74] IDMC, 'Afghanistan Overview', n.d., url.
[75] OCHA, 'Afghanistan: Conflict Inducted Displacements', 2 June 2019, url.

experienced the greatest increase in EIA [enemy initiated attacks] since October 31 (96% and 30%, respectively). The most violent province in terms of EIA shifted toward the end of the year, with the most EIA reported by far in Helmand (2,861), followed by Farah (1,801), and Badghis (1,798) Provinces. Last quarter's data showed Farah with the most reported EIA, followed by Helmand and Faryab Provinces.'[76]

8.2.2 Presenting security incident data for 2018 from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), SIGAR reported:

'ACLED recorded 7,399 security-related events in Afghanistan in 2018, roughly the same as the 7,345 recorded in 2017. The three provinces with the most events were unchanged from 2017 to 2018: Nangarhar, Ghazni, and Helmand. The events occurring in these three provinces accounted for 35% of 2018's total events. Eight of the top 10 provinces with the most ACLED-recorded security-related events in 2018 were also within the top 10 provinces where RS recorded the most enemy-initiated attacks in 2018 (Helmand, Farah, Faryab, Uruzgan, Kandahar, Herat, Ghazni, and Nangarhar).'[77]

8.2.3 The UN Secretary General reported that the United Nations recorded 22,478 security incidents in 2018, a 5% decrease compared to 2017. The highest number of incidents (52%) were recorded in the southern and eastern regions. The report added:

'Between 16 November 2018 and 7 February 2019, UNAMA recorded a total of 4,420 security-related incidents, an 8 per cent decrease compared with the same period the year before. The southern region saw the highest number of incidents, followed by the eastern and northern regions, with these three regions accounting for 67 per cent of all incidents. Between 16 November 2018 and 7 February 2019, UNAMA recorded a total of 4,420 security-related incidents, an 8 per cent decrease compared with the same period the year before. The southern region saw the highest number of incidents, followed by the eastern and northern regions, with these three regions accounting for 67 per cent of all incidents. Established trends remain unchanged, with armed clashes dominating the security incident profile, accounting for 58 per cent of all incidents, a 12 per cent decrease compared with the same period in 2017. Suicide attacks decreased by 61 per cent, possibly reflecting successful interdiction efforts by Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in the cities of Kabul and Jalalabad.'[78]

8.2.4 The Asia Foundation 2018 survey reported a noticeable increase in fear of travelling compared to 10 years ago, most notably in the West, North-West, North and North-East and some provinces in the Central region of Afghanistan. According to its findings, 79.7% of respondents reported some or a lot of fear when travelling, an increase of 18.7 percentage points compared to 2008[79].

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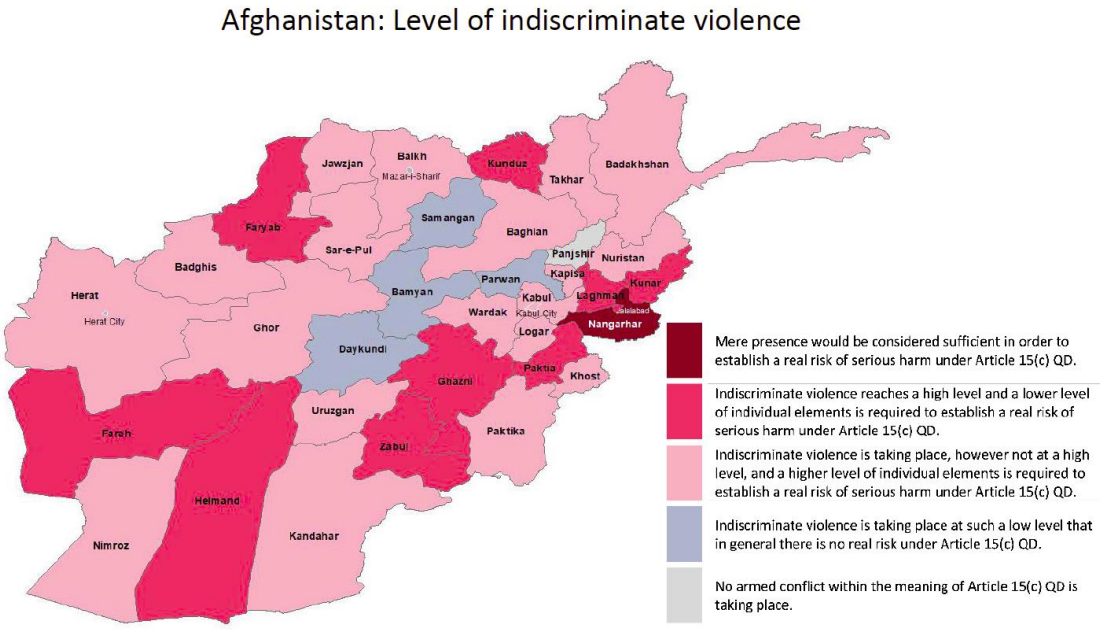
[76] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report', (page 75), 30 April 2019, url.
[77] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report', (page 76), 30 April 2019, url.
[78] UN General Assembly, 'The situation in Afghanistan …', (paras 16-17), 28 February 2019, url.
[79] The Asia Foundation, 'Afghanistan in 2018', (page 50), December 2018, url.

8.2.5 The EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan map below summarised and illustrated the assessment of indiscriminate violence per province in Afghanistan, as of 28 February 2019[80]:



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8.3 District control

8.3.1 The Long War Journal (LWJ) produced a frequently updated 'living map', mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan. As of 7 June 2019, the Long War Journal assessed that 141 districts (35%) were under government control or undetermined; 205 districts (52%) were contested and 51 districts (13%) under Taliban control. Control of one district was unconfirmed[81]. LWJ definition: 'Any "Unconfirmed" district […] has some level of claim-of-control made by the Taliban, but either has not yet been – or can not be – independently verified by LWJ research. A "Contested" district may mean that the government may be in control of the district center, but little else, and the Taliban controls large areas or all of the areas outside of the district center. A "Controlled" district may mean the Taliban is openly administering a district, providing services and security, and also running the local courts.'[82]

8.3.2 SIGAR's quarterly report to US Congress, dated 30 January 2019, noted:

'According to RS, as of October 22, 2018, there were 219 districts under Afghan government control (74) or influence (145), 53.8% of the total number of districts. This represents a decrease of seven government-controlled or influenced districts compared to last quarter and eight since the same period in 2017. Insurgent control or influence of Afghanistan's districts increased marginally: there were 50 districts under insurgent control (12) or influence (38) this quarter. This is an increase of one district since last quarter, but a decrease of eight compared to the same period in 2017.

[80] EASO, 'Country Guidance Afghanistan', (page 89), June 2019, url.
[81] Long War Journal, 'Mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan', n.d., url.
[82] Long War Journal, 'Mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan', n.d., url.

Therefore, 12.3% of Afghanistan's districts are now reportedly under insurgent control or influence. The number of contested districts – controlled or influenced by neither the Afghan government nor the insurgency – increased by six since last quarter to 138 districts, meaning that 33.9% of Afghanistan's districts are now contested. […] RS identified the provinces with the most insurgent-controlled or -influenced districts as Kunduz (five of seven districts), and Uruzgan (four of six districts), and Helmand (nine of 14 districts).'[83]

8.3.3 According to Bill Roggio of the Long War Journal 'Both USFOR-A and Resolute Support have underestimated and understated the Taliban's control of districts in the past.'[84]

8.3.4 As reported by the UN Secretary General in his February 2019 report, 'The Taliban succeeded in temporarily capturing 21 district administrative centres throughout the year, the second highest level since the security transition to the Afghan forces at the end of 2014.'[85]

8.3.5 The SIGAR report noted regarding population control:

'According to RS, as of October 22, 2018, 63.5% of the population (21.2 million of an estimated 33.3 million total) lived in areas under Afghan government control or influence, […] The insurgency slightly increased its control or influence over areas where 10.8% of the population (3.6 million people) lived, […]. The population living in contested areas increased to 8.5 million people (25.6% of the population) …'[86]

8.3.6 In February 2019, the UN Secretary General reported ISKP/Daesh (ISIL) strongholds in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan and Laghman. The report added:

'ISIL suffered a severe setback in northern Afghanistan during the reporting period. In July 2018, 1,000 Taliban attacked ISIL positions in Jowzjan province, killing 200 ISIL fighters, while 254 ISIL fighters surrendered to government forces and 25 foreign terrorist fighters surrendered to the Taliban. One Member State assesses that the ISIL presence in Jowzjan has been eliminated while, elsewhere in the north, a minority of Taliban – approximately 170 fighters in Faryab, 100 in Sari Pul and 50 in Balkh – retain sympathies for ISIL.'[87]

8.3.7 In March 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Department for Country of Origin Information Reports (CAB) noted in its Country of Origin Report Afghanistan, based on public and confidential sources:

'Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) was militarily active primarily in the eastern provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar during the reporting period. Until about August 2018 it was also active in Jawzjan and other provinces in northern Afghanistan. The ISKP presence in northern Afghanistan seems to

[83] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report', (pages 69 and 71), 30 January 2019, url.
[84] Long War Journal, 'Taliban controls or contests 40 percent of Afghan districts…', 1 May 2017, url.
[85] UN General Assembly, 'The situation in Afghanistan …', (para 16), 28 February 2019, url.
[86] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report', (page 69), 30 January 2019, url.
[87] UN Security Council, 'Eighth report of the Secretary-General', (paras 38, 40), 1 February 2019, url.

be greatly reduced following the surrender of about 250 ISKP fighters to the Afghan government.'[88]

8.3.8 According to the US Department of Defense (US DoD), reporting in December 2018, 'The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) remain in control of most of Afghanistan's population centers and all of the provincial capitals, while the Taliban control large portions of Afghanistan's rural areas, and continue to attack poorly defended government checkpoints and rural district centers.'[89]

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 EASO's May 2018 COI report on the security situation in Afghanistan stated 'Both the Taliban and IS carry out high-profile attacks in Kabul city, and the Haqqani network is also said to commit attacks in Kabul city.'[90] In its updated report on the security situation, dated June 2019, EASO noted that according to AAN expert Thomas Ruttig '[T]he capital city offers infrastructure, logistics and possible personnel that could be used by the Haqqani network, Taliban groups, splinter groups claiming its affiliation to the IS and Pakistani anti-Shia group.'[91]

8.4.2 According to UNAMA, '[A]ttacks perpetrated in Kabul mainly targeted civilians, including the civilian Government administration, places of worship, education facilities, election-related sites and other "soft" targets.'[92] Latest UNAMA figures for civilian casualties in 2018 reported 1,866 civilian casualties in Kabul province[93] (up from 1,831 or 2% in 2017[94] and 1,758 or 6% in 2016[95]). There has been a rise in civilian casualties in Kabul city: 1,686 recorded civilian casualties in 2018, an increase of 4.59% (1,612) compared to 2017[96]; 22% (1,381) compared to 2016[97]; and 105% (820) compared to 2015[98]). In 2018, the civilian casualties in Kabul city were due to 28 suicide and complex attacks[99].

8.4.3 Summarising the situation in Kabul, Lifos noted 'The security situation in Kabul city is characterized by increased violence and with increasingly frequent suicide bombings. Although the incident level in Kabul is relatively low, each individual attack can potentially claim a large number of casualties. After the first seven months of this year [2018], almost as many suicide

[88] CAB, 'Country of Origin Report Afghanistan', (page 26), March 2019, url.
[89] US DoD, 'Enhancing security and stability in Afghanistan', (page 11), December 2018, url.
[90] EASO 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation – Update', (page 25), May 2018, url.
[91] EASO 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (Section 2.1.2), June 2019, url.
[92] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2018', (page 23), February 2019, url.
[93] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2018', (page 68), February 2019, url.
[94] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2017', (page 3), February 2018, url.
[95] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2016', (page 4), February 2017, url.
[96] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2017', (page 4), February 2018, url.
[97] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2016', (page 60), February 2017, url.
[98] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2016', (page 60), February 2017, url.
[99] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2018', (page 23), February 2019, url.

bombings occurred in the capital as in the whole of 2017.'[100] The June 2019 EASO report noted 'The picture of conflict in Kabul city is characterised by asymmetric tactical warfare with suicide bombers and IEDs as weapons of attack.'[101]

8.4.4 Cedoca noted in its report dated 15 May 2019:

'After an increase at the end of 2017 and in the first months of 2018, several sources indicate that the number of high-profile attacks in Kabul (and in the country as a whole) started to decrease from April - May 2018 and further into the second half of 2018. The UN Secretary General reports a 37% decrease of suicide attacks in Kabul in December 2018 and a 61% decrease in February 2019, suggesting together with the United States Department of Defence (USDoD) that this possibly reflects the successful interdiction efforts and enhanced security measures by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) in the capital ... Nevertheless, Kabul remains a target for insurgent groups and anti-government elements (AGEs) such as the Taliban and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), who continue to carry out attacks in the city.'[102]

8.4.5 In January 2018 a single attack in Kabul city accounted for 343 civilian casualties, accounting for 20% of the total casualties in the city for 2018[103].

8.4.6 The Cedoca report stated:

'Commenting on a string of violent incidents in January 2018 in urban areas and in Kabul city in particular, analysts note that this was "not the first peak of attacks over recent years" and "does not constitute a major shift in the conflict or the modus operandi of the Taliban", while pointing out that "it contributes to the feeling of a worsening security situation and the feeling that the government and its security organs are incapable of stopping terror attacks".'[104]

8.4.7 Security-related incidents in Kabul in 2018 and into 2019, causing multiple civilian casualties, [105] [106] [107] [108] included:

- 20 January 2018, a complex attack on the Intercontinental Hotel resulted in the deaths of around 20 people;
- 27 January 2018, a suicide attacker detonated a vehicle-borne IED at the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) checkpoint near the old Ministry of Interior building, killing 114 civilians and injuring 229;
- 22 April 2018, a suicide IED outside the entrance of a tazkira (national identification card) distribution centre in a Hazara populated area killing 60 civilians and injuring 138;

[100] Lifos, 'Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan', (pages 5-6), 4 December 2018, url.
[101] EASO 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (Section 2.1.2), June 2019, url.
[102] Cedoca, 'COI Focus Afghanistan', (page 8), 15 May 2019, url.
[103] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2018', (page 26), February 2019, url.
[104] Cedoca, 'COI Focus Afghanistan', (page 8), 15 May 2019, url.
[105] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2018', (page 23), February 2019, url.
[106] FCO, 'Foreign travel advice Afghanistan', updated 20 March 2019, url.
[107] Cedoca, 'COI Focus Afghanistan', (page 21), 15 May 2019, url.
[108] UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Quarterly', (page 3), 24 April 2019, url.

- 30 April 2018, a suicide attack targeting the National Directorate of Security counterterrorism department caused 63 civilian casualties;
- 4 June 2018, a suicide attack on a gathering of the Afghan Ulema Council, the country's top religious body in Kabul, killing at least 7 civilians (including 2 religious scholars) and injuring 20;
- 11 June 2018, suicide bombing at the Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, killing 13 and injuring 25;
- 15 July 2018, another suicide attack targeting the same ministry, killed 7 people and wounded 15;
- 22 July 2018, a suicide bombing at the entrance of Hamid Karzai International Airport, shortly after Afghan First Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum had left the airport after his arrival in the capital, causing the death of 27 civilians and injuring 79;
- 10 September 2018, a suicide attack near the procession commemorating the death of former mujahedin commander Ahmed Shah Massoud, killing 7 civilians and injuring 24;
- 20 November 2018, a suicide attack on a wedding hall killed approximately 55 people and injured over 85;
- 28 November 2018, a complex attack on the G4S compound killed at least ten people and injured at least 35 others;
- 14 January 2019, a suicide vehicle-borne IED detonated near Green Village compound, in which several international companies were based. Six civilians were killed and 140 injured;
- 17 March 2019, a mortar attack on a crowd of people marking the anniversary of the death of a prominent ethnic Hazara leader killed 11 and injured 124;
- 20 April 2019, a suicide attack and subsequent siege targeting the Ministry of Communication, killing at least 7 and injuring several others.

8.4.8 The EASO report of June 2019 noted that AAN's Thomas Ruttig '[…] described the difficulties of attributing security incidents to different anti-government groups. ISKP often claims attacks not carried out by its fighters, whereas the Taliban often deny their involvement in assaults causing high numbers of civilian casualties.' The EASO report cited Taliban- and ISKP-claimed attacks in Kabul city between January 2018 and February 2019[109].

8.4.9 The June 2019 EASO country guidance Afghanistan concluded that, whilst indiscriminate violence was taking place in Kabul and Kabul city, it was not at a 'high level'[110].

See also Civilian casualties.

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[109] EASO 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (Section 2.1.3), June 2019, url.
[110] EASO, 'Country Guidance Afghanistan', (page 102), June 2019, url.

8.5 Effect on residents of Kabul

8.5.1 Lifos noted in its December 2018 report 'Although Kabul is under stable government control, the frequent attacks have a great impact on people's perceived security in the capital, and many Kabul residents limit their movement in the city to only necessary travel, avoiding traveling at times when many military convoys and other government targets are moving about the city.'[111]

8.5.2 Cedoca noted in its report on Kabul:

'When asked about the everyday life strategies of the people in Kabul to minimize the risks of attacks, analyst Thomas Ruttig [Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN)] mentions a combination of rising fear and habituation or numbness. In the wake of the string of large-scale violent incidents in January 2018 in Kabul city […], national and international press paid attention to the psychological effects or mental impact these attacks have on Kabul's residents, mentioning feelings of anxiety and a "shift in normalcy for the people who now live in fear of the next attack". According to UNAMA, these attacks have influenced people's perceived security in the city, and "the unpredictable nature of these types of attacks, often away from the fighting and in civilian populated areas, has caused ordinary Afghans to live in fear of the next explosion, severely curtailing their ability to carry out normal lives".'[112]

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8.6 Mazar-e Sharif (Balkh province) and Herat

8.6.1 The June 2019 EASO country guidance report described Balkh as one of Afghanistan's most stable provinces, though added AGEs were active[113]. The EASO report on Afghanistan's security situation, dated May 2018, noted that insurgents conducted several attacks in the capital, Mazar-e-Sharif, citing targeted attacks in last quarter (October to December) of 2017[114]. EASO's June 2019 report noted a rise in criminal activities including armed robberies, murder, clashes, and kidnapping, in the city of Mazar-e-Sharif[115]. However, the EASO country guidance concluded there was a low level of indiscriminate violence in the city[116]. According to the Khaama Press news agency, reporting on 30 April 2019, an explosion caused by a magnetic bomb planted on a police vehicle near the municipality compound of Mazar-e-Sharif, killed a border police officer[117]. Mazar-e-Sharif remained under government control[118].

8.6.2 EASO's country guidance on Afghanistan noted that Taliban militants were active in some remote districts of Herat and in the provincial capital, Herat city. ISKP were also noted to be active in the city, targeting Shia Muslims in

[111] Lifos, 'Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan', (pages 5-6), 4 December 2018, url.
[112] Cedoca, 'COI Focus Afghanistan', (page 18), 15 May 2019, url.
[113] EASO, 'Country Guidance Afghanistan', (page 92), June 2019, url.
[114] EASO 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation – Update', (page 49), May 2018, url.
[115] EASO 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (Section 2.5.2), June 2019, url.
[116] EASO, 'Country Guidance Afghanistan', (page 93), June 2019, url.
[117] Khaama Press, 'Explosion rips through border police vehicle in Mazar-e-Sharif', 30 April 2019, url.
[118] EASO 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (Section 2.5.2), June 2019, url.

particular. It concluded, however, that indiscriminate violence was at a low level in Herat city[119]. According to the SIGAR report, Herat was among the 8 provinces which saw the most enemy-initiated attacks in 2018[120]. UNAMA recorded the number of civilian casualties in Herat province in 2018 as 259, a decrease of 48% compared to 2017[121]. Citing sources dated 2017, the EASO report of June 2019 noted an upsurge in criminality in Herat, allegedly by 'local strongmen', alongside locals resorting to abductions and theft to make money. The EASO report added 'Taliban are allegedly also active in the city, causing casualties among security force members as well as civilians (January 2019). Between 2017 and 2018, ISKP reportedly conducted three suicide attacks in Herat City.'[122] In February 2019, Said Reza Kazemi of the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) described Herat city as 'generally safe', though added that, since 2016, the city had seen 'an array of mostly small-scale attacks against Shias.'[123]

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Section 9 updated: 11 July 2019

9. Returnees

9.1 Overview

9.1.1 UNHCR recorded 15,699 Afghan refugees returned in 2018. There was a significant decrease from the number of returns in 2017 of 58,817 (the majority from Pakistan – 13,584 in 2018 and 57,411 in 2017). There were 4,099 returns to Kabul in 2018 compared to 13,996 in 2017[124] [125].

9.1.2 According to UNHCR, the decrease in returns in 2018 was mainly due 'to the changing regional political dynamics and the improved protection environment for Afghan refugees in Pakistan as well as the deteriorating security environment in Afghanistan, the drought and the poor socio economic conditions.'[126]

9.1.3 Over 90% of interviewed returnees stated that they had sufficient information to make an informed decision prior to the return, mainly obtained through Afghan communities and visits to Afghanistan[127].

9.1.4 In addition, 99,980 total returns of undocumented Afghans from Iran and Pakistan were recorded between 1 January 2019 to 30 March 2019[128].

9.1.5 EASO noted in its April 2019 report on key socio-economic indicators, 'Many returnees end up in Kabul because of relatively higher security than in their regions of origin, and because of expectations of more job opportunities and

[119] EASO, 'Country Guidance Afghanistan', (pages 99-100), June 2019, url.
[120] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report', (page 75), 30 April 2019, url.
[121] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2018', (page 67), February 2019, url.
[122] EASO 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (Section 2.13.2), June 2019, url.
[123] AAN, 'Speculation Abounding… ', 3 February 2019, url.
[124] UNHCR, 'Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation Update', January 2019, url.
[125] UNHCR, 'Afghanistan Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Jan – Dec 2017', 3 January 2018, url.
[126] UNHCR, 'Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation Update', January 2019, url.
[127] UNHCR, 'Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation Update', January 2019, url.
[128] IOM, 'Return of undocumented Afghans Weekly situation report', 24-30 March 2019, url.

support facilities for returnees.'[129] The report added 'More than one third of the residents of Kabul province were born abroad or elsewhere in Afghanistan. Alongside returnees from abroad, the most sizeable communities are migrants from Wardak, Parwan, Ghazni, Bamyan, Nangarhar, Panjshir and Kapisa.'[130]

9.1.6 The conference People on the Move, a meeting between the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations, took place in Geneva on 27-28 November 2018[131]. At the meeting, H.E. Dr. Jamaher Anwary, Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, made a speech:

'Since 2002, my Ministry, together with UNHCR, has built almost 220,000 houses for the most vulnerable returnees. We have constructed more than 10,000 water points and provided cash grants to assist 4.6 million returnees with their immediate needs. However, our joint contributions to the reintegration process have been rather modest to date, and much work remains to be done if the hopes of the remaining 2.7 million refugees still living in Iran and Pakistan are not be disappointed.

'Around 60 percent of all returned refugees continue to live below the standard of their fellow countrymen. They are struggling to find work; to provide housing for their families; to get medical care when needed; to enroll their children in school; and to find water that is safe to drink. ...

'But while we continue supporting the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees, we also need to get it right supporting those that have already returned. There are many reasons why repatriation and reintegration in Afghanistan has slowed down – conflicts in some parts of the country, food insecurity, scarcity of land and shelter, limited access to education and healthcare and above all, the need to be able to earn a proper living.

'This is why my government, together with our key partners, in the international community is revising its reintegration strategy to target communities in areas of high return. It reflects a transition from focusing on humanitarian emergency assistance to also providing long-term development assistance in order to ensure sustainable reintegration.

'This approach will further enhance our capacity to assist Afghan returnees. It will create conditions conducive for their return-conditions which will help them get back on their feet, so that they don't have to leave the home they return to in search of work.'[132]

9.1.7 See also Humanitarian situation, Security situation and Geographical distribution of violence.

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[129] EASO, 'Afghanistan: Key Socio-Economic Indicators', (page 15), April 2019, url.
[130] EASO, 'Afghanistan: Key Socio-Economic Indicators', (page 15), April 2019, url.
[131] How Safe is Afghanistan?, 'Returnees in Afghanistan', 30 December 2018, url.
[132] Speech by H.E Dr. Jamaher Anwary, Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, November 2018, url.

9.2 Access to services and shelter

9.2.1 UNHCR[133] noted in its Returnee and IDP monitoring report, dated May 2018, based on 14,095 surveys conducted with IDPs, returnees (from 2016 and 2017) and the general population between 30 August 2017 and 5 January 2018, that:

'Overall, the high number of refugee returnees to Afghanistan and increased internal displacement has put additional pressure on an over stretched social service mechanism. In general, there is insignificant difference in terms of access to social and economic rights [difficulties almost always relate to lack of jobs and cost of living[134]] between returnees, IDPs and the general population. Through the survey, no particular challenges to the development of self-reliance have been observed that affect returnees and IDPs in a discriminatory way.'[135]

9.2.2 The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) noted that, in November 2015, 'Approximately 55,000 individuals live in 52 informal settlement sites across Kabul. Most inhabitants of the Kabul Informal Settlements (KIS) are returnees from Pakistan and Iran, or internally-displaced people (IDPs) fleeing conflict, insecurity or human rights abuses in their provinces of origin.'[136]

9.2.3 By November 2016, this had increased to 65 informal settlements hosting 65,000 returnees and IDPs[137]. EASO noted in its April 2019 report on socio-economic indicators 'Most returnees live outside the city centre of Kabul, often in very remote areas, and many of them live in camps. According to analyst Foschini [Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) analyst Fabrizio Foschini], immigrants mainly end up in Kabul's peripheral neighbourhoods where recent immigrants from the same regional or ethnic background perpetuate a village society which often has more direct connections with the province of origin of local residents than with Kabul's central areas.'[138]

9.2.4 The EASO report also noted

'According to Oxfam, Kabul had a total inflow of 628 260 returnees and IDPs by June 2017 with most returnees living outside the city centre, often in remote areas and camps. Chaman-e Babrak, a camp located in urban Kabul has hardly any relationship with the host community. While there were no reports of major tension from the host community here, the people interviewed for Oxfam's research perceived the returnees 'as a source of pressure on the job market and local wages'. Most of the returnees interviewed stated that they depend on relatives for accommodation and other support. Those who have been in Kabul for years say that the situation deteriorated with increased local prices, unemployment, insecurity and crime.'[139]

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[133] UNHCR supports refugee returnees e.g. from Pakistan and Iran.
[134] UNHCR, 'Returnee and IDP Monitoring Report', (page 10), May 2018, url.
[135] UNHCR, 'Returnee and IDP Monitoring Report', (page 4), May 2018, url.
[136] OCHA, 'Kabul Informal Settlement', November 2015, url.
[137] EASO, 'Afghanistan: Key Socio-Economic Indicators', (page 15), April 2019, url.
[138] EASO, 'Afghanistan: Key Socio-Economic Indicators', (page 15), April 2019, url.
[139] EASO, 'Afghanistan: Key Socio-Economic Indicators', (page 30), April 2019, url.

9.2.5 The OCHA reported in its 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview:

'With the ever-present threat of violence turning daily activities into a potentially life-threatening affair, increased anxiety levels can be seen across much of the Afghan population. According to a recent Whole of Afghanistan (WoA) Assessment, 70 per cent of men do not feel safe when travelling to work, the mosque, health and education facilities or the market, with this figure as high as 95 per cent in Uruzgan and 92 per cent in Hilmand. In many cases, concerns are so pronounced that people have restricted their movements in response – 16 per cent of all families surveyed nationally reported that they are currently unable to access health facilities due to it being unsafe to travel to them.'[140]

See also Humanitarian situation.

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9.3 Tazkera (identity card)

9.3.1 EASO noted in its April 2019 report:

'The most important identification document in Afghanistan is called tazkera. Most Afghans hold one, but they are significantly less common among women and displaced people. A tazkera is formally required to access a range of public services, such as education, employment, health care and official loans provided by a bank. It is also formally required for the issuance of housing, land and property certificates and title deeds. It is particularly important to have a tazkera in urban or peri-urban areas where the lack of one restricts access to basic services and credit, but it is less necessary in rural areas where people are known to each other and to community elders.

'As stated in a joint study by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Samuel Hall and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), to obtain a tazkera IDPs are generally required to travel back to their district of origin, which is impossible for many due to transport costs and insecurity. The government of Afghanistan has recognised the importance of the IDP documentation issue and has been working with international organisations such as IOM to address it, but it continues to occur that IDPs have to travel back to their places of origin to receive their documents. Temporary changes are being introduced to the system, including the Ministry of Education facilitating enrolment in school without a tazkera.'[141]

9.3.2 According to the NRC/Samuel Hall, 88% of male refugee returnees and 86% of male IDP returnees possessed a tazkera, compared to 54% and 43% of respective females[142].

9.3.3 The EASO Country Guidance Afghanistan noted regarding travel, including any documentation requirements:

'There are no legal restrictions on travel inside Afghanistan. The government does not generally restrict the right of movement of individuals within the

[140] OCHA, '2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview', (page 9), November 2018, url.
[141] EASO, 'Afghanistan: Key Socio-Economic Indicators', (pages 19-20), April 2019, url.
[142] EASO, 'Afghanistan: Key Socio-Economic Indicators', (page 20), April 2019, url.

borders of the country, but security forces and insurgents may operate illegal checkpoints and extort money and goods from travellers. At government checkpoints, appropriate identification is generally sufficient to permit passage and other sources report that there is no "systematic requirement for documents to travel within Afghanistan".'[143]

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Section 9 updated: 11 July 2019

10. Internal relocation

10.1.1 For information including, but not limited to, food security, accommodation, land, livelihoods and access to services, see Humanitarian situation and Returnees. See also Security situation and Geographical distribution of violence.

10.1.2 Also see the EASO COI Reports 'Afghanistan: Key socio-economic indicators: Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City' and 'Country Guidance Afghanistan', the Cedoca report 'COI Focus Afghanistan. Security situation in Kabul city', and the 'Country of Origin Report Afghanistan' by the Department for Country of Origin Information Reports, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands.

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[143] EASO, 'Country Guidance Afghanistan', (page 130), June 2019, url.

Terms of Reference

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

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

- Demography – population
- Conflict in Afghanistan – recent conflicts
- Actors in the conflict – Taliban, ISIL, security forces
- Security situation
    - Overview
    - Civilian casualties
    - Nature of violence
- Geographical distribution of violence
    - Overview
    - Security incidents
    - District control
    - Kabul
    - Effect on residents of Kabul
    - Mazar-e Sharif (Balkh province) and Herat
- Humanitarian situation
    - Humanitarian aid and needs
    - Internally displaced persons (IDPs)
    - Food security
    - Employment and financial security
    - Education
    - Health and healthcare
- Returnees
- Internal relocation

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Annex A

Provincial breakdown of civilian casualties 2018 by UNAMA

Province	Leading cause	Total civilian casualties	Compared to 2017
Kabul	Suicide/complex attacks	1,866 (596 deaths and 1,270 injured)	+2%
Nangarhar	Suicide/complex attacks	1,815 (681deaths and 1,134 injured)	+111%
Helmand	Ground engagements	880 (281 deaths and 599 injured)	+11%
Ghazni	Ground engagements	653 (253 deaths and 400 injured)	+84%
Faryab	Ground engagements	646 (230 deaths and 416 injured)	+1%
Kandahar	IEDs (non-suicide)	537 (204 deaths and 333 injured)	-25%
Paktya	Suicide/complex attacks	428 (152 deaths and 276 injured)	-13%
Kunar	Ground engagements	397 (128 deaths and 269 injured)	+77%
Kunduz	Ground engagements	337 (105 deaths and 151 injured)	-11%
Zabul	Ground engagements	293 (57 deaths and 236 injured)	-12%
Farah	Ground engagements	275 (122 deaths and 153 injured)	-19%
Laghman	Ground engagements	271 (93 deaths and 178 injured)	-23%
Baghlan	Ground engagements	261 (68 deaths and 193 injured)	+17%
Herat	IEDs (non-suicide)	259 (95 deaths and 164 injured)	-48%
Balkh	Ground engagements	227 (85 deaths and 142 injured)	+76%
Wardak	Ground engagements	224 (88 deaths and 136 injured)	+170%
Jawzjan	Ground engagements	183 (61 deaths and 122 injured)	+55%
Khost	IEDs (non-suicide)	175 (84 deaths and 91 injured)	-3%
Uruzgan	Ground engagements	173 (46 deaths and 127 injured)	-70%
Paktika	IEDs (non-suicide)	150 (67 deaths and 83 injured)	-6%
Logar	Ground engagements	143 (68 deaths and 75 injured)	-3%
Kapisa	Ground engagements	139 (39 deaths and 100 injured)	+38%
Takhar	Ground engagements	113 (26 deaths and 87 injured)	+15%
Sar-e-Pul	Ground engagements	101 (22 deaths and 79 injured)	-6%
Nimroz	Ground engagements	82 (18 deaths and 64 injured)	-17%
Badghis	Ground engagements	79 (21 deaths and 58 injured)	-40%
Ghor	Targeted/deliberate killings	64 (28 deaths and 36 injured)	+94%
Badakhshan	Ground engagements	63 (18 deaths and 45 injured)	-3%
Samangan	IEDs (non-suicide)	46 (19 deaths and 27 injured)	+21%
Parwan	Ground engagements	41 (20 deaths and 21 injured)	-47%
Daikundi	Ground engagements	41 (19 deaths and 22 injured)	-5%
Nuristan	Ground engagements	25 (9 deaths and 15 injured)	+41%
Bamyan	UXO/landmines	7 (1 death and 6 injured)	+75%
Panjshir	n/a	no civilian casualties	0

[144] (IED – Improvised Explosive Device; UXO – unexploded ordnance)

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[144] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2018', (page 67), February 2019, url.

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **7.0**
- valid from **18 May 2020**

Changes from last version of this note

Updated assessment to include the country guidance case AS (Safety of Kabul) Afghanistan (CG) [2020] UKUT 130 (IAC) (1 May 2020).

There has been no substantive update to the country information.

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