



European Asylum Support Office

Afghanistan

Key socio-economic indicators

Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City

Country of Origin Information Report



April 2019

SUPPORT IS OUR MISSION



Afghanistan

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Country of Origin Information Report

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Secretary-General António Guterres met with with Afghans displaced by conflict, as part of his one-day visit to the country's capital. A view of the camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) outside Kabul.

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The following organisation reviewed the report:

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Furthermore, an external expert review was carried out by Fabrizio Foschini, political analyst with the Afghanistan Analysts Network.

It must be noted that the review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EASO.

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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2012).¹ The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

‘Refugee’, ‘risk’ and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither EASO nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 31 December 2018. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#).

¹ The EASO methodology is largely based on the Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI), 2008, and can be downloaded from the EASO website: <http://www.easo.europa.eu>.

Glossary and abbreviations

AAN	Afghanistan Analysts Network
ACBR	Afghanistan Central Business Registry
ACCI	Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries
ACJC	Anti-Corruption Justice Center
ALCS	Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey; long running survey of the Afghan population conducted by CSO
ANMDP	Afghanistan New Market Development Project
APPRO	Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization
Arazi	Afghanistan's independent land authority
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
AUWSSC	Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Corporation of Afghanistan
Bazaar	A traditional type of marketplace
Be naqsha	Without permission
BPHS	Basic Package of Health Services
CSO	Central Statistics Organisation
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
EHPS	Essential Package of Hospital Services
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCV	Fragility – Conflict - Violence
GCPEA	Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack
Ghayr-e plani	Unplanned residential area
Ghayr-e qanuni	Illegal
ICRC	International Committee for the Red Cross
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
IGC	International Growth Centre
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPSO	International Psycho-Social Organization
ISKP	Islamic State in Khorasan Province; affiliates of ISIL based in Pakistan and Afghanistan
IWA	Integrity Watch Afghanistan
IWPR	Institute for War and Peace Reporting

Madrasa	Islamic religious school
MCN	Ministry of Counter Narcotics
Microraiion	Soviet-style residential area in Kabul City
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoLSAMD	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
Nahiya	Administrative district
NEET	Neither in Employment, Education or Training
NPR	National Public Radio
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
Qawmi	A social unit based on kinship, residence, or occupation
SCA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
SEHAT	System Enhancement for Health Action
Shahrak	Residential complex
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction; an independent oversight body on US-funded reconstruction programs
Tazkera	Afghan identity document
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USDoS	US Department of State
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
WFP	World Food Programme
Zorabad	Literally translates as ‘land taken by force’. It refers to the areas where people grabbed government and public land and sold it to others or built their houses without seeking official permission

Introduction

This report was co-drafted by the national COI specialists, as referred to in the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

Terms of Reference

The report aims to provide relevant information for the purposes of the examination of applications for international protection. In particular, it is intended to inform the update of the chapter on Internal Protection Alternative within the Country Guidance on Afghanistan 2019 update.

The terms of reference of this report build on the input received from policy experts from EU+ countries and UNHCR in the context of the pilot development of Country Guidance on Afghanistan as reflected in '[Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City](#)' (August 2017). During a kick-off meeting for the drafting of the current report in September 2018, the terms of reference were further adapted by the national COI experts drafting and reviewing this report, as mentioned under the Acknowledgement section. The Country Guidance Network was subsequently informed of these updated terms of reference.

Terms of reference for this report can be found in [Annex II](#).

Methodology

The information is a result of desk research of public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 30 November 2018.

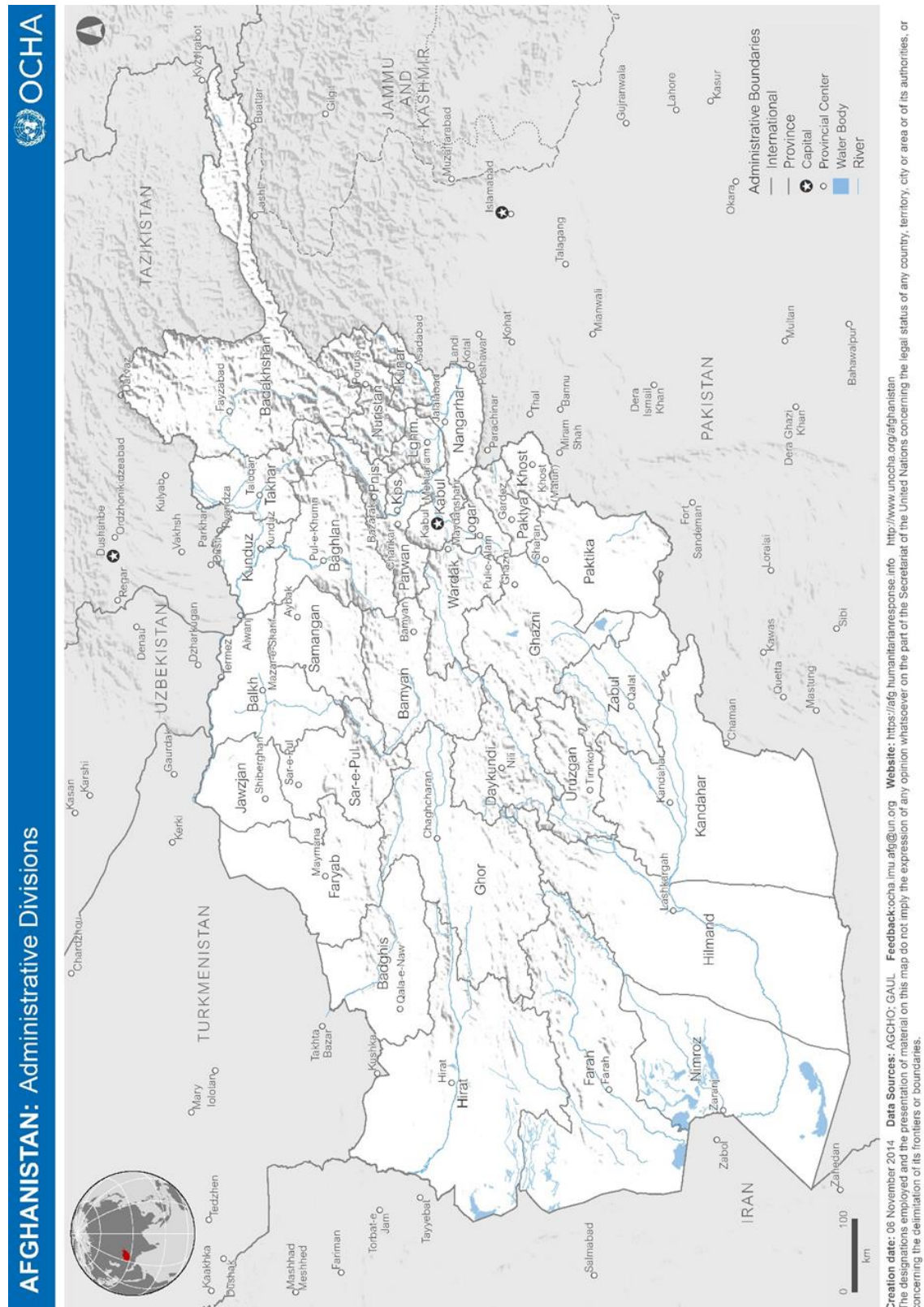
To verify whether the writers respected the EASO COI Report Methodology, a peer review was carried out by COI specialists from the departments listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. In addition, a review of the report was carried out by Fabrizio Foschini, a political analyst with the Afghanistan Analysts Network and UNHCR. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report. EASO performed the final quality review and editing of the text. This quality process led to the inclusion of some additional information, in response to feedback received during the respective reviews, until 31 December 2018.

Structure and use of the report

During 2016, EASO initiated a pilot project to facilitate Member States' cooperation on the development of country guidance notes on Afghanistan. In the context of this project, the need for updated information was identified on topics of relevance for the consideration of Internal Protection Alternative (IPA) in Afghanistan, with a focus on the cities of Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e Sharif. This choice of focus was also kept for the 2019 update of Country Guidance on Afghanistan.

After providing some background information on these three cities and discussing their accessibility, the report looks into several socio-economic indicators. The information is provided for the country as a whole, and where available for the three cities separately. Additional attention is paid to specific vulnerable groups such as IDPs, returnees, women and children.

Map



Map 1: Afghanistan - administrative divisions, source: UNOCHA

1. Background information on Kabul City, Herat City and Mazar-e Sharif

1.1 Population

1.1.1 Kabul

Kabul City, the capital of Kabul province and Afghanistan, is located in the country's Central region.² According to Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) analyst Fabrizio Foschini, Kabul is by far Afghanistan's most populous and influential city. In the absence of a proper census, the number of people living in Kabul City is not known. Estimates on its population vary considerably from 3.5 to 5.5 million³, with the Afghan Central Statistics Organization's (CSO) figure for 2017-18 at 4 million but only including 17 city districts out of a total of 22.⁴ Kabul has become one of the world's fastest growing cities, its population increasing fourfold since 2001.⁵ The expansion of Kabul and also other cities is exacerbated by internal displacement due to conflict, the ongoing drought, and the search of economic opportunities.⁶ Kabul's urbanised area has tripled since the 1978 master plan of the city, continuously expanding in almost all directions and on the rocky hills surrounding the city.⁷ Kabul City consists of 22 administrative districts (*nahiya*), an expansion from 12 before 2001.⁸

Kabul has historically been a majority Persian-speaking city with its own distinctive Dari dialect.⁹ It is an ethnically diverse city with communities of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluch, Sikhs and Hindus all residing there.¹⁰ Foschini describes Kabul City as consisting of three rings, Kabul's city centre (the areas of Shahr-e Kohna, Shahr-e Naw, Shash Darak, Wazir Akbar Khan) forming the inner ring. Neighbourhoods popular with young Afghan professionals that were planned and developed between the 1950s and 1980s form the second ring (Taimani, Qala-ye Fathollah, Karte Se, Karte Chahar, Karte Naw and the Soviet-style *microraiions* or microdistricts). The outer, growing ring of the city expanded rapidly after 2001, mainly housing Afghans who have migrated to the capital since then. Districts in Kabul's outer rings are ethnically more homogenous than the city centre, for example northern outskirts and districts, such as Khairkhana, being primarily associated with the Tajiks and western outskirts, such as Dasht-e Barchi, primarily with the Hazaras.¹¹ In 2017 the Afghan government declared a key area of the capital where important government institutions are located along with foreign embassies and some businesses as the green zone and established new check points.¹²

² Based on the Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, the classification of provinces into regions is the following: Central – Kabul, Kapisa, Logar, Panjshir, Parwan, Wardak; South – Ghazni, Khost, Paktika, Paktya; East – Kunar, Laghman, Nangarhar, Nuristan; Northeast – Badakhshan, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar; North – Balkh, Faryab, Jawzjan, Samangan, Sar-e Pul; West – Badghis, Farah, Herat; Southwest – Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Uruzgan, Zabul; West Central – Bamyán, Daykundi, Ghor

Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 99

³ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 9-10

⁴ Afghanistan, CSO, Population by Sex and Age Groups 2017-18, 2017, [url](#), p. 4

⁵ Guardian (The), Kabul - The Fifth Fastest Growing City in the World - Is Bursting at the Seams, 11 December 2014, [url](#)

⁶ UNHCR Afghanistan, email, 9 November 2018. UNHCR made this addition during the review of this report.

⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 7; Reuters, Afghan Capital's Thirsty Residents Dig Deep to Combat Drought, Overuse, 28 February 2017, [url](#)

⁸ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 7

⁹ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 6-8

¹² Tolo News, Security Check Points Stepped Up In Kabul, 7 February 2018, [url](#)

1.1.2 Herat

Herat City is the provincial capital of Herat province, located in the west of Afghanistan. Herat City's population for 2017-18 was estimated by the CSO to be 507 000.¹³ The city consists of a historical city centre, suburbs built around it during the 20th century and newly built residential enclaves, *shahraks*, that have developed around the city.¹⁴

Herat is a Persian-speaking city and the majority of its people are either Sunni or Shia Tajiks/Farsiwans. There is also a consistent Pashtun minority.¹⁵ Jolyon Leslie described Herat City as historically 'a Tajik-dominated enclave in a Pashtun-majority province that includes sizeable Hazara and Aimaq minorities'. Up to one fourth of the urban population may be Hazaras, many of whom having spent time in exile in Iran and after their return having settled in neighbourhoods such as Jebrael in the west of the city that was estimated to be home to some 60 000 predominantly Hazara residents. According to Leslie, the degree of ethnic segregation was 'pronounced' in Herat, with members of certain ethnic groups inhabiting specific quarters.¹⁶

1.1.3 Mazar-e Sharif

Mazar-e Sharif is the provincial capital of Balkh province, located in the north of Afghanistan. Mazar-e Sharif's population for 2017-18 was estimated by the CSO to be 428 000.¹⁷ The population of Balkh is heterogeneous with Tajiks and Pashtuns forming the largest groups, followed by Uzbeks, who constitute the majority in certain districts of the province and in several neighbouring provinces as well,¹⁸ and also Hazaras, Turkmens, Arabs and Baluchis.¹⁹ These communities live partially mixed in the city.²⁰

1.2 Displacement and returnees

The UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement define IDPs as 'persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters'.²¹ This definition was entirely reflected in Afghanistan's National IDP Policy adopted in 2013.²²

According to estimations by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), there were at least two million IDPs in Afghanistan in September 2018.²³ The number of conflict-induced IDPs almost tripled from 2012 to 2017, from 492 000 to nearly 1.3 million. More than 650 000 people were displaced by conflict and violence in 2016 alone and 474 000 during 2017.²⁴ In 2018, a total of 343 000 people were verified as

¹³ Afghanistan, CSO, Population by Sex and Age Groups 2017-18, 2017, [url](#), p. 38

¹⁴ Leslie, J., Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, USIP, 2 April 2015, [url](#), pp. 7, 11-12

¹⁵ Foschini, F., Back to Stopgap Appointments? The Story behind the Replacement of Herat's Governor, AAN, 24 July 2013, [url](#)

¹⁶ Leslie, J., Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, USIP, 2 April 2015, [url](#), pp. 8, 13

¹⁷ Afghanistan, CSO, Population by Sex and Age Groups 2017-18, 2017, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁸ Foschini, F., email, 9 November 2018. Fabrizio Foschini made this addition during his review of this report.

¹⁹ APPRO, Afghanistan Rights Monitor: Baseline Report, April 2016, [url](#), p. 22

²⁰ Fishstein, P., et al., Balkh's economy in transition, AREU, August 2013, [url](#), p. 22

²¹ UN, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 2004, [url](#), p. 1

²² Afghanistan, The National Policy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on Internal Displacement, June 2013, [url](#), p. 16

²³ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 5

²⁴ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 8; IDMC, Country information - Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#)

displaced by conflict²⁵ and around 226 000 were displaced by drought in the southern and western provinces.²⁶

IDPs may include among other groups returnees - returning refugees and migrants deported back to Afghanistan.²⁷ It happens that returnees to Afghanistan find themselves living in internal displacement thus becoming 'returnee-IDPs', either by being unable to return to their place of origin or by being displaced after return to their place of origin.²⁸

According to the UNHCR, the return of over 5.2 million Afghan refugees since 2002 assisted by the agency has been the largest voluntary repatriation programme in UNHCR's history. However, Afghanistan still remained the second largest country of origin of refugees in the world in 2017, with almost 2.6 million registered refugees. Despite being dispersed across more than 80 countries, the majority (91 %) of them continued to be hosted by Pakistan and Iran. In addition to the registered Afghan refugees, there were 1.5-2 million undocumented Afghans in Iran and 350 000-550 000 in Pakistan. 2016 marked a spike in returns, with more than 370 000 refugees returning to Afghanistan from Iran and Pakistan. However, in 2017, refugee returns declined to 58 800 and further to 12 785 as of September 2018. Although significant numbers of undocumented Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan, these returns showed some decline as well, with almost 693 000 returns recorded in 2016, around 561 000 in 2017 and 562 000 have returned as of September 2018.²⁹ More than 522 000 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran from January until September 2018 due to Iran's economic problems that have reduced Afghans' work opportunities and due to Iran's strict carrying out of deportations.³⁰

The significant numbers of returnees in 2016-18 along with the continued displacement to urban areas, particularly high return areas such as Kabul and Nangarhar, added pressure on community services and social infrastructure affecting Afghanistan's limited absorption capacity.³¹ According to Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) data for 2016-17, Kabul province hosted most migrants and immigrants in Afghanistan, secondary destinations being the provinces of Nangarhar, Balkh and Herat.³² According to a UNHCR study conducted in 2017-18, 38 % of former refugees did not settle in their province of origin upon return for reasons including insecurity, the presence of non-state armed groups and lack of services and economic opportunities.³³ The study found that especially returnees and IDPs living in areas that were contested between the government and armed opposition forces faced challenges, such as being more likely to be forced to skip meals, have children working, girls out of school or have less access to health care, as compared to similar populations in government-controlled areas.³⁴

1.2.1 Kabul

Kabul has been the destination for a large number of Afghans since 2001, when those who had spent years in Pakistan or Iran began to move back. Many of them settled in Kabul regardless of their place of origin in Afghanistan.³⁵ Kabul is one of the provinces in Afghanistan with the highest percentage of returnees who did not originate there.³⁶ According to ALCS, 'Kabul province - and more specifically,

²⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 24-31 December 2018, 3 January 2019, [url](#), p. 1

²⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Overview of Natural Disasters, Natural Disaster events from 2 January to 25 December 2018, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 6

²⁸ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Going "Home" to Displacement - Afghanistan's Returnee-IDPs, December 2017, [url](#), p. 3

²⁹ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), pp. 4-5

³⁰ IRIN, Why Economic Turmoil in Iran Is Causing Big Problems in Afghanistan, 11 September 2018, [url](#); IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, Weekly Situation Report, 02-08 September 2018, 11 September 2018, [url](#), p. 1

³¹ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), pp. 5, 21

³² Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 39

³³ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 15

³⁴ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

³⁵ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 12-13

³⁶ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

the capital - stands out as the main gravitational centre for migrants in the country, both for those moving internally and for those returning from abroad.³⁷ 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 support facilities for returnees.³⁸

More than one third of the residents of Kabul province were born abroad or elsewhere in Afghanistan.³⁹ Alongside returnees from abroad, the most sizeable communities are migrants from Wardak, Parwan, Ghazni, Bamyan, Nangarhar, Panjshir and Kapisa.⁴⁰ Most returnees live outside the city centre of Kabul, often in very remote areas, and many of them live in camps.⁴¹ According to analyst 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.⁴²

The large number of returnees to Kabul has challenged the absorption capacity of the government and NGOs.⁴³ According to IOM data until June 2018, Kabul province had 178 835 returnees, which was the second largest number after Nangarhar.⁴⁴ In 2016 there were about 60 recognised informal settlements in Kabul housing 65 000 registered returnees and IDPs. The residents in the settlements lived in partial or whole mudhouses. Nearly half of these settlements were provided for free by the government, but these small sites were no longer able to expand, driving households arriving after 2010 to rent properties in the host community.⁴⁵

Kabul saw a surge of displaced people coming in 2016, with informal settlement populations growing.⁴⁶ Many IDPs without family connections or the ability to rent a house ended up in camps. The number of settlers and the locations of informal settlements, such as Chaharrah-e Qanbar, Pol-e Charkhi and Chaman-e Babrak, were 'volatile and depend on the season, the attitudes of city officials, income opportunities and access to services'.⁴⁷ UNHCR documented 4 099 refugee returnees to Kabul province in 2018.⁴⁸

1.2.2 Herat

Herat is a destination for Afghan economic migrants and also a transit route for often young Afghans migrating out of Afghanistan. Many returnees use Herat as a transit route back to their own provinces.⁴⁹ Herat is one of the provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who did not originate there.⁵⁰ According to Oxfam, Herat City is considered a relatively secure urban area with employment and business opportunities. It is a diverse city where people are not tribally connected, which makes it easier for returnees and IDPs to settle.⁵¹

According to a 2016 socio-demographic and economic survey carried out by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and CSO, 47 % of Herat City's population were migrants: 43 % of them came from other districts in Herat province, 27.5 % from abroad and the rest from other provinces of Afghanistan. From those coming from abroad, 93.9 % came from Iran and 5 % from Pakistan.⁵² Being

³⁷ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. xxx

³⁸ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 23

³⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. xxx

⁴⁰ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 13

⁴¹ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 23

⁴² Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 6-8

⁴³ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 23-24

⁴⁴ IOM, Afghanistan - Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results (April - June 2018), 25 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁵ REACH, Kabul Informal Settlement Profiling, November 2016, [url](#), p. 10

⁴⁶ REACH, Kabul Informal Settlement Profiling, November 2016, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 15

⁴⁸ UNHCR, Refugee Returnees to Afghanistan in 2018, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 20

⁵⁰ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

⁵¹ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 20

⁵² Afghanistan, CSO, Final Report of Herat Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey, 7 March 2017, [url](#), pp. 29-30

‘the regional magnet of attraction in the west’, Herat province received migrants especially from the western provinces of Badghis, Farah and Nimroz.⁵³

Herat province - Herat City and its neighbouring Injil district in particular - has historically been a significant destination for IDPs. At the end of 2015 Herat was one of the provinces hosting the largest numbers of IDPs in Afghanistan, some of whom have lived in the province for as long as two decades.⁵⁴ According to IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) survey, a quarter of all assessed IDPs in Afghanistan were residing in Herat province.⁵⁵ Herat City is described as the district ‘most severely affected’ by IDPs and returnees with IOM adding that it is ‘potentially susceptible to social instability induced by the large influx of returnees and IDPs, who face inadequate access to basic services and limited job opportunities, jeopardizing reintegration prospects and fuelling secondary displacement’.⁵⁶

In 2018, Afghanistan suffered from the worst drought in its recent history hitting the Western region hardest. As a result, around 60 000 new IDPs were displaced to Herat by September 2018. According to NRC, the IDPs that fled to Herat have been living in dire conditions in makeshift shelters.⁵⁷ The displacement due to conflict and drought has had serious impacts on access to services, land, shelter and has resulted in negative coping mechanisms including child marriage, using children as collateral for loans or petty crime for example.⁵⁸

According to IOM data until June 2018, Herat province had 91 806 returnees, which was the tenth largest number among the Afghan provinces.⁵⁹ UNHCR documented 814 refugee returnees to Herat province in 2018.⁶⁰ As many as 20 % of Herat province’s estimated current population were newly arrived IDPs (544 500). According to IOM’s DTM, Herat City was the district hosting the most returnees and IDPs in Afghanistan (205 532 in total; around 26 000 returnees and 180 000 IDPs) in June 2018, while the nearby district Injil also had significant numbers of IDPs. 36 % of Herat’s IDPs were displaced by natural disasters, predominantly the drought.⁶¹

1.2.3 Mazar-e Sharif

Mazar-e Sharif has been known as the economic hub of the north, attracting economic migrants from rural areas with its work opportunities and relative safety.⁶² Being ‘the regional magnet of attraction in the north’, Balkh province received migrants especially from the northern provinces of Samangan, Sar-e Pul, Jawzjan and Faryab.⁶³

According to IOM data until June 2018, Balkh had 109 845 returnees, which was the fifth largest number among the Afghan provinces.⁶⁴ According to a 2015 CSO survey, about 38 % of Mazar-e Sharif’s population are migrants, mostly descending from other Afghan provinces and only 17 % are returnees from abroad.⁶⁵ According to a 2018 UNHCR field study, the number of returnees from Iran and other countries was very low in Mazar-e Sharif. Most of those returning from Iran were reported to be students who returned for a short period to obtain necessary documentation and then went back to

⁵³ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 40-41

⁵⁴ UN-Habitat et al., Inter-Agency Durable Solutions Initiative - Profile and Response Plan of Protracted IDP Settlements in Herat, October 2016, [url](#), p. 12

⁵⁵ IOM, Afghanistan - Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results (April - June 2018), 25 September 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁶ IOM, Afghanistan - Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results (April - June 2018), 25 September 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁵⁷ NRC, Millions of Afghans Face Risks of Drought Related Displacement, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁸ UNHCR Afghanistan, email, 8 November 2018. UNHCR made this addition during the review of this report.

⁵⁹ IOM, Afghanistan - Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results (April - June 2018), 25 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁰ UNHCR, Refugee Returnees to Afghanistan in 2018, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

⁶¹ IOM, Afghanistan - Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results (April - June 2018), 25 September 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁶² Samuel Hall, Urban Poverty Report - A Study of Poverty, Food Insecurity and Resilience in Afghan Cities, 2014, [url](#), pp. 31-32

⁶³ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 40-41

⁶⁴ IOM, Afghanistan - Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results (April - June 2018), 25 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey Balkh, 5 January 2015, [url](#), pp. 28-32

Iran to continue their education.⁶⁶ UNHCR documented 466 refugee returnees to Balkh province in 2018.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ UNHCR, Multi-Purpose Cash and Sectoral Outcomes - Afghanistan Case Study, May 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁶⁷ UNHCR, Refugee Returnees to Afghanistan in 2018, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

2. Internal mobility

2.1 Airports and flight connections

According to an overview on Afghan air traffic by Lifos, there are about 25 active airports in the country, although only a number of those were open for domestic commercial air traffic as of September 2018. Afghanistan's four international airports are located in Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif and Kandahar. Lifos noted that flight schedules can change often and information about destinations and departures is not always updated on the websites of airlines. Delays or cancellations at short notice are common and may be caused by weather conditions, natural disasters, technical problems or security related incidents, while for some destinations flights are even suspended for months. However, from Kabul to Herat, Mazar-e Sharif and Kandahar regular flights have 'more or less consistently existed over a longer period of time, whereas departures to smaller destinations, such as Bamiyan, has varied over time'.⁶⁸

As of September 2018, Kam Air and Ariana Afghan Airlines are the only Afghan companies operating flights in Afghanistan.⁶⁹ According to a New York Times article, Kam Air operated 90 % of domestic flights in Afghanistan before the Taliban attacked the Intercontinental Hotel in January 2018 in Kabul, killing nine members of Kam Air's international staff among others. After the attack more than 50 other foreign Kam Air workers left the country, forcing the airline to suspend its flights to many destinations.⁷⁰ Flights to certain domestic destinations that Kam Air used to fly to (Bamiyan, Fayzabad, Chaghcharan) were still not available by September 2018.⁷¹

2.1.1 Kabul

Kabul International Airport, officially named as Hamid Karzai International Airport in 2014 and also locally known as Khwaja Rawash Airport, is one of Afghanistan's international airports.⁷²

Based on online flight schedules accessed through a tracking site, the following connections were available from Kabul as of 31 October 2018⁷³:

- The following international airlines fly to Kabul: Flydubai and Emirates from Dubai, Air Arabia from Sharjah, Turkish Airlines and Ukrainian Wings from Istanbul, Mahan Air from Tehran and Mashhad, SpiceJet and Air India from Delhi, Silk Way Airlines from Baku and Pakistan International Airlines from Islamabad.
- Ariana Afghan Airlines operates domestic flights from Kabul to Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, Kandahar and international flights to Dubai, Delhi and Urumqi.
- Kam Air flies from Kabul domestically to Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, Kandahar, Zaranj, Bost and Farah and internationally to Istanbul, Ankara, Delhi, Islamabad, Dushanbe, Tashkent, Mashhad, Jeddah and Sharjah.

⁶⁸ Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan (version 3.0), 26 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁹ Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan (version 3.0), 26 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁰ New York Times (The), Grounded and Gutted, Main Afghan Airline Struggles after Taliban Attack, 26 January 2018, [url](#)

⁷¹ Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan (version 3.0), 26 September 2018, [url](#), p. 7

⁷² Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan (version 3.0), 26 September 2018, [url](#), p. 8; Hamid Karzai International Airport, n.d., [url](#); LCA, Afghanistan Kabul (Hamid Karzai) International Airport, 5 January 2018, [url](#); ACAA, International Airfields, 10 January 2018, [url](#)

⁷³ Flightradar 24, Kabul International Airport, n.d., [url](#)

2.1.2 Herat

Herat International Airport is one of Afghanistan's four international airports.⁷⁴ There are regular domestic flights from Herat to Kabul, Kandahar, Mazar-e Sharif and international flights to Mashhad in Iran.⁷⁵

Based on online flight schedules accessed through a tracking site, the following connections were available from Herat as of 31 October 2018⁷⁶:

- No international airlines fly to Herat.
- Ariana Afghan Airlines operates domestic flights from Herat to Kabul several times a day and international flights to Delhi.
- Kam Air flies from Herat domestically several times a day to Kabul and internationally to Mashhad.

2.1.3 Mazar-e Sharif

Mazar-e Sharif International Airport, locally known as Mawlanea Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi International Airport, is one of Afghanistan's international airports.⁷⁷

Based on online flight schedules accessed through a tracking site, the following connections are available from Mazar-e Sharif as of 31 October 2018⁷⁸:

- The following international airlines fly to Mazar-e Sharif: Turkish Airlines from Istanbul and ASL Airlines France to Tbilisi.
- Ariana Afghan Airlines operates domestic flights from Mazar-e Sharif to Kabul several times a day and international flights to Moscow, Istanbul and Ankara.
- Kam Air flies from Mazar-e Sharif domestically several times a day to Kabul and internationally to Tehran, Mashhad and Delhi.

2.2 Travel restrictions and documents

There are no legal restrictions on travel or residence inside Afghanistan. Afghans have the constitutional right to foreign travel, emigration as well as repatriation.⁷⁹ The government does not generally restrict the right of movement of individuals within the borders of the country, but security forces and insurgents may operate illegal checkpoints and extort money and goods from travellers.⁸⁰ The Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) observed that 'appropriate identification is generally sufficient to permit passage through government-run checkpoints.'⁸¹ Sources contacted by the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board did not mention any 'systematic requirement for documents to travel within Afghanistan'.⁸²

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

⁷⁴ Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan (version 3.0), 26 September 2018, [url](#), p. 8

⁷⁵ Tourism Herat, Herat International Airport, n.d., [url](#); ACAA, International Airfields, 10 January 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁶ Flightradar 24, Herat International Airport, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁷ Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan (version 3.0), 26 September 2018, [url](#), p. 8

⁷⁸ Flightradar 24, Mazar-i-Sharif International Airport, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁹ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2018 – Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#); USDoS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 – Afghanistan, 20 April 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰ USDoS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 – Afghanistan, 20 April 2018, [url](#)

⁸¹ USDoS, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, Afghanistan 2018 Crime & Safety Report, 16 February 2018, [url](#)

⁸² Canada, IRB, Afghanistan: Documents Required to Travel within Afghanistan, Documents Required to Pass Checkpoints (2013-January 2015), 3 February 2016, [url](#)

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.⁸³

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*.⁸⁴

According to a 2016 NRC and Samuel Hall study, possession rates for civil and identification documents varied significantly by the type of document with the *tazkera* being the most commonly possessed.⁸⁵

		Host community	Refugee returnee	IDP	IDP returnee
MEN	Tazkera	94 %	88 %	87 %	86 %
	Passport	15 %	16 %	11 %	9 %
	Birth certificate	3 %	3 %	2 %	0 %
	Marriage certificate	16 %	19 %	6 %	9 %
	None of the above	6 %	9 %	12 %	14 %
WOMEN	Tazkera	44 %	54 %	21 %	43 %
	Passport	6 %	2 %	1 %	2 %
	Birth certificate	0 %	2 %	0 %	2 %
	Marriage certificate	9 %	14 %	3 %	7 %
	None of the above	52 %	43 %	75 %	52 %

Figure 1: Rates of identification and civil documentation possession, by displacement status⁸⁶

Having a valid *tazkera* was also a necessity for accessing other types of documentation such as passports or marriage certificates.⁸⁷ While possession rates of identification documents like *tazkera* showed an increase, 'there is still a perception that civil documents such as birth and marriage certificates are not a necessity.'⁸⁸ However, the study found that civil documentation, allowing access to services and rights was 'crucial' for social integration.⁸⁹ The lack of *tazkera* could increase a person's vulnerability to harassment from the authorities.⁹⁰ With no civil documentation, women were found particularly at risk with regards to the judicial system, inheritance and family disputes.⁹¹ The same study noted that gender was more significant than displacement having an impact on the possession

⁸³ NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 16; NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 37

⁸⁴ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 37

⁸⁵ NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 23

⁸⁶ NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 25

⁸⁷ NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 21

⁸⁸ NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 24

⁸⁹ NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 38

⁹⁰ NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 39

⁹¹ NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 39

rates of identification documents. Women were considerably less likely to have a *tazkera*, mostly because for them it was far more difficult to access documentation and also ‘the perceived need for documentation is lower’.⁹² Merely 21 % of IDP women had a *tazkera* compared to 54 % of returnee women and 44 % of host community women. For men the impact of displacement on the possession of a *tazkera* was less noticeable: 87 % of male IDPs, 88 % of male returnees and 94 % of male host community members reported having a *tazkera*.⁹³

ALCS 2016-17 found that 61 % of urban children were registered at birth, compared to only 22 % of rural children.⁹⁴ According to UNHCR, very few children have *tazkeras*.⁹⁵ Having a *tazkera* is not common among residents of remote rural areas either.⁹⁶

2.3 Freedom of movement for women

Social restrictions constrain women’s ability to travel on their own.⁹⁷ According to social customs, women’s freedom of movement is limited by the requirement of male consent or male chaperone.⁹⁸ There is variation in women’s freedom of movement and dress code across the country. For example, in Kandahar women are rarely seen alone in public, but this is more common in Mazar-e Sharif and Kabul. Many sources interviewed during Austria’s Fact finding mission to Afghanistan in 2017 agreed that it is generally not safe for a woman to travel outside of cities without male company, but it may be done if the woman has local connections, is wearing a proper attire (for example *burqa*) and speaks the local language.⁹⁹ It also depends on which districts the women travel to; for example women may travel alone on routes connecting some major cities to the surrounding districts, using public transportation like other commuters do. This happens around Kabul (especially in the Shomali plateau north of the city), along the Herat-Islam Qalah highway, and on the main highways leading to and from Mazar-e Sharif.¹⁰⁰

There are no legal obstacles for women to drive cars in Afghanistan, but only a few do because of the threats they face behind the wheel.¹⁰¹ Kabul is one of the cities where female drivers are increasingly seen along with Balkh and Herat.¹⁰²

2.4 Roadway security

The conflict in Afghanistan is causing mass displacement and restricting travel in many parts of the country.¹⁰³ The lack of security is seen as the greatest barrier to movement.¹⁰⁴ The Asia Foundation’s 2018 Survey of the Afghan People found that 79.7 % of respondents were afraid of travelling from one part of Afghanistan to another.¹⁰⁵

Kabul’s international airport is located 5 kilometres from the city centre.¹⁰⁶ There have been bombings, attacks and security incidents occurring around the airport by insurgents targeting security apparatus. On 27 September 2017 suicide bombers and militants firing mortars attacked Kabul airport during the

⁹² NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 23

⁹³ NRC and Samuel Hall, Access to Tazkera and Other Civil Documentation in Afghanistan, November 2016, [url](#), p. 25

⁹⁴ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 167

⁹⁵ UNHCR Afghanistan, email, 9 November 2018. UNHCR made this addition during the review of the report.

⁹⁶ Foschini, F., email, 9 November 2018. Fabrizio Foschini made this addition during the review of the report.

⁹⁷ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2018 – Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁸ USDoS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 - Afghanistan, 20 April 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁹ Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Fact-finding Mission Report Afghanistan, [source: Representative of an international NGO], April 2018, [url](#), p. 28

¹⁰⁰ Foschini, F., email, 9 November 2018. Fabrizio Foschini made this addition during the review of the report.

¹⁰¹ Huffington Post, Despite The Backlash, Women Take The Wheel In Afghanistan, 31 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰² Tolo News, Number of Woman Drivers on the Rise in Kabul, 28 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰³ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2018 – Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ USDoS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 - Afghanistan, 20 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ Asia Foundation, Survey of the Afghan People 2018, December 2018, [url](#), p. 50

¹⁰⁶ LCA, Afghanistan Kabul (Hamid Karzai) International Airport, 5 January 2018, [url](#)

visit of US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis. The attack was claimed both by the Taliban and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).¹⁰⁷ BBC reported on 23 July 2018 that 14 people had died and another 60 had been injured in a blast at Kabul airport shortly after Afghan Vice-President Abdul Rashid Dostum returned from self-imposed exile.¹⁰⁸

The airports of Mazar-e Sharif and Herat are located outside the cities. The Mazar-e Sharif airport is located 9 kilometres east of the city centre.¹⁰⁹ Herat airport is located 13 kilometres south of Herat City in the district of Gozara.¹¹⁰ Even though the road connecting Herat to the airport is a major one, routinely controlled by security forces, in recent years it has seen activity by criminal networks. In this part of the country they are often connected to insurgents as well, who try to intercept potential targets for kidnap or murder moving to and from the airport.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Reuters, Militants Attack Kabul Airport during Mattis Visit, U.S. Strike Hits Civilians, 27 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ BBC, Afghan airport blast: VP Gen Dostum unhurt as Kabul bomb kills 14, 23 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ LCA, Afghanistan Mazar-i-Sharif (Mawlana Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi) International Airport, 5 January 2018, [url](#); ACAA, International Airfields, 10 January 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ Tourism Herat, Herat International Airport, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹¹ Foschini, F., email, 9 November 2018. Fabrizio Foschini made this addition during the review of the report.

3. Economic climate

In terms of GDP per capita in USD, Afghanistan was the 6th poorest country in the world in 1960 and it had only risen 6 ranks by 2016.¹¹² ALCS 2016-17 found that ‘the overall macro-economic and security context in the country since 2007 can be broken into two distinct phases, before and after the 2014 security transition’. While the phase before the transition showed ‘higher economic growth and a relatively stable security situation’, after 2014 the growth rate slowed and the security deteriorated.¹¹³ Afghanistan continues to stay within the group of low income states, well below the average for other countries that are fragile and affected by conflicts.¹¹⁴

According to the World Bank, between 2003 and 2013 the average growth rate was 9 %, but in 2014 it slowed to 2.7 % and in 2015 to 1.5 %.¹¹⁵ The decline was caused by multiple factors, including worsening security, decreasing foreign aid accompanied by the downscaling of international forces and political instability following the 2014 elections.¹¹⁶ Although after 2015 the economy started to show signs of stabilisation with a 2.3 % growth in 2016, followed by 2.7 % in 2017,¹¹⁷ the World Bank considered the recovery ‘increasingly vulnerable’.¹¹⁸ Possible disruptions during the presidential and provincial council elections scheduled for 2019 could have negative impact on confidence, investment and growth.¹¹⁹

Apart from the challenges described above, ALCS 2016-17 defined other ‘structural factors’ that can get in the way of Afghanistan’s development including the scope of population growth, difficulties for women to participate in society and the lack of quality education and investments.¹²⁰

3.1 Economic growth

As the World Bank stated, economic growth in 2017 was mainly powered by the expanding (2.5 %) services sector and the agricultural sector also grew by 3.8 %. In the first quarter of 2018 export levels were up almost 50 % compared to the same period of 2017 – a development mostly powered by setting up new air corridors to India and resolving border issues with Pakistan. Imports showed an increase as well but mostly due to higher energy prices and greater grain import connected to the drought.¹²¹

Opium production reached a record high in 2017.¹²² The opiate economy was about the size of the whole agricultural sector and a vital element of the country’s economy, securing livelihoods for many Afghans.¹²³ According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the illegal opiate economy was worth between USD 4.1-6.6 billion – around 20-32 % of GDP in 2017.¹²⁴ This is a significant increase compared to 2016, when the opiate economy’s value was approximated at around 15 % of the GDP.¹²⁵ The UNODC’s 2017 joint village survey with the Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) not only showed links between government control, insecurity and opium poppy cultivation but also pointed out that a sizeable amount of the opium harvest is taxed by non-state authorities and

¹¹² World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 25

¹¹³ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁴ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 25

¹¹⁵ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁶ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁷ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁸ World Bank (The), Afghanistan - Overview, 28 October 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 15

¹²⁰ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2

¹²¹ World Bank (The), Afghanistan - Overview, 28 October 2018, [url](#)

¹²² UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017, May 2018, [url](#), pp. 5-6.

¹²³ UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017, May 2018, [url](#), pp. 5-6.

¹²⁴ UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017, May 2018, [url](#), pp. 5-6.

¹²⁵ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 4

insurgency groups including the Taliban.¹²⁶ Matthew C. DuPée, a senior analyst for the US Defense Department noted that the Taliban also exploit mining sites in 14 of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan, generating an estimated revenue of USD 200-300 million per year.¹²⁷

While revenues were growing in 2017, the first half of 2018 brought a stop to this, echoing a slowdown in economic activity and disruptions surrounding elections.¹²⁸ As a reflection to the slowing growth, poverty increased considerably: 38.3 % of the population was living below the national poverty line in 2012-2013 and this increased to 54.5 % in 2016-2017.¹²⁹

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'.¹³⁰

3.2. Business climate

Businesses in Afghanistan face risks created by macroeconomic (e.g. price and exchange rate volatility), political and security-related uncertainties combined with 'largely undeveloped financial markets'.¹³¹ The US Department of State identified the still-developing legal environment, the impact of corruption on administration and the varying interpretations of tax law as the main challenges the business environment had to face apart from the security.¹³²

Even when compared to other countries affected by 'fragility, conflict and violence (FCV)', Afghanistan stands out as an example of weak financial developments. Merely 27.5 % of the firms in the country reported starting any investment projects and only 3 % of firms used bank loans to finance them while this was around 40 % for the median country in the FCV sample.¹³³

Expectations of political instability and violence in the context of upcoming elections caused the deterioration of almost all business indicators during the last quarter of 2017. The number of new business license applications showed a 20 % decline in 2018 compared to 2016. While new business registrations in the service and manufacturing sector were also down by 20 %, registrations in the construction sector experienced a 40 % increase.¹³⁴

The findings of the Business Tendency Survey Report (2018 Q3) by the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) mentioned negative tendencies as well. According to the surveyed companies, business conditions and level of confidence deteriorated along with their expectations for the next 6 months. Compared to the previous quarter the business indicator showed a considerable decline in all surveyed regions (Kabul, Balkh, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Herat) in Q3.¹³⁵

Corruption was cited frequently both by Afghan and foreign firms as a difficulty when doing business, specifically in permits and licenses, government procurement, regulatory requirements and taxation.¹³⁶

Fabrizio Foschini mentioned the case of Pamir Airways as an example of major businesses paying bribes when launching any contract or in exchange for government services. Pamir Airways had to pay a bribe

¹²⁶ UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017, May 2018, [url](#), p. 42

¹²⁷ DuPée, M., Taliban Stones Commission and the Insurgent Windfall from Illegal Mining, CTC Sentinel, Volume 10, Issue 3, March 2017, [url](#), p. 34

¹²⁸ World Bank (The), Afghanistan - Overview, 28 October 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 100

¹³⁰ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 16

¹³¹ World Bank (The), Investment under Risks and Uncertainty in Afghanistan, May 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹³² USDoS, 2018 Investment Climate Statements – Afghanistan, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

¹³³ World Bank (The), Investment under Risks and Uncertainty in Afghanistan, May 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁴ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁵ ACCI, Business Monitor 2018 – Business Tendency Survey 3rd Quarter, 2018, [url](#), pp. 2-4

¹³⁶ USDoS, 2018 Investment Climate Statements – Afghanistan, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

to the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation for every plane they registered in Afghanistan. Other businesses – more connected to political networks – enjoyed benefits like the possibility of evading fiscal or accountability controls or even hindering the work of rivals.¹³⁷

3.2.1 Business climate in the three cities

The Afghan government was committed to increase private sector investment.¹³⁸ In Kabul a new licensing system was initiated in 2016 with the aim of streamlining the business registration process under the Afghanistan Central Business Registry (ACBR) that also extended the validity of business licenses for 3 years.¹³⁹ Apart from starting business, Kabul was also in a leading position in getting electricity as a result of the country's highly centralised administration system.¹⁴⁰ Businesses in other provinces needed to obtain permission from central authorities in Kabul when getting a new electricity connection which added more to the procedures and costs they were already facing.¹⁴¹

The lack of cheap and reliable provision of electricity has always been a major setback for all productive activities in Afghanistan with a heavy weight on the production costs, making Afghan enterprises non-competitive in the face of foreign goods and companies. This disadvantage hampered significantly the development of Herat's industrial parks. These were among the better positioned in the whole country to yield results due to the relatively permissive security environment of the city and the vibrant local businessmen community, but paradoxically were dependent for energy on their main competitor, Iran.¹⁴²

The World Bank also noted that businesses in Herat had to wait 6 more weeks than in Balkh to get a new connection due to the limited amount of power available.¹⁴³

Because of its rapid growth the capital faced large volume of applications for construction permits and property transfers.¹⁴⁴ In an attempt to reduce backlogs, different municipal offices were brought together to create a 'one-stop shop' for construction permits and to make registering property more of an administrative procedure instead of one managed by courts.¹⁴⁵

While streamlining the licensing process in Kabul reduced the number of procedures needed to start a business, the required time did not drop accordingly. Businesses in Balkh and Herat need to visit three different agencies when starting a business and this results in twice as many procedures as in Kabul. However, starting a business still takes the same time in Kabul and Balkh and just a day more in Herat despite the higher number of procedures required, suggesting that back-office processes still lack efficiency in the capital.¹⁴⁶

3.3. Development Aid

A joint report by Oxfam and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) stated that effective aid delivery was a major challenge given the security situation and level of corruption in Afghanistan.¹⁴⁷

According to Oxfam/SCA, international aid provided to Afghanistan declined from nearly USD 6.5 billion in 2010 to USD 4.2 billion in 2015.¹⁴⁸ The World Bank had different estimates for an

¹³⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 42-43

¹³⁸ USDoS, 2018 Investment Climate Statements – Afghanistan, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁹ World Bank (The), Doing Business In Afghanistan 2017, 2017, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁴⁰ World Bank (The), Doing Business In Afghanistan 2017, 2017, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁴¹ World Bank (The), Doing Business In Afghanistan 2017, 2017, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴² Foschini, F., email, 9 November 2018. Fabrizio Foschini, made this addition during his review of this report.

¹⁴³ World Bank (The), Doing Business In Afghanistan 2017, 2017, [url](#), pp. 42-43

¹⁴⁴ World Bank (The), Doing Business In Afghanistan 2017, 2017, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁴⁵ World Bank (The), Doing Business In Afghanistan 2017, 2017, [url](#), pp. 4, 6

¹⁴⁶ World Bank (The), Doing Business In Afghanistan 2017, 2017, [url](#), p. 25

¹⁴⁷ Oxfam and SCA, Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan, March 2018, [url](#), p. 37

¹⁴⁸ Oxfam and SCA, Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan, March 2018, [url](#), p. 7

annual average of USD 12.5 billion of development aid in 2009-2012 dropping to around USD 8.8 billion in 2015.¹⁴⁹ Despite the decrease, Afghanistan still remains highly dependent on aid: around 66 % of the budget in the financial year of 1396 (March 2017-Feb 2018) was funded through international donor support.¹⁵⁰ As Integrity Watch Afghanistan – an independent civil society organisation committed to increase transparency – stated, changing Afghanistan’s aid dependency would require tapping the country’s mineral resources and also introducing a zero tolerance approach on corruption.¹⁵¹

According to the Oxfam/SCA report, social infrastructure and services was the area that received most financial support with over USD 14 billion from 2011 to 2015, followed by economic infrastructure and services (USD 4 billion), humanitarian aid (USD 2 billion) and production sector support (USD 1.6 billion).¹⁵² Even with this significant amount of aid distributed, as AAN pointed out, poverty is more widespread according to 2016-17 ALCS figures than it was immediately after the Taliban regime which is ‘nothing but a result of continuing ineffectiveness’.¹⁵³ There were over 30 different international donors distributing aid in Afghanistan without effective donor coordination and harmonisation that lead to fragmentation and as a result, ineffectiveness.¹⁵⁴ The World Bank – one of the major donors of agricultural investments in Afghanistan – for example admitted that they did not engage with other donors sufficiently which lead to the duplication of programs in the agricultural sector.¹⁵⁵

The other issue having a negative impact on Afghanistan’s progress was corruption.¹⁵⁶ According to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Afghans were required to pay bribes in almost every aspect of their daily lives and suffered from the effects of ‘widespread nepotism and patronage’.¹⁵⁷ In 2016 the Anti-Corruption Justice Center (ACJC) was opened to investigate and try cases related to corruption and has successfully convicted some government officials.¹⁵⁸ However, other courts still have to demonstrate their ability to do so and this, combined with the outdated integrity measures of the justice sector and the weakness of the law enforcement capacity, minimised the preventive effect of corruption prosecutions.¹⁵⁹

¹⁴⁹ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, November 2017, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁵⁰ Oxfam and SCA, Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan, March 2018, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁵¹ Integrity Watch Afghanistan, The Game of Numbers - Analysis of the National Budget 2018, December 2017, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁵² Oxfam and SCA, Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan, March 2018, [url](#), p. 28

¹⁵³ Bjelica, J. and Ruttig, T., The State of Aid and Poverty in 2018: A new look at aid effectiveness in Afghanistan, AAN, 17 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ Oxfam and SCA, Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 7-8

¹⁵⁵ Oxfam and SCA, Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 34-35

¹⁵⁶ Oxfam and SCA, Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 35

¹⁵⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan’s fight against corruption – From Strategies to Implementation, 14 May 2018, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁵⁸ USDoS, 2018 Investment Climate Statements – Afghanistan, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan’s fight against corruption – From Strategies to Implementation, 14 May 2018, [url](#), p. 67

4. Employment

The Afghan labour market is dominated by agriculture and can be described further by the large share of self-employed or family workers indicating a high level of informality, the underrepresentation of women and the lack of opportunities for young people.¹⁶⁰ According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) 54 % of the Afghan population is of legal working age (15-64 years), while 44 % is below the age of 15.¹⁶¹ The World Bank stated that nearly three-quarters of the population are younger than 30 years and around 25 % is between 15-30 years.¹⁶² As a result, young Afghans enter the labour market in large numbers every year, but employment opportunities cannot keep up with the population growth because of inadequate development resources and poor security.¹⁶³

4.1 Unemployment

As the World Bank noted ‘employment and labour force participation has fallen between 2013 and 2017’. The decline was most noticeable among women in rural areas, where employment to working age population ratio fell from 21.2 % to 18.3 %, equalling the loss of almost 130 000 jobs. Employment of men between the ages of 25-50 also showed a decline from 93.4 % in 2011/12 to 84.3 % in 2016/17 – this equals a drop in employment by about 176 000 jobs.¹⁶⁴

According to ALCS 2016-17, 2 million Afghans – 23.9 % of the total labour force – can be classified as unemployed, meaning they do not work or seek employment or work less than eight hours per week.¹⁶⁵ The unemployment rate for age shows a U-shape: unemployment levels are very high among persons under age 25 and over age 50.¹⁶⁶ The youth unemployment (age 15-24) rate is 31 %, while 42 % are neither in employment, education or training (NEET).¹⁶⁷ The difference between urban and rural youth in the NEET rate is rather small compared to the difference by sex: 80.1 % of the NEET population is female as a result of women’s low labour force, education and training participation and high female unemployment.¹⁶⁸

The seasonal effect is a significant factor about unemployment. The unemployment rate is relatively low during spring and summer months (around 20 %) while in winter time it can reach 32.5 %.¹⁶⁹ Although labour-driven migration has been a traditional coping mechanism and many left for Turkey, Pakistan or Iran in search of employment opportunities, it may have become a less effective option lately as Iran has increased the number of deportations.¹⁷⁰

4.2 Labour opportunities and conditions

The Afghan economy is dominated by agriculture; nearly 45 % of the employed population (2.8 million people) works in the farming or livestock sub-sectors.¹⁷¹ 52.6 % of the rural population is employed in

¹⁶⁰ Afghanistan, CSO, Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey - Economically Active Population, Provinces of Kabul, Bamyan, Daykundi, Ghor, Kapisa and Parwan, 8 Jun 2017, [url](#), p. 35

¹⁶¹ ILO, Afghanistan - Employment and Environmental Sustainability Fact Sheets 2017, 2 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁶² World Bank (The), Afghanistan - Overview, 28 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶³ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁶⁴ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁶⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 59

¹⁶⁶ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 59

¹⁶⁷ World Bank (The), Afghanistan - Overview, 28 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 61

¹⁶⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 61

¹⁷⁰ Bjelica, J., Less Rain and Snowfall in Afghanistan: High Level Of Food Assistance Needed Until Early 2019, AAN, 30 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 67

agriculture, while there is more diversity in urban employment where 36.5 % of the working population is engaged in various services and only 5.5 % in agriculture.¹⁷²

Access to productive or remunerative employment is limited, 80 % of employment is considered vulnerable and insecure in the form of self- or own-account employment, day labour or unpaid work.¹⁷³

ALCS 2016-17 noted that only 19.8 % of all employed persons in Afghanistan are in salaried public and private employment or are employers, meaning the majority of workers represent vulnerable employment.¹⁷⁴ According to ILO most of the workers in this category have own-account status, often within the agriculture sector and they are more likely to face low job and income security and lower coverage by social protection systems.¹⁷⁵ Given that employers form only a small group (2.6 %), salaried workers constitute 'the only visible category in the labour market that can be considered to have more or less secure jobs'.¹⁷⁶

Poor job quality and insecure employment are widespread and the World Bank noted that 'neither education nor employment are a guarantee out of poverty'.¹⁷⁷ Holding a salaried job can bring poverty rates below 50 % while for those households that are headed by day labourers or self-employed persons, poverty rates are as high as 66 % and 53 % respectively.¹⁷⁸

4.2.1 Labour opportunities in the three cities

According to Fabrizio Foschini, Kabul is the major trade and employment hub in Afghanistan which serves also as a 'magnet' for labourers from a wider area reaching Parwan, Logar or Wardak provinces. People from small villages commute daily or weekly to Kabul to trade agricultural products or work as guards, household staff or wage labourers. Commuting to Kabul is more common for people living in the north and south of the city because of the greater travelling times and costs for those living east of the city.¹⁷⁹

Kabul is largely an urban province with its economically active population divided into professions related to trade, services and elementary occupations.¹⁸⁰ The capital has a large share of salaried workers, while self-employment is less common compared to rural parts of the country.¹⁸¹ The major employers in Kabul include community, social and personal services as well as the public administration.¹⁸² Foschini noted that while the public sector offers limited salaries, it is more secure than other forms of employment.¹⁸³ Salaries in Kabul are generally higher than in other provinces, particularly for those working for foreign organisations (e.g. computer technicians can earn monthly an average AFN 25 000, nearly USD 375).¹⁸⁴

According to Jolyon Leslie, the young age structure of the population in Herat means that the economically most productive age group (15-64 years) is rather small and therefore carries the burden of providing for a large number of people in the dependent ages. In addition, half of the working

¹⁷² Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁷³ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Overview, 28 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 63

¹⁷⁵ ILO, Afghanistan, Employment and Environmental Sustainability Fact Sheets 2017, 2 April 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁶ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 64

¹⁷⁷ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 30

¹⁷⁸ World Bank (The), Poverty in Afghanistan, Results based on ALCS 2016-17, July 2018, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁷⁹ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 5, 7-8

¹⁸⁰ Afghanistan, CSO, Economically Active Population, Provinces of Kabul, Bamyan, Daykundi, Ghor, Kapisa and Parwan, 8 Jun 2017, [url](#), p. 31

¹⁸¹ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁸² Afghanistan, CSO, Economically Active Population, Provinces of Kabul, Bamyan, Daykundi, Ghor, Kapisa and Parwan, 8 Jun 2017, [url](#), p. 31

¹⁸³ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 30

¹⁸⁴ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 33

population in Herat City are day labourers with their income vulnerable to the vagaries of the labour market.¹⁸⁵

Fabrizio Foschini added that Herat's economy has long provided job opportunities in trade, including the import and export of goods with neighbouring Iran, mining and manufacturing. Some of the age-old artisanal crafts (carpets, glass, embroidery) have managed to survive, while a set of modern industrial activities has also developed (e.g. food processing and packaging). However, all these workplaces have been threatened by insecurity (particularly the kidnapping of businessmen or their relatives by criminal networks with connivance inside the police), by power shortages and the difficulty of competing with Iranian and other foreign imports and rising unemployment.¹⁸⁶

Mazar-e Sharif is considered as a regional trading centre for northern Afghanistan and also as an industrial centre with large-scale manufacturing operations and a huge number of small and medium enterprises providing handicrafts, rugs and carpets.¹⁸⁷ Mazar-e Sharif has been relatively more stable compared to Herat or Kabul according to analyst Foschini.¹⁸⁸ The largest group of workers in the city were service and sales workers (23.1 %) followed by managers/professionals/technicians and clerks (20.9 %).¹⁸⁹

Mazar-e Sharif is also one of the cities in Afghanistan where the Afghanistan New Market Development Project (ANMDP) is implemented. The project covering Herat, Kabul and Jalalabad as well supports small and medium enterprises and business associations with access to business development services. From its start in 2013 to September 2016 it covered 145 organisations in Balkh province, including a local pasteurization factory in Mazar-e Sharif.¹⁹⁰

4.3 Livelihood opportunities for IDPs and returnees

The increased numbers of refugees and undocumented Afghans returning to certain areas in Afghanistan, especially to Kabul, along with the continued displacement added further pressure on community services and social infrastructure in the country.¹⁹¹ The World Bank noted that the successful integration of the better educated returnees into productive employment could improve productivity and growth. Still, the concentration of returnees and IDPs in urban centres has the risk of overwhelming services and generating large humanitarian needs.¹⁹²

Nassim Majidi noted that many return and reintegration programs did not sustain long-term livelihoods and reliable shelter and also failed to 'bridge the gap' between the skills returnees had and those that were in-demand in the local markets.¹⁹³ Oxfam stated that the government's capacity was limited to address the reception and reintegration of returnees, 30 % of them faced difficulties finding livelihood opportunities and 18 % had challenges when accessing food.¹⁹⁴

According to Oxfam extended family networks were vital for returnees in finding and maintaining employment and housing, however having a family network did not necessarily remove all vulnerabilities.¹⁹⁵ For unaccompanied minors, single women and female-headed households vulnerabilities were higher even with family support.¹⁹⁶ Many returnees, particularly those without family connections settled in cities assuming that those were safer and livelihood opportunities were

¹⁸⁵ Leslie, J., Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, USIP, 2 April 2015, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁸⁶ Foschini, F., email, 9 November 2018. Fabrizio Foschini made this addition during the review of the report.

¹⁸⁷ Afghanistan, State of Afghan Cities 2015, Volume One, 2015, [url](#), p. 63.

¹⁸⁸ Foschini, F., email, 9 November 2018. Fabrizio Foschini made this addition during the review of the report.

¹⁸⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey: Balkh, 5 January 2015, [url](#), p. 42

¹⁹⁰ World Bank (The), Thriving Local Businesses Provide Jobs to Thousands in Afghanistan, 18 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁹¹ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁹² World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁹³ Majidi, N., From Forced Migration to Forced returns in Afghanistan: Policy and Program Implications, MPI, November 2017, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁹⁴ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁹⁵ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁹⁶ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 17

better.¹⁹⁷ While returnees were not perceived as a source of conflict in general, they clearly represented competition for resources and employment.¹⁹⁸ According to UNHCR's returnee and IDP monitoring findings in May 2018, nearly 60 % of interviewed returnees and 71 % of interviewed IDPs reported difficulties with the host communities that were related to the lack of job opportunities rather than discrimination or inter-tribal tensions.¹⁹⁹ For 2016 and 2017 returnees the most common source of income was unskilled labour. Finding work was reported as an 'overwhelming difficulty' both for returnees and IDPs: more than 24 % of 2017 returnees and 33 % of 2016 returnees faced difficulties at finding a job while 21 % of IDPs reported the same.²⁰⁰

According to Oxfam, IDPs were facing more risks and vulnerabilities than returnees in general.²⁰¹

A joint study by the NRC, Samuel Hall and the IDMC surveyed IDPs and found that Afghanistan was 'struggling to absorb increasingly large numbers of refugees and migrants'. The study showed an increase in 'returnee-IDPs' – those IDPs who reported becoming secondarily displaced after their return to Afghanistan. Three quarters of the returnee-IDP respondents were unable to go back to their home as a result of insecurity and 72 % reported having been displaced twice while nearly a third were displaced three times. Only 25 % of IDPs received some kind of aid assistance and one in two respondents reported having difficulties fulfilling their food needs on a regular basis. At the same time, an increasing number of IDPs adopted harmful coping mechanisms like skipping meals or relying on child labour.²⁰²

71 % of the respondents in the NRC, Samuel Hall, IDMC study mentioned unemployment, underemployment or lack of marketable skills as one of their three main problems and 'this was consistent across gender, type of IDP, number of displacements and provinces'. The main source of income for the majority of IDPs was the informal economy, 59 % of respondents were day labourers before their displacement and 67 % after that. Female-headed households stood out as particularly vulnerable with 69 % reporting daily seasonal labour as their main source of income and 72 % after that. The 'rural-to-urban trajectory' is an important limiting factor in employment opportunities during displacement since urban areas do not offer the same possibilities: 61 % of respondents mentioned working in agriculture before displacement but only 4 % after that.²⁰³

4.3.1 Situation in the three cities

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.²⁰⁴

A survey conducted in 2016 among Afghan youth in Kabul showed that most are either self-employed or working for a single individual. Those who were forced to return showed lower level of job satisfaction, with 60 % of deportees expressing satisfaction compared to 85 % of non-migrants. One of

¹⁹⁷ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁹⁸ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 17-18

¹⁹⁹ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 4

²⁰⁰ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 15

²⁰¹ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 14

²⁰² NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 10

²⁰³ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 28

²⁰⁴ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 23

the factors causing dissatisfaction was the mismatch of skills: 74 % of deportees mentioned their current work as a poor match for their skills.²⁰⁵

Oxfam's research noted that returnees can generally work only from time to time in Kabul as daily wage workers and most of them cannot find jobs every day making their earnings unstable. Most documented returnees received some financial support from UNHCR, while some undocumented returnees received assistance from IOM. They have not received further support from the government or NGOs, although this is perceived as very much needed, particularly in terms of shelter and basic social services.²⁰⁶

46 % of the respondents in the NRC, Samuel Hall, IDMC study on IDPs stated that their household's access to livelihoods was restricted; this was 67 % in Kunduz, while Kabul seemed to have a better situation with 33 %.²⁰⁷

According to Oxfam, Herat City is considered relatively safe with employment and business opportunities which made it attractive for returnees. Herat's absorption capacity has proven to be high but is put under pressure by the growing number of returnees and IDPs that seek economic opportunity within the city and often have their families follow.²⁰⁸

The Afghan government established Shahrak Saadat, a township for returnees in 2010. Although the plan was to distribute land, only one of the intended 13 phases of land distribution was actually completed. Out of around 300 families who received land and built shelters, only 66 stayed leaving many houses empty or occupied by IDPs. Although Shahrak Saadat has access to water and electricity and its facilities include a school and a mobile health clinic, few returnees choose to live here as it is far from Herat City, lacks transportation and beyond day labour and seasonal work, job opportunities are few.²⁰⁹ Oxfam also mentions another township, Shegofan, which is closer to Herat City and provided electricity, water, a school and health services by NGOs. It is populated by IDPs and returnees and their families pushing their integration by sharing a Community Development Council (CDC) with the local host community. This is a platform that meets on a regular basis to discuss problems and find solutions for the whole community.²¹⁰

In October 2016 an inter-agency research found that the majority of IDP families in Herat were engaged in daily labour or other insecure, seasonal forms of employment with men mostly working in construction or loading and unloading goods in marketplaces and women working as cleaners in local houses or as vendors. A large number of children collected garbage, cleaned vehicles or were hawking goods at road intersections. Families reported earning AFN 1 000-3 000 (USD 45) per month which proved insufficient to run the household.²¹¹

According to IOM IDPs and returnees in Balkh province mostly work in daily labour if it is available. Only few of them work in agriculture or own livestock. Markets and small businesses in Mazar-e Sharif provide employment opportunities but these are often only temporary.²¹²

4.4 Employment opportunities for women

The 2004 Constitution of Afghanistan protects women's equality before the law, their right to education and their right to work.²¹³ Afghanistan's development framework also made gender equality

²⁰⁵ Majidi, N., From Forced Migration to Forced returns in Afghanistan: Policy and Program Implications, MPI, November 2017, [url](#), p. 15

²⁰⁶ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 24

²⁰⁷ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 28

²⁰⁸ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 20

²⁰⁹ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 20

²¹⁰ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility - Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 21

²¹¹ UN-Habitat et al., Inter-Agency Durable Solutions Initiative - Profile and Response Plan of Protracted IDP Settlements in Herat, October 2016, [url](#), p. 6

²¹² IOM, Afghanistan - Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results, June 2017, [url](#), p. 23

²¹³ Afghanistan, Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2017-2021, 29 January 2017, [url](#), p. 8

and women's empowerment key priorities.²¹⁴ However, ALCS 2016-17 data showed very low participation of women in the Afghan economy and also in society in general.²¹⁵

Asia Foundation's 2018 survey found that the most frequently cited problem for women after lack of education/illiteracy was unemployment.²¹⁶ Even though some progress was made in gender equality in terms of literacy, the literacy rate of young women is still only 57 % of that of young men.²¹⁷ The share of women participating in the Afghan economy was only one third of that of men and at the same time unemployment and NEET indicators showed women having a very disadvantaged position on the labour market.²¹⁸ According to ALCS 2016-17 data, the female unemployment rate was more than twice as high as that of men: 41 % against 18.3 %.²¹⁹ ALCS 2016-17 also showed that the overall percentage of women in vulnerable employment (89.9 %) exceeded the male percentage (77.5 %).²²⁰

Women in Afghanistan were often judged for working outside the home and faced multiple economic and social challenges in Afghanistan's traditionally conservative culture.²²¹ However, Asia Foundation's survey showed that 70.3 % of Afghans supported women working outside the home, though women (79.8 %) were more likely to hold this view than men (60.8 %).²²² The survey also added that women's contribution to household income decreased slightly from 20.1 % in 2017 to 19.1 % in 2018 overall.²²³

According to Fabrizio Foschini the participation of women in the workforce varied greatly by sector in Kabul and was limited mostly to areas like teaching, cleaning, cooking and weaving or other textile-related industries, although 'some young educated professionals are hired by the government and by international or national companies at many professional levels'. Women working outside their home in Kabul were mostly Hazaras with many returnees from exile in Iran or Pakistan among them.²²⁴

4.5 Child labour

48 % of its population being younger than 15 years, Afghanistan is one of the four countries in the world with the highest proportion of persons under the age of 15.²²⁵

Afghanistan ratified all key international conventions concerning child labour and also established its own laws and regulations.²²⁶ Despite improvements, the country's legal framework still lacks effective means regarding the prevention of child labour. According to the relevant Afghan law, the minimum age for employment is 18, however children between the ages of 15-17 can work, if 'the work is not harmful, consists of less than 35 hours per week, and represents a form of vocational training'. Children aged 14 or younger are not allowed to work.²²⁷ The Afghan government established institutional mechanisms to enforce laws and regulations on child labour but gaps still exist within the authority of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and Disabled (MoLSAMD) while the Afghan Labor Inspectorate is not authorised to sanction child labour practices either.²²⁸

²¹⁴ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-2017: Highlights Report, 2018, [url](#), p. 13

²¹⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-2017: Highlights Report, 2018, [url](#), p. 14

²¹⁶ Asia Foundation, Survey of the Afghan People 2018, December 2018, [url](#), p. 196

²¹⁷ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-2017: Highlights Report, 2018, [url](#), p. 13

²¹⁸ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-2017: Highlights Report, 2018, [url](#), p. 13

²¹⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 59

²²⁰ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 64

²²¹ IWPR, Afghan Women Fight to Stay in Business, 5 April 2018, [url](#)

²²² Asia Foundation, Survey of the Afghan People 2018, December 2018, [url](#), p. 189

²²³ Asia Foundation, Survey of the Afghan People 2018, December 2018, [url](#), p. 193

²²⁴ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 30

²²⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-2017: Highlights Report, 2018, [url](#), p. 4

²²⁶ USDOL, 2017 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Afghanistan, 20 September 2018, [url](#), p. 3

²²⁷ APPRO, Chronic Conflict, Poverty and Child Labor: Evidence from Kandahar, Bamyan, Herat and Balkh, April 2018, [url](#), p. 7

²²⁸ USDOL, 2017 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Afghanistan, 20 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 1,3

According to UNICEF children working on the streets are common throughout Kabul, their number is estimated at 60 000.²²⁹ Most of them sell goods, collect garbage or beg instead of going to school.²³⁰ The USDoS noted that children were employed ‘as domestic servants, street vendors, peddlers, and shopkeepers. There was child labor in the carpet industry, brick kilns, coalmines, and poppy fields. Children were also heavily engaged in the worst forms of child labor in mining (especially family-owned gem mines), commercial sexual exploitation [...], transnational drug smuggling, and organized begging rings. Some forms of child labor exposed children to land mines’.²³¹

UNAMA documented the recruitment and use of 22 boys by parties to the armed conflict along with credible allegations of the recruitment and use of seven boys.²³² Fabrizio Foschini added that underage recruiting happened on both sides of the conflict, particularly among those local units that were less directly under the control of the central military commands: village self-defence militias and Afghan Local Police in case of the government, local fronts of fighters co-opted but not established anew by the Taliban. While both sides theoretically did not condone the practice, they seemed unwilling or unable to suppress it.²³³

The 2018 joint study by NRC, Samuel Hall and IDMC found that while child labour is still underreported, it is more prevalent among the displaced families than it was in 2012. Nearly one in five families responded relying on child labour to meet their basic needs. 24 % of returnee-IDP households responded relying on child labour compared to 16 % of IDP families. Child labour is more widespread among urban IDPs (21 %) compared to those residing in peri-urban (18 %) and rural areas (15 %) and is particularly prevalent in Kabul. This likely reflects the greater economic vulnerability of IDPs in the capital and also the demand that Kabul's ‘relatively vibrant’ economy creates for child labour.²³⁴

UNHCR added that the scale of problems children were facing was likely much larger, as underreporting was common due to social stigma and cultural issues.²³⁵

²²⁹ UNICEF and Samuel Hall, Evaluation of “Improving Street-working Children’s Access to Education and Livelihood Support for their Families” Kabul, Afghanistan, September 2017, [url](#), p. 6

²³⁰ IWPR, No Respite for Kabul's Street Children, 09 December 2016, [url](#)

²³¹ USDoS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2017 - Afghanistan, 20 April 2018, [url](#)

²³² UNAMA, Mid-year Update on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 June 2018, 15 July 2018, [url](#), p. 3

²³³ Foschini, F., email, 9 November 2018. Fabrizio Foschini made this addition during the review of the report.

²³⁴ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 32

²³⁵ UNHCR Afghanistan, email, 9 November 2018. UNHCR made this addition during the review of this report.

5. Poverty

5.1 General trends

As a reflection to the slowing growth, poverty increased considerably: 38.3 % of the population was living below the national poverty line in 2012-2013 and this increased to 54.5 % in 2016-2017.²³⁶ Development assistance did not result in a reduction of poverty while ‘humanitarian assistance has been used primarily as a “band aid”’, according to the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.²³⁷

The ALCS 2016-17 added that in Afghanistan poverty always had a seasonal character with winter months showing deterioration in welfare. This trend is explained by an increase in prices, particularly in food prices and also a decline in income-generating opportunities in agriculture.²³⁸ The survey found the largest increase (17-20 %) in poverty between 2011-12 and 2016-17 in the Central, East, North and Northeast regions.²³⁹

Poverty rates increase steadily with household size: one third of households with 1-5 members live below the poverty line compared to 60 % of households with eight members or more.²⁴⁰ About 59 % of the population lives in a household where the head of household holds vulnerable employment, meaning is self-employed or works on own account or is a day labourer or an unpaid worker.²⁴¹ Data showed that poverty also rises when there is an increasing dependency: households with 3 or more dependents for each working-age member of the household have a 70 % poverty rate.²⁴²

One significant aspect of the increase in poverty between 2011 and 2016 has been the shift in the distribution of the poor towards urban areas; however, 4 out of every 5 poor persons still live in rural Afghanistan. ALCS 2016-17 added that ‘the Central region, including Kabul, alone accounts for a half of all urban poor, while the North, Northeast and Southwest regions account for another third’. The rural poor are more dispersed with the Northeast and Southwest regions each accounting for 17 % of the rural poor, followed by the North with 15 %.²⁴³

5.2 Urban poverty

Afghanistan faced a sharp increase in poverty since 2011-12 with a rise in both urban and rural poverty rates. Even though the decline in welfare was widespread, urban poverty rates were lower than rural.²⁴⁴

Kandahar, Kabul, Herat, Balkh and Kunduz are the areas where the increase of urban poverty has been concentrated since 2011. These provinces together accounted for 80 % of the urban poor in 2016-17 with Kabul alone accounting for nearly half. According to ALCS 2016-17 this trend may be powered by IDPs and returnees who turn to urban centres in their search for security, employment and services and if continued, the pressure on these centres could further increase.²⁴⁵

²³⁶ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 100

²³⁷ Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Afghanistan: A Political Economy Analysis, December 2017, [url](#), p. 44

²³⁸ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 109

²³⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 107

²⁴⁰ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 110

²⁴¹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 113

²⁴² Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 111

²⁴³ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 108

²⁴⁴ World Bank (The), Afghanistan, Poverty in Afghanistan, Results based on ALCS 2016-17, July 2018, [url](#), p. 8

²⁴⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 102

Fabrizio Foschini noted that in the case of Kabul, physical growth has not been accompanied by the development of industrial and trading facilities. The economy has not taken any specific direction or specialisation in any sectors while the state of employment is alarming and poverty is increasing.²⁴⁶

Because mostly rural areas are in the focus of humanitarian efforts, data on urban poverty in Kabul are largely limited to those inhabiting the Kabul Informal Settlements. A 2014 survey – using the criteria of AFN 1 710 in monthly income – found that 77.6 % of Kabul households lived below the poverty line.²⁴⁷ The capital may offer a better job market, but the cost of living there is also significantly higher than in other provinces, particularly for housing but for some food items as well. Residents of Kabul tend to rely more on credit compared to other urban areas. Given that food expenses can make up half of a household's expenditure and rent one third, many households are pushed to find alternative sources of cash, whether by accessing informal credit or sending a family member abroad.²⁴⁸

5.3 Situation of female-headed households, IDPs and returnees

ALCS 2016-17 found that only 1.2 % of households are headed by women with 212 000 people living in female-headed households overall.²⁴⁹

UNOCHA noted that displaced female-headed households earn up to 61 % less (AFN 5 687), than their male counterparts (AFN 9 298) and are 15 % more likely to have no access to a *tazkera*. Since access to documentation is a basic requirement to access humanitarian assistance, the lack of documentation impedes women's ability to receive certain services and necessary legal protection.²⁵⁰ In addition, female-headed households are 67 % more food insecure than those headed by men.²⁵¹

Human Rights Watch added that insurgent attacks against civilians have devastating impact on the victim's family as well, particularly on women who suddenly become dependent on members of their husband's family and face limitations in where they can live and work.²⁵²

The joint report by NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall found that three quarters of IDP households in Afghanistan do not receive aid, pressuring them towards harmful coping strategies such as relying on child labour or skipping meals. IDPs are exposed to ongoing risks by lacking access to food, water, housing and services like education, health care or livelihood opportunities trapping them in 'protracted cycles of endemic poverty'.²⁵³

²⁴⁶ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, url, p. 27

²⁴⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, url, p. 34

²⁴⁸ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, url, p. 34

²⁴⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, url, p. 30

²⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2021, 1 December 2017, url, p. 16

²⁵¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2021, 1 December 2017, url, p. 30

²⁵² HRW, "No Safe Place": Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Afghanistan, May 2018, url, p. 2

²⁵³ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, url, p. 10

6. Food security

6.1 General situation

According to ALCS 2016-17 44.6 % of the Afghan population – 13 million people – are very severely to moderately food insecure.²⁵⁴ Food insecurity increased from 30.1 % in 2011-12 to 44.6 % in 2016-17 with an increase in all residence population groups, the highest rise being observed in the rural areas.²⁵⁵ The highest percentage of food insecure people is reported in the Eastern region (59.7 %), followed by the North (54.9 %), North-east (50.5 %) and the Central Highlands (49 %). Jawzjan, Paktya, Takhar, Badakshan, Nangarhar, Uruzgan, Nuristan, Samangan, Balkh and Laghman showed very high food insecurity (above 60 %) while high food insecurity (40.1-60 %) was observed in Ghazni, Kunduz, Zabul, Herat, Daykundi, Badghis, Kandahar, Faryab, Ghor and Sar-e-Pul. The third category – 30.1-40 % food security – included Parwan, Nimroz, Kunarha, Bamyan and Wardak while Panjshir, Khost, Kabul, Farah, Kapisa, Helmand and Logar were 20.1-30 % food insecure. Only Paktika and Baghlan had less than 10 % food-insecure population.²⁵⁶ The employment status of the head of household had a significant impact on food security: households with an employed head are less food insecure (41.5 %) compared to those where the head of household is underemployed (47.2 %), unemployed (50.8 %) or inactive (51.5 %).²⁵⁷

Fabrizio Foschini noted that Afghanistan experienced a dramatic increase in food prices between late 2007 and early 2008, particularly in the price of flour and bread that almost doubled while salaries could not keep up with the price rise. Even though flour prices have been more stable since then, they are still subject to severe seasonal rises during winter.²⁵⁸

A joint report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP) stated that food insecurity is driven by the limited food access determined by conflict and insecurity, population displacement and the severe drought conditions.²⁵⁹

Afghanistan experienced an extended period of dryness in the winter planting season during December 2017 – February 2018. There was a precipitation deficit of more than 70 % in most parts of the country which had a devastating impact on crops and livestock with the winter wet season being considered critical for successful agricultural production. This worsened the situation for the already chronically food-insecure population and had a disrupting impact on the country's main livelihoods.²⁶⁰

6.2 Food security for IDPs and returnees

According to FEWS (Famine Early Warning System), poor food security is increasingly concentrated in drought and conflict-affected areas. Many people displaced from rural areas worked in agriculture meaning that their crops and small livestock were left unattended or unharvested. For them the destruction of property and also the disruption of normal livelihoods add to the immediate impact of displacement making it difficult to recover and meet basic needs in the medium term.²⁶¹

The joint study on IDPs by NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall found that 71 % of respondents listed the lack of food and water as one of their three main challenges. The situation was more severe in Kabul, Kunduz and Herat compared to Kandahar and Nangarhar. The study also found no correlation between

²⁵⁴ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 118

²⁵⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 121

²⁵⁶ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 119

²⁵⁷ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 124

²⁵⁸ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 34

²⁵⁹ FAO and WFP, Monitoring Food Security in Countries with Conflict Situations, issue no 4, August 2018, [url](#), pp.3-4

²⁶⁰ FAO, Afghanistan – Drought response, 23 November 2018, [url](#), p. 2

²⁶¹ FEWS, Afghanistan - Food Security Outlook, June 2018, [url](#)

receiving assistance and struggling to access food and water: 47 % of respondents in Kabul mentioned receiving emergency assistance, while 83 % still reported access to food and water as a major challenge.²⁶²

The study also found that causes for food insecurity for IDPs were structural and according to the respondents, were connected particularly to their inability to find work which ‘may be down to a lack of skills suitable for their new environment, a lack of knowledge and networks or, in the case of women, cultural barriers to their economic integration’. Even though WFP and other organisations provided assistance, the underlying issues were not addressed while most IDPs only ate twice per day and some of them did not eat every day.²⁶³

According to UNOCHA the drought displaced more than 260 000 people in Badghis, Daykundi, Herat and Ghor provinces during the first half of 2018. Most displaced families stay in displacement sites either in Herat City, Herat or in displacement sites in and around Qala-e-Naw, the provincial capital of Badghis. The sites receive daily water trucking and food distributions along with tents and emergency shelter. Sanitation and nutrition services are also provided together with health services via mobile health teams. In September 2018 IOM established 6 flow monitoring posts on major highways that connect Herat City to the rural areas and the drought affected provinces of Badghis and Ghor to issue newly displaced families passing by with a registration card and to provide further information on assistance.²⁶⁴

UNOCHA reported in September 2018 that the availability of food was the most pressing issue that was raised by the focal points from all informal sites in Herat City. Both families who received cash for food or 1-2 in-kind food rations since their arrival in Herat City reported running out of food. Most of them were not able to find livelihood opportunities and resorted to sending children to work, begging or collecting trash while women cleaned or washed clothes for households in the city. They were unable to buy fruit, vegetables or meat with the money they made and maintained a diet of bread and tea instead. Many who received cash assistance paid debts or health services which left them unable to buy food.²⁶⁵

According to UNHCR 27 % of 2017 returnees reported skipping a meal or reducing their food intake in the previous week – a trend which was more common among female respondents (53 %) and urban returnees (28 %). 2017 returnees who were staying in their intended destination where they were more likely to have family support were less prone to face hunger. In comparison, IDPs were more likely to face hunger than 2017 returnees: 55 % of IDPs reported skipping a meal or reducing food intake which suggests that IDPs are more likely ‘to be exposed to protection risks associated with reliance on negative coping mechanisms, such as child labour and begging’. This trend was also much more pronounced among female (78 %) and urban (59 %) respondents.²⁶⁶

6.3 Food security in the three cities

According to 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 government does not have the capacity to store large amount of grain, and has not devised ways of protecting vulnerable households through price controls or a coupon system [...]’.²⁶⁷

²⁶² NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, *Escaping War: Where to Next?*, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 11

²⁶³ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, *Escaping War: Where to Next?*, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 11

²⁶⁴ UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin – Afghanistan*, Issue 78 (1 July – 30 September 2018), 20 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²⁶⁵ UNOCHA, *Afghanistan: Drought Response Situation Report No. 2* (as of 16 September 2018), 20 September 2018, [url](#), p. 5

²⁶⁶ UNHCR, *Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report*, May 2018, [url](#), p. 11

²⁶⁷ Foschini, F., *Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid*, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 34

UN-Habitat noted in 2016 that the majority of IDP households in Herat were faced with food insecurity.²⁶⁸

UNOCHA found that the drought in 2018 has affected more than two thirds of Afghan population, causing health issues, triggering negative coping mechanisms and reducing incomes by half.²⁶⁹

FEWS labelled both Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif as 'stressed' in December 2018 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'. Herat was found to be in the category of 'crisis' meaning that despite any humanitarian assistance at least one in five households had food consumption gaps or above usual acute malnutrition or was only marginally able to meet minimum food needs.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ UN-Habitat et al., Inter-Agency Durable Solutions Initiative - Profile and Response Plan of Protracted IDP Settlements in Herat, October 2016, [url](#), p. 6

²⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin – Afghanistan, Issue 79 (1 October – 31 December 2018), 13 January 2019, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷⁰ FEWS, Afghanistan - Food Security Outlook Update, December 2018, [url](#); FEWS, Integrated Phase Classification - IPC 2.0: A Common Starting Point for Decision Making, n.d., [url](#)

7. Education

Afghanistan has made significant progress in improving access and enrolment in primary schools since 2001, but the achieved results have remained limited:²⁷¹ Afghanistan is still one of the countries that fall short in providing adequate education to its population. Various education indicators such as attendance and literacy rates, school-life expectancy and gender-equity indicators, showed great progress in Afghanistan in the first decade after the fall of the Taliban but the improvements slowed down and even ‘come to a complete halt’ according to ALCS 2016-17.²⁷²

One of the most important findings of ALCS 2016-17 was that apart from the quality of education, ‘the main problem of Afghanistan’s education system is not so much retention and drop out, but first and foremost making a start at school. Residence, gender, disability status and poverty status are factors that invariably differentiate education outcomes, always strongly and often accumulatively impairing the outcomes of girls, rural and Kuchi residents, people with disabilities and the poor’.²⁷³

Attending formal education, either in public or private schools or Islamic *madrasas*, is compulsory in Afghanistan until the 9th grade.²⁷⁴ However, according to the Ministry of Education (MoE), around 3.7 million children were out of school across Afghanistan in 2018 and 60 % of them were girls.²⁷⁵ ALCS 2016-17 found the following overall net attendance rates: 56.1 % for primary education, 35.7 % for secondary and 9.7 % for tertiary, meaning that 1.9 million primary-school age children and 1.8 million secondary-school age children missed out on education.²⁷⁶ Most of the out-of-school children lived in rural areas while the attendance rates, particularly for women, were considerably higher in urban areas than in rural Afghanistan.²⁷⁷ Girls and rural children were disproportionately likely to drop out of school.²⁷⁸

In 2015, the MoE recorded 9.2 million Afghan youths and children who were enrolled in school.²⁷⁹ A World Bank study showed a big gap between school enrolment and attendance: nearly half of the enrolled students did not show up regularly at school. Rural children and youth were 10 % more likely to be out of school compared to the national average and for Kuchi children being out of school was six times more likely. Even for those attending school, learning outcomes remained low with teachers being generally underqualified and the learning environment inadequate. The distribution of teachers was uneven across regions and did not correlate with the number of students or school population. Half of all schools lacked buildings.²⁸⁰ The teaching profession is not considered especially attractive in Afghanistan due to low wages and security risks especially in the provinces.²⁸¹

A joint study by the Ministry of Education, UNICEF and Samuel Hall found specific groups of marginalised children who were disproportionately excluded and deprived from access to school. These included children with disabilities, including children having psychosocial issues, children from ethnic minorities and different linguistic background, children from religious minorities, children living in urban slums and on the street, children from families who migrate seasonally for work, and refugee

²⁷¹ World Bank (The), Afghanistan: Promoting Education During Times of Increased Fragility, 15 August 2018, [url](#), pp. 8-9

²⁷² Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 139

²⁷³ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 139

²⁷⁴ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 141

²⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3.7m Afghan Children, Mostly Girls, Out of School, 11 October 2018, [url](#)

²⁷⁶ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 139

²⁷⁷ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 143, 153-154

²⁷⁸ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 150

²⁷⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 140

²⁸⁰ World Bank (The), Afghanistan: Promoting Education During Times of Increased Fragility, 15 August 2018, [url](#), pp. 9-10

²⁸¹ World Bank (The), Afghanistan: Promoting Education During Times of Increased Fragility, 15 August 2018, [url](#), pp. 38-39

and IDP children.²⁸² Additionally, numerous studies have shown that children engaged in labour experienced considerable drops in their school performance.²⁸³

The lack of access to formal education – particularly for girls – during the Taliban rule is still noticeable.²⁸⁴ According to Asia Foundation’s 2017 survey, almost half of all Afghan adults reported having no formal schooling, covering 34 % men and 62 % of women. 16 % of the respondents had attended primary school, 26 % secondary school and 8 % university. On average, respondents had 4.7 years of formal education.²⁸⁵ Over half of the population between the ages of 15 and 24 were illiterate.²⁸⁶

ALCS 2016-17 put the youth literacy rate at 53.6 %, and for all the population above age 15 the rate was 34.8 %.²⁸⁷ The literacy rate was considerably higher for people who lived in urban areas than for those who lived in the rural parts of the country: 75.1 % for urban youth aged 15-24 and 53.7 % for all the urban population above 15, and respectively 47.9 % and 29.6 % for rural people.²⁸⁸

Education spending in Afghanistan has been reduced since 2014, and it is heavily reliant on donor funding. Afghanistan’s child and youth population is expected to increase from 11 million to 14 million between 2015 and 2030, meaning that the Afghan education system will need to make room for 1.5 to 3 million new students depending on the enrolment ratio.²⁸⁹ The share of the private sector in education is small, with private schools enrolling two percent of general education students and five percent of technical, vocational, education and training and teacher training students.²⁹⁰

7.1 Gender gap

According to Human Rights Watch, millions of girls who would not have had any schooling under the Taliban regime received education since 2001 although their actual number is disputed.²⁹¹ Regardless of this improvement, ‘even according to the most optimistic statistics, only slightly more than half of Afghan girls are in school.’²⁹²

The gender gap begins to show in early grades and it widens as students move up to higher grades.²⁹³ The main reasons why girls are not in school are cultural reasons, insecurity and distance to school.²⁹⁴ Fabrizio Foschini added that in Afghan society it is usually considered inappropriate that girls move around because of real or perceived insecurity and cultural reasons.²⁹⁵ According to statistics, girls who do not study are more likely to marry before age 18 than those who do.²⁹⁶

ALCS figures for 2016-17 put the female net attendance rate for primary school at 45.5 % (65.5 % for males), secondary school at 24.1 % (46.8 % for males) and tertiary school at 4.8 % (14.9 % for males).

²⁸² Afghanistan, MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall, All in School and Learning: Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children – Afghanistan Country Study, June 2018, [url](#), p. 75

²⁸³ Afghanistan, MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall, All in School and Learning: Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children – Afghanistan Country Study, June 2018, [url](#), p. 47

²⁸⁴ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 159-160

²⁸⁵ Asia Foundation, Survey of the Afghan People 2017, November 2017, [url](#), pp. 85-86

²⁸⁶ World Bank (The), Afghanistan: Promoting Education During Times of Increased Fragility, 15 August 2018, [url](#), p. 56

²⁸⁷ Afghanistan, NSIA, Afghanistan Provincial Profile 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²⁸⁸ Afghanistan, NSIA, Afghanistan Provincial Profile 2018, [url](#), pp. 3-6

²⁸⁹ World Bank (The), Afghanistan: Promoting Education During Times of Increased Fragility, 15 August 2018, [url](#), pp. 10-12

²⁹⁰ World Bank (The), Afghanistan: Promoting Education During Times of Increased Fragility, 15 August 2018, [url](#), p. 8

²⁹¹ HRW, “I Won’t Be a Doctor, and One Day You’ll Be Sick” – Girls’ Access to Education in Afghanistan, October 2017, [url](#), p. 5

²⁹² HRW, “I Won’t Be a Doctor, and One Day You’ll Be Sick” – Girls’ Access to Education in Afghanistan, October 2017, [url](#), p. 39

²⁹³ World Bank (The), Afghanistan: Promoting Education During Times of Increased Fragility, 15 August 2018, [url](#), p. 9

²⁹⁴ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 16

²⁹⁵ Foschini, F., email, 9 November 2018. Fabrizio Foschini made this addition during the review of the report.

²⁹⁶ HRW, “I Won’t Be a Doctor, and One Day You’ll Be Sick” – Girls’ Access to Education in Afghanistan, October 2017, [url](#), p. 53

Female attendance rates on all levels were notably higher in urban areas than rural.²⁹⁷ According to Human Rights Watch, NGO-operated and donor-funded community-based education programmes that operate in communities where there are no schools nearby are often an Afghan girl's only chance to access education.²⁹⁸

Human Rights Watch added that 30 % of Afghan government schools lack safe drinking water and 60 % do not have toilets. Girls are particularly affected by poor toilet facilities.²⁹⁹ Pashto speakers have lower enrolment numbers compared to Dari speakers, in the case of girls in particular due to cultural barriers. A joint study by the MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall found the highest prevalence of out-of-school girls in the southern provinces, most notably Uruzgan 98 %, Zabul 95 %, Paktika 94 % and Kandahar 90 %. The proportion was lower than average in the central and central highland provinces, such as Bamyan 34 %, Panjshir 38 % and Daykundi 35 %.³⁰⁰

7.2 The impact of conflict on education

The conflict has impeded access to education in some parts of the country.³⁰¹ In 2018, attacks on schools were reported countrywide, due to their use as voter registration centres and polling places for the parliamentary elections.³⁰²

According to the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), Afghanistan was one of the countries 'heavily affected' by attacks on education and military use of schools from 2013 to 2017.³⁰³ GCPEA's briefing paper on Afghanistan added that attacks on education accelerated again in 2018.³⁰⁴ From 1 April to 30 June 2018 the UN verified 79 attacks against schools and education-related personnel which is a 'sharp increase' compared to 11 such incidents recorded in the previous reporting period and is connected to the use of schools as voter registration centres.³⁰⁵

However, according to GCPEA the military use of schools in Afghanistan is declining.³⁰⁶ The UN verified the military use of only one school during the period from 1 April to 30 June 2018.³⁰⁷

According to the Ministry of Education, 1075 schools out of a total of 17 500 were shut in 2017 because of violence. The southern parts of Afghanistan have been disproportionately affected by school closures.³⁰⁸

The Taliban and other armed groups like the ISKP opposed girls' access to education and targeted their attacks against girls' schools, female students and their teachers.³⁰⁹

²⁹⁷ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 143

²⁹⁸ HRW, "I Won't Be a Doctor, and One Day You'll Be Sick" - Girls' Access to Education in Afghanistan, October 2017, [url](#), p. 25

²⁹⁹ HRW, "I Won't Be a Doctor, and One Day You'll Be Sick" - Girls' Access to Education in Afghanistan, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 21-22

³⁰⁰ Afghanistan, MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall, All in School and Learning: Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children – Afghanistan Country Study, June 2018, [url](#), p. 43

³⁰¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2017, March 2018, [url](#), p. 3

³⁰² UNHCR Afghanistan, email, 9 November 2018. UNHCR made this addition during the review of this report.

³⁰³ GCPEA, Education under Attack 2018, May 2018, [url](#), pp. 32-33

³⁰⁴ GCPEA, Attacks on Education in Afghanistan, Briefing Paper, November 2018, [url](#), p. 3

³⁰⁵ UN General Assembly, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 September 2018, [url](#), p. 8

³⁰⁶ GCPEA, Attacks on Education in Afghanistan, Briefing Paper, November 2018, [url](#), p. 3

³⁰⁷ UN General Assembly, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 September 2018, [url](#), p. 8

³⁰⁸ New York Times (The), A New Push Is On for Afghan Schools, But the Numbers Are Grim, 1 April 2018, [url](#)

³⁰⁹ HRW, "I Won't Be a Doctor, and One Day You'll Be Sick" - Girls' Access to Education in Afghanistan, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 17, 66

7.3 Education opportunities for IDPs and returnees

There have been limitations in the access to education for IDPs and undocumented refugee returnees.³¹⁰ Afghanistan's education system has been described as overwhelmed, particularly due to the increased displacement, with most schools overcrowded and insufficiently resourced. An NRC research conducted in 2016 found that over half of all IDPs, refugees and returnees were children or youths, and a large number of them were out of school. Main reasons for them to not attend school were lack of capacity of schools to absorb additional students, lack of required documentation, including birth certificates and previous school records, and inability of families to afford school-related costs.³¹¹

IDPs and returnees have been deprived of education and other essential services as a result of lacking civil documentation in the form of a *tazkera*.³¹² Government schools typically have a number of documentation requirements, such as identification and official transfer letters from previous school, acquisition of which may present an obstacle to enrolment for IDPs and returnees.³¹³

A study by MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall found that the key barriers to displaced children's school enrolment were not political or legal but rather financial or related to the lack of appropriate teaching or schooling.³¹⁴ Another study by NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall found 26 % of respondents saying that their lack of documentation hindered their access to education.³¹⁵ In Herat and Kabul 33 % of respondents mentioned the lack of *tazkera* impeding schooling for their family members while in Kunduz the figure was 16 %.³¹⁶

The school attendance figures for recent returnees to Afghanistan are lower than those for the population as a whole. According to a 2017-18 UNHCR survey, 55 % of returnee boys and 30 % of returnee girls were in school in 2017 compared to 66 % of returnee boys and 44 % of returnee girls in 2016. School attendance for returnees was higher in urban than rural areas. The most commonly cited reasons for returnee and IDP children to not attend school were distance, the need for children to contribute to household income and school fees. Households with higher levels of income were more likely to have all their boys and girls in school. Less returnee girls were attending school in contested areas than in government-controlled areas: 33 % in government areas and only 23 % in contested areas.³¹⁷

7.4 Education opportunities in the three cities

According to Fabrizio Foschini, Kabul has not only been the most educated part of Afghanistan for long but it also acts as a magnet for educated people from various parts of the country. The quality of teaching at the universities is higher in the capital than in the provinces and Kabul's job market, with the office of the government and national and international companies located there, has a greater capacity to absorb educated people.³¹⁸

Kabul province has the highest literacy rate in Afghanistan: for 2016-17 youth literacy rate was at 74.4 % and the literacy rate for all the population above 15 years of age in the province was at 54.2 %.³¹⁹ Kabul is also among the provinces that have the highest net attendance rates for primary

³¹⁰ Afghanistan, MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall, All in School and Learning: Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children – Afghanistan Country Study, June 2018, [url](#), p. 49

³¹¹ NRC, Broken Promises, Displaced Afghan Girls, February 2017, [url](#), p. 1

³¹² UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 22

³¹³ HRW, "I Won't Be a Doctor, and One Day You'll Be Sick" - Girls' Access to Education in Afghanistan, October 2017 [url](#) p. 25

³¹⁴ Afghanistan, MoE, UNICEF and Samuel Hall, All in School and Learning: Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children – Afghanistan Country Study, June 2018, [url](#) p. 75

³¹⁵ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 39

³¹⁶ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 37

³¹⁷ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 16

³¹⁸ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 30

³¹⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Afghanistan Provincial Profile, 2018, [2018], [url](#), p. 9

school for boys and girls.³²⁰ According to the World Bank, 22 % of all children are out of school in Kabul, and for females the proportion is 30 %.³²¹ A 2018 SIGAR investigation conducted in Kabul province found problems with student and teacher attendance and staffing at several schools and that many schools had structural deficiencies that may affect the delivery of education.³²²

The literacy rate for people aged 15 years and above in Herat City was 57.3 % according to 2016 data: the rate for males was 66.2 % and for females 48.4 %.³²³ According to ALCS figures for 2016-17, Herat province's youth literacy rate was 52.5 % and the literacy rate for all the population above 15 in the province was 34.5 %, which was almost the same as the national average.³²⁴

According to Jolyon Leslie, in 2015 the growth of private education in Herat has been significant with reportedly 30 000 students enrolled in roughly 70 private schools, who can charge up to USD 1 500 in tuition fees per year. Leslie added that these private schools serve the wealthy in the first place and attract increasing numbers of students because of poor standards of tuition in public schools. Skilled teachers are attracted by higher salaries and better working conditions. In 2015, 30 000 students, of which 5 000 were female, attended a *madrassa* in Herat.³²⁵

Net attendance rate in primary school in Herat City was 78 % according to 2016 data: 79.6 % for males and 76.2 % for females. Attendance rate in secondary school was 42 %: 42.3 % for males and 41.7 % for females.³²⁶ According to UNHCR figures, Herat had the lowest returnee male child school enrolment rate (32 %) in Afghanistan after Samangan and Parwan (31 %).³²⁷ A SIGAR investigation conducted in 2016 found indications of student and teacher absenteeism in schools, including in Herat City, and also lack of basic services, such as electricity and clean water.³²⁸

The literacy rate for people aged 15 years and above in Mazar-e Sharif was 61.7 % according to 2015 data: the rate for males was 71.8 % and for females 51.4 %.³²⁹ According to ALCS figures for 2016-17, Balkh province's youth literacy rate was 57.7 % and the literacy rate for all the population above 15 in the province was 37.9 %, which was slightly above the national average.³³⁰

Balkh province has one of the highest female school enrolment rates in the country (48 % as of 2014).³³¹ A SIGAR investigation conducted in 2017 found that several schools in Balkh province, including in Mazar-e Sharif, lacked basic services, such as electricity and clean water.³³² Mazar-e Sharif has approximately 10-20 universities, both private and public.³³³

³²⁰ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 144

³²¹ World Bank (The), Afghanistan: Promoting Education During Times of Increased Fragility, 15 August 2018, [url](#), pp. 9-10

³²² SIGAR, Schools in Kabul Province, Afghanistan: Observations from Site Visits at 24 Schools, 6 February 2018, [url](#), p. 2

³²³ Afghanistan, CSO, Final Report of Herat Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey, 7 March 2017, [url](#), p. 19

³²⁴ Afghanistan, NSIA, Afghanistan Provincial Profile 2018, [2018], [url](#), p. 71

³²⁵ Leslie, J., Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, USIP, 2 April 2015, [url](#), pp. 28, 41

³²⁶ Afghanistan, CSO, Final Report of Herat Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey, 7 March 2017, [url](#), p. 27

³²⁷ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 17

³²⁸ SIGAR, Schools in Herat Province: Observations from Site Visits at 25 Schools, 4 November 2016, [url](#)

³²⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey: Balkh, 5 January 2015, [url](#), p. 17

³³⁰ NSIA, Afghanistan Provincial Profile 2018, [2018], [url](#), p. 9

³³¹ Sahar, Culture of Education in Balkh Province: An Unique Example, 1 June 2017, [url](#)

³³² SIGAR, Schools in Balkh Province: Observations from Site Visits at 26 Schools, 28 March 2017, [url](#)

³³³ Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Fact-Finding Mission Report Afghanistan [source: Representatives of international NGOs, Representative of a national NGO], April 2018, [url](#), pp. 51-52

8. Health care

8.1 Basic data

Life expectancy at birth	52.1 years (2018 est., The World Bank estimated life expectancy at birth was 64 years in 2017 ³³⁴)
Death rate	13.2 deaths/1 000 population (2018 est.)
Maternal mortality rate	396 deaths/100 000 live births (2015 est.)
Infant (under 1) mortality rate	108.5 deaths/1 000 live births (the highest number in the world) (2018 est.)
Health expenditures	8.2 % of GDP (2014)
Physicians density	0.3/1 000 population (2016)
Hospital bed density	0.5 beds/1 000 population (2014)
Unimproved water sources in urban area	21.8 % of population (2015 est.)
Unimproved sanitation facilities in urban areas	54.9 % of population (2015 est.)
HIV/AIDS – adult prevalence rate	less than 1 % of population (2016 est.)

Figure 2: Basic health and sanitation indicators³³⁵

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) warned that '[h]ealth statistics from Afghanistan are notoriously unreliable. Constraints in monitoring – caused in particular by the remote control support of health facilities – mean that data from the most insecure areas are often excluded from statistics. This introduces a persistent bias that is likely to contribute to overly positive country averages.'³³⁶ There has been particularly high variation in the estimates of maternal mortality rate and life expectancy.³³⁷

8.1.1 Afghanistan health status

In 2001, Afghanistan had 'a devastated health system and some of the worst health statistics in the world'.³³⁸ Since then, Afghanistan's health care has been steadily progressing but continues to rely on support from the NGOs and the international community. Beginning in 2002, structural changes were made to improve the health conditions of the Afghan people, starting from the Basic Package of Health Services (BHPS), implemented by the Ministry of Public Health, which was followed in 2005 by the Essential Package for Hospital Services (EPHS) as its extension. The BHPS was intended to focus on those health issues where most progress could be made and focused specifically on rural areas and care for women and children.³³⁹ More recently, the System Enhancement for Health Action (SEHAT) and Sehatmandi programmes were created to support the provision and improvement of BHPS and EPHS.³⁴⁰

³³⁴ World Bank (The), Country Profile Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#)

³³⁵ CIA, World Factbook, Afghanistan - People and Society, 11 December 2018, [url](#)

³³⁶ MSF, Between Rhetoric and Reality, The Ongoing Struggle to Access Healthcare in Afghanistan, February 2014, [url](#), p. 18

³³⁷ New York Times (The), How the U.S. Government Misleads the Public on Afghanistan, 8 September 2018, [url](#)

³³⁸ WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

³³⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 168

³⁴⁰ World Bank (The), Community Health Care Increases Access to Medical Services in Herat Province, 1 November 2016, [url](#)

According to World Bank data, from 2003 to 2015 the under-five mortality rate dropped from 137 to 91 per 1 000 live births (34 %), and the number of functioning health facilities increased from 496 in 2002 to more than 2 800 in 2018.³⁴¹

In a 2018 report the World Bank concluded that over 2004-2010 health care services showed major improvements in Afghanistan, while in the period of 2011-2016 improvements continued at a slower pace.³⁴² The report added that the provinces with high performing health facilities in 2003–2010 were Baghlan, Faryab, Herat, Jawzjan, Khost, Kunar, Laghman, Logar, Nuristan and Paktika, whereas in the period of 2011-2016 health facilities were functioning best in Badakhshan, Balkh, Daykundi, Farah, Faryab, Helmand, Nangarhar, Paktiya, Saripul and Zabul with Faryab being the only high-performing province during both periods.³⁴³

Despite these improvements, Afghanistan's public health care system, neglected during the years of conflict, continues to face challenges, such as damaged infrastructure, a lack of trained health care providers and under-resourced healthcare facilities. The situation is 'further complicated by a lack of security and pervasive poverty'.³⁴⁴ A 2017 study by Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) found 53 % of health care facilities experiencing structural and maintenance problems and poor hygiene and sanitation conditions were found in 45 % of the facilities.³⁴⁵ IWA also added that the lack of electricity was another serious deficiency weakening the health sector with 20 % of the facilities having no electricity supply.³⁴⁶

Compared to other countries, Afghanistan's health indicators remain poor and the health conditions of the rural population continue to be a matter of serious concern according to ALCS 2016-17.³⁴⁷ Public health services are even more overwhelmed due to large population movements inside the country and a significant number of returnees heading towards urban centres. Local medical facilities are largely unable to absorb the additional burden and cannot cope with the increasing needs.³⁴⁸

8.2 Access and availability

Even though the majority of Afghanistan's population have access to primary health care,³⁴⁹ large sections of Afghanistan's rural population still do not have access to essential health care services.³⁵⁰ According to ALCS 2016-17, 93 % of the population lived within a range of two hours from a public clinic, 82.4 % lived less than two hours from a district or provincial hospital and 94.8 % were less than two hours away from a pharmacy.³⁵¹ Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health stated that 60 % of people had access to health services in April 2018, when access was defined as one hour walking distance to the nearest clinic.³⁵²

Many Afghans seek health care services abroad. According to the Ministry of Public Health, Afghans spent at least USD 300 million on treatment outside the country in the past few years with 90 % of these patients suffering from heart diseases.³⁵³ Despite improvements in public hospitals and in the

³⁴¹ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Country Update, October 2018, [url](#), p. 15

³⁴² World Bank (The), Progress in the face of insecurity: Improving health outcomes in Afghanistan, 6 March 2018, [url](#), p. 18

³⁴³ World Bank (The), Progress in the face of insecurity: Improving health outcomes in Afghanistan, 6 March 2018, [url](#), p. 21

³⁴⁴ WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁵ Integrity Watch Afghanistan, Life Matters: Caring For The Country's Most Precious Resource, August 2017, [url](#), p. 4

³⁴⁶ Integrity Watch Afghanistan, Life Matters: Caring For The Country's Most Precious Resource, August 2017, [url](#), p. 5

³⁴⁷ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 168

³⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan – First Quarter Report (January to March 2017), May 2017, [url](#), p. 18

³⁴⁹ WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁰ UNICEF, Afghanistan Annual Report 2017, February 2018, [url](#), p. 17

³⁵¹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 169

³⁵² Tolo News, 60% of Afghans Now Have Access to Health Services, 4 April 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Worsening Security in Afghanistan Threatens Health Gains, Minister Says, 17 May 2018, [url](#)

³⁵³ Tolo News, Afghanistan Imports 40% of Medicine 'Illegally', 6 October 2017, [url](#)

health sector for treatment of cardiac diseases, Afghanistan faces lack of medical facilities, medical equipment and lack of heart specialists.³⁵⁴

The estimated number of patients receiving in-patient care in 2016-17 was 954 000, 64 % of them in public hospitals and 27 % in private ones. An estimated 2.5 million people visited health services as out-patients.³⁵⁵

8.2.1 Impact of conflict on health care

According to UNOCHA, medical workers and health facilities are most affected by security incidents and direct violence amongst all aid workers and humanitarian infrastructure in Afghanistan. Health personnel are being harassed, detained, kidnapped and killed.³⁵⁶ Many people in Afghanistan lack access to health care due to the conflict, and trauma-care is regarded as one of the most critical gaps remaining in Afghanistan's public health care.³⁵⁷ Medical facilities are increasingly a target of military attacks,³⁵⁸ even in Kabul.³⁵⁹

In 2017, UNAMA documented 75 incidents targeting or impacting health care facilities and workers. Most of the casualties occurred in the anti-government elements' attack on the military hospital in Kabul in March 2017. UNAMA also documented the temporary closure of at least 147 health facilities in 2017, following threats by anti-government elements. The large majority of the closures occurred in Laghman, Uruzgan and Baghlan.³⁶⁰

In the first six months of 2018, the Afghanistan Health Cluster registered 54 incidents against health workers and facilities, which was slightly more than in the same period in 2017. According to a representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Kabul, however, the attacks in 2018 were more deliberate and violent.³⁶¹

The Afghanistan Health Cluster noted in December 2018 that there had been 71 attacks on health workers and facilities with a trend shifting towards more directed and violent attacks. As a result of these incidents approximately 5.6 million people have reduced access to health services.³⁶²

8.2.2 Cost of treatment

Despite the fact that based on article 52 of the Afghan Constitution health care should be free of charge, people have to pay for medications, doctor's fees, laboratory tests and inpatient care in many public facilities.³⁶³ High treatment costs were the main reason treatment was avoided.³⁶⁴ The payment for medications, laboratory tests, inpatient care, transportation and consultation fees pushed many into debt.³⁶⁵

According to a 2014 MSF survey, at least 60 % of the people interviewed live on less than USD 1 per day and it is often impossible for them to pay medical costs.³⁶⁶ More than half of those interviewed in Kabul and Kunduz reported having paid about USD 44 just for medications during a previous illness.³⁶⁷

³⁵⁴ Tolo News, 52,000 Patients in a Year; MoPH Says Cardiac Disease on the Rise, 29 September 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 167

³⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin - Afghanistan, Issue 77 (1 - 30 June 2018), 24 July 2018, [url](#), p. 4

³⁵⁷ WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2016, February 2017, [url](#), p. 27; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2017, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 14-16

³⁵⁹ BBC, IS gunmen dressed as medics kill 30 at Kabul Military Hospital, 8 March 2017, [url](#)

³⁶⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2017, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 14-16

³⁶¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin - Afghanistan, Issue 77 (1 - 30 June 2018), 24 July 2018, [url](#), p. 4

³⁶² WHO, Afghanistan Health Cluster Bulletin, 17 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶³ Dörner, F. and Langbein, L., Between Rhetoric and Reality: Access to health care and its limitations, AAN, 2 December 2014, [url](#)

³⁶⁴ Frost A., et al., An assessment of barriers to accessing the BPHs in Afghanistan, 15 November 2016, [url](#)

³⁶⁵ MSF, Between rhetoric and reality, The ongoing struggle to access healthcare in Afghanistan, February 2014, [url](#), p. 8

³⁶⁶ MSF, Between rhetoric and reality, The ongoing struggle to access healthcare in Afghanistan, February 2014, [url](#), p. 31

³⁶⁷ MSF, Between rhetoric and reality, The ongoing struggle to access healthcare in Afghanistan, February 2014, [url](#), p. 33

When the medications were available at the health facility, patients often could not afford them. 60 % of people interviewed by MSF in Kabul did not get medication because of high costs.³⁶⁸

In a study among urban poor Samuel Hall found in 2014 that '[e]ven with access to public health facilities, the cost of medication is often too high for urban households to follow the treatment prescribed by doctors. For serious illnesses, many urban households will prefer travelling abroad to get treatment, in particular to Pakistan or India, increasing the overall costs of treatment for households'.³⁶⁹

Thomas Ruttig noted in a 2017 paper that sometimes second year medical students open a clinic on their own and start caring for people without any control mechanism in place to check the quality of the provided services.³⁷⁰ Since the 'good' clinics in Kabul, including those run by relief organisations, cannot keep up with the demand, there is a strong medical tourism. Afghans do not rely on their own doctors, not even for minor medical interventions, and drive to Pakistan instead. The costs for the travel are not that high, at least for the middle class.³⁷¹

The bad reputation of the public health system pushed many towards private health care providers who asked high fees for their services, benefitting from the distrust surrounding the public sector. However, 'many reported overprescribing, misdiagnosing and even malpractice by private practitioners'.³⁷²

8.2.3 Availability of medicines

According to a fact sheet by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), IOM and ZIRF Counselling from 2017 '[a]ny kind of medication is available on the Afghanistan markets now, but the costs vary based on quality, company names and manufacturers'.³⁷³ Most medicines were sold privately.³⁷⁴

The Ministry of Public Health prepared the National Essential Medicines List of Afghanistan containing all the medicines recommended for use in BPHS and EPHS.³⁷⁵ These essential medicines were a major challenge for the health system, both in terms of quality and quantity.³⁷⁶

Availability of medicines and medical equipment is limited due to insecurity, inaccessibility of roads and disruption of electricity or temperature-controlled supply chains. Often there are no life-saving medicines, even in referral hospitals.³⁷⁷ Required medicine may not be delivered to hospitals on time, creating temporary medicine shortages. In such instances, medicines are only used in emergency cases. The remaining patients must buy them from private pharmacies.³⁷⁸

According to WHO, 'most of the essential medicines are imported from neighbouring countries, sometimes illegally'.³⁷⁹ Local authorities have no proper testing equipment and quality control available in Kabul is a lengthy process that 'costs the trader a lot, so no one wants to import medicine legally and they resort to smuggling'.³⁸⁰

³⁶⁸ MSF, Between rhetoric and reality, The ongoing struggle to access healthcare in Afghanistan, February 2014, [url](#), p. 35

³⁶⁹ Samuel Hall, Urban Poverty Report - A Study of Poverty, Food Insecurity and Resilience in Afghan Cities, 2014, [url](#), p. 85

³⁷⁰ Ruttig, T., Notiz Afghanistan Alltag in Kabul, SEM, 20 July 2017, [url](#), p. 8

³⁷¹ Ruttig, T., Notiz Afghanistan Alltag in Kabul, SEM, 20 July 2017, [url](#), p. 8

³⁷² Dörner, F. and Langbein, L., Between Rhetoric and Reality: Access to health care and its limitations, AAN, 2 December 2014, [url](#)

³⁷³ BAMF, IOM and ZIRF, Country Fact Sheet Afghanistan 2017, 10 January 2017, [url](#), p. 4

³⁷⁴ Frost A., et al., An assessment of barriers to accessing the BPHs in Afghanistan, 15 November 2016 [url](#); Guardian (The), Killing, not curing: deadly boom in counterfeit medicine in Afghanistan, 7 January 2015, [url](#)

³⁷⁵ WHO, Essential Medicines and Health Products Information Portal - National Essential Medicines List, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2014, [url](#)

³⁷⁶ WHO, Afghanistan - Essential medicines and pharmaceutical policies, [2017], [url](#)

³⁷⁷ WHO, Health Cluster Strategic Response Plan, 2 February 2017, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, State-run hospitals in Kabul Faced with medicine shortage, 12 August 2015, [url](#)

³⁷⁹ WHO, Afghanistan - Essential medicines and pharmaceutical policies, [2017], [url](#)

³⁸⁰ IWPR, Afghans Complain of Substandard Medicines, 11 July 2014, [url](#)

The whole process of importing medicine is vulnerable to corruption with irregularities in the registration of companies responsible for import. It is estimated that around 70 % of pharmaceuticals imported to Afghanistan are produced in neighbouring countries, specifically for the Afghan market. Many of these pharmaceutical suppliers are not allowed to sell their products on their own market, but are allowed to export them to Afghanistan.³⁸¹

According to an article in the Guardian, markets are flooded with low-quality and counterfeit medicines. A doctor and provincial council member for Nangarhar quoted in the article clarified: '[i]llicit medicine comes in two types[...]. The first is completely fake. The second contains a small dose, say 20 %, of the stated medicine, and this type can be most harmful. Too small a quantity of an antibiotic, for example, will not only fail to treat an infection effectively but risks making the bacteria drug-resistant'.³⁸² The Medicine Importers Union stated that at least 40 % of medicine and medical equipment enter the Afghan market illegally and many of the pharmaceutical products are low quality.³⁸³

Many people use traditional medicine for health problems as it is less expensive and easily accessible.³⁸⁴

8.3 Situation for women

Women face specific obstacles when accessing health services including a lack of knowledge of health problems and practices due to low literacy rates, restrictions on their movement and limited access to money.³⁸⁵ UNOCHA noted that, 'prohibitions on men providing medical treatment to women', compromise women's access to health care, adding that merely 15 % of nurses and 2 % of doctors are female.³⁸⁶

A 2016 NRC and Samuel Hall study noted that mobile clinics had a special role in providing medical care to women. Mobile clinics had significantly more female patients than male, mostly due to the restricted access women had to other types of health services.³⁸⁷

Before the implementation of the BPHS in 2003, Afghanistan had the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world. According to estimations by the UN, the maternal mortality rate was 1100 per 100 000 live births in 2000 and has fallen by 64 % to 396 per 100 000 live births by 2015. One of the leading contributing factors to this high mortality rate was that only 14.3 % of births were attended by a skilled professional with only 12.8 % of births occurring at a health facility.³⁸⁸

According to ALCS 2016-17, progress has been made in maternal and child health, much of it due to enhanced ante-natal care and increased deliverance in specialised institutions with skilled attendants.³⁸⁹ However, almost half of all births in Afghanistan still took place at home without a skilled health practitioner and there are large differences between urban and rural areas in terms of birth attendance.³⁹⁰ In urban areas, the majority of women giving birth are assisted by a skilled provider, whereas less than half of rural deliveries are supported by a skilled birth attendant. 82.7 % of urban births are institutional deliveries, compared to 43.4 % of rural births.³⁹¹ In Nuristan, Paktika, Badakhshan, Nimroz and Daykundi more than half of pregnant women did not receive any ante-natal

³⁸¹ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, Low quality medicines, 19 October 2016, [url](#)

³⁸² Guardian (The), Killing, not curing: deadly boom in counterfeit medicine in Afghanistan, 7 January 2015, [url](#)

³⁸³ Tolo News, Afghanistan Imports 40% of Medicine 'Illegally', 6 October 2017, [url](#)

³⁸⁴ WHO, Afghanistan - Essential medicines and pharmaceutical policies, [2017], [url](#)

³⁸⁵ Dörner, F. and Langbein, L., Between Rhetoric and Reality: Access to health care and its limitations, AAN, 2 December 2014, [url](#)

³⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview (2019), 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 15

³⁸⁷ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 35

³⁸⁸ Frost A., et al., An assessment of barriers to accessing the BPHs in Afghanistan, 15 November 2016, [url](#)

³⁸⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 168

³⁹⁰ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 167, 190

³⁹¹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 190

care, but in Kabul, Kandahar, Bamyan, Balkh and Kapisa more than 80 % of women had check-ups during pregnancy.³⁹²

8.4 Mental health care

After nearly 40 years of on-off conflict, war-induced mental illness, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, is widespread in Afghanistan, but facilities to help patients are few. Afghanistan's national mental health strategy estimates that half of all Afghans have a mental health problem, but there is only one public mental health hospital in Afghanistan, located in Kabul.³⁹³

There are no accurate figures available on the prevalence of mental disorders in Afghanistan, but according to estimates by WHO, more than a million Afghans suffer from depressive disorders and over 1.2 million suffer from anxiety disorders.³⁹⁴ According to another estimate some 42 to 66 % of Afghans are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, it is uncommon to have a formal diagnosis of PTSD, because some of the symptoms related to it are not considered abnormal as many people are suffering from them in Afghanistan.³⁹⁵

According to the 2016 study by Samuel Hall 'the alarming mental health situation of the Afghan youth should not be considered as a secondary individual health issue anymore, but as an actual threat to any possible social, economic and political development in the country.' The majority (70 %) of young Kabulis have experienced traumatic events (one or more shocks that include criminal or terrorist-related issues and not only personal traumas). The study also found that returnees and IDPs find themselves most vulnerable compared to those with no migration background.³⁹⁶

The information available about the availability of mental health services and amount of mental health professionals in Afghanistan is contradictory.

The Public Health Minister stated in 2017 that the ministry 'has recently trained over 700 professional psychological counselors and 101 specialized mental health doctors'. It is also mentioned that the trained professionals are working in government-run health centres or for different health NGOs.³⁹⁷ Furthermore the minister, quoted in an article by IWPR (Institute for War and Peace Reporting), noted that there are 300 dedicated mental health clinics in Afghanistan and psychological services are available at some 1 500 health centres in total. Also another 200 specialist centres have been planned to be created by the government.³⁹⁸ According to another article by IWPR 'the ministry had set up clinics across the 34 provinces of the country to treat psychological problems', but 'there was only one dedicated mental health hospital in Kabul'.³⁹⁹

According to a scholar with field experience in Afghanistan interviewed by Asylos 'mental health care in Afghanistan is virtually non-existent' with one public mental health hospital operating in Kabul and a private one in Mazar-e Sharif.⁴⁰⁰

The 2016 Samuel Hall study reported that Afghanistan suffers from the lack of trained professionals (psychiatrists, social workers, psychologists), sufficient infrastructure and awareness about mental health issues with 'only one tertiary health facility (Kabul Mental Health Hospital), approximately three trained psychiatrists and ten psychologists "covering" a population of more than 30 million people'.⁴⁰¹

³⁹² Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 183-184

³⁹³ Guardian (The), 'My Liver is Bleeding': Life inside an Afghan Psychiatric Hospital - in Pictures, 5 February 2016, [url](#)

³⁹⁴ WHO, Depression a leading cause of ill health and disability among Afghans – fighting stigma is key to recovery, 9 April 2017, [url](#)

³⁹⁵ de Rond, M. and Rakita, M., Why there is no PTSD in Afghanistan, Medium, 28 November 2016, [url](#)

³⁹⁶ Samuel Hall, Urban displaced youth in Kabul – Part 1. Mental Health Also Matters, 2016, [url](#), p. 11

³⁹⁷ WHO, Depression a leading cause of ill health and disability among Afghans – fighting stigma is key to recovery, 9 April 2017, [url](#)

³⁹⁸ IWPR, Depression Rampant Among Afghan Women, 12 February 2017, [url](#)

³⁹⁹ IWPR, Afghan Women Hit by Mental Health Crisis, 12 May 2016, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰ Asylos, Afghanistan: Situation of young male 'Westernised' returnees to Kabul, August 2017, [url](#), p. 111

⁴⁰¹ Samuel Hall, Urban displaced youth in Kabul – Part 1. Mental Health Also Matters, 2016, [url](#), p. 12

According to a MedCOI informant ‘people usually don’t want to keep their mental patients in a public mental health care hospital because of the harsh and careless interaction with the patients.’ Instead, people ‘who can afford it often choose private health care or travel abroad to Pakistan or India to get better treatment. This does not happen only for mental health care, but for other kinds of treatments as well.’⁴⁰²

8.5 Situation for IDPs and returnees

Afghanistan’s overwhelmed health facilities have struggled to absorb the masses of IDPs and returnees congregating in urban centres and their outskirts.⁴⁰³ A 2016 NRC and Samuel Hall study noted that 24 % of respondents lacked access to health services. Health issues were widely reported with a third of households having at least one member with a chronic illness.⁴⁰⁴

According to UNHCR, 31 % of 2017 returnees reported that they were unable to access health care with this trend being more prominent amongst female respondents (34 %). Overall, 2016 returnees reported slightly better access to health care with 30 % of female respondents stating that they could not access health care. For returnees the five provinces with the lowest rates of access to health care were Baghlan (51 % unable to access), Parwan (40 %), Kunduz (40 %), Takhar (39 %) and Kabul (34 %). For IDPs, the five provinces with the lowest rates of access to health care were Nimruz (59 %), Zabol (57 %), Ghor (52 %), Herat (52 %) and Uruzgan (51 %).⁴⁰⁵

IDPs experienced more difficulties with 42 % being unable to access health care; however urban IDPs reported ‘slightly more access’ than those in rural areas. Access to health care was ‘significantly higher’ in areas controlled by the government compared to contested areas for both IDPs and returnees. The main reasons for not being able to access health care for both groups were the cost and the low quality of the available health care.⁴⁰⁶

IDPs and returnees might sometimes be deprived of health care and other essential services as a result of lacking documentation in the form of a *tazkera*.⁴⁰⁷

8.6 Situation in the three cities

In a study on urban poverty, Samuel Hall found in 2014 that Kabul benefitted from easier access to health facilities than other cities.⁴⁰⁸ Kabul is among the provinces of Afghanistan where the proportion of women with access to health care is the highest.⁴⁰⁹

Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO) noted in a 2016 report that ‘[t]hough people have access to public and private health services in Kabul City, poor quality motivates those who can to seek treatment in India and Pakistan [...] Some corruption – in the form of requiring payments for service at public facilities and doctors receiving kickbacks from pharmacies – is reported and there are widespread complaints about having to purchase medicines in the market, rather than receive them for free at the clinic.’⁴¹⁰

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.⁴¹¹ Most of the trauma care in Kabul was provided by

⁴⁰² MedCOI Project, Afghanistan Accessibility Info, BDA-20180417-AF-6802, 25 April 2018

⁴⁰³ WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁴ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 35

⁴⁰⁵ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 18

⁴⁰⁶ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 18

⁴⁰⁷ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 22

⁴⁰⁸ Samuel Hall, Urban Poverty Report - A Study of Poverty, Food Security and Resilience in Afghan Cities, 2014, [url](#), p. 48

⁴⁰⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 184, 191, 193

⁴¹⁰ APPRO, Afghanistan Rights Monitor: Baseline Report, April 2016, [url](#), pp. 59-60

⁴¹¹ World Bank (The), Kabul’s Renovated Hospital Improves Quality of Healthcare for Thousands, 30 September 2018, [url](#)

Emergency, an Italian NGO which offered specialised trauma care that was not available in standard government facilities, treating both local patients and those from outside of Kabul.⁴¹²

In Kabul, according to a MedCOI informant, there was no private mental health care institution providing inpatient treatment but two public institutions offered this kind of treatment for free. Medication might not be available in the hospitals free of charge but the patient might be asked to pay for it. Unofficial fees could be also charged for treatment. Outpatient treatment was provided by various private specialists who charge a fee of AFN 200 to 500 for a consultation visit. The informant noted that '[i]n case of suicide attempt the patient can be treated for free in public hospitals', and '[t]here are also many private practices in Kabul City offering this kind of treatment.'⁴¹³

German-funded International Psycho-Social Organisation (IPSO) offered psycho-social assistance for those deported from Germany but also for locals who needed psycho-social help, assisting 400 to 500 people daily. Their services included self-awareness groups, Afghan-life skills training, one-to-one counselling and other types of psychosocial help.⁴¹⁴ A MedCOI informant confirmed that there was outpatient treatment, psychiatric counselling, and follow up by a psychiatrist or psychologist available in this institution free of charge.⁴¹⁵ However, the director of an organisation providing support for migrants in Kabul, interviewed by Asylos noted that IPSO had 'very limited sources and services' and might not be able to help someone who had been in a bad mental state for many years.⁴¹⁶

The 2014 Samuel Hall study on urban poverty found that Herat benefitted from easier access to health facilities than other cities such as Mazar-e Sharif or Kandahar where the average distance to a health facility was 'significantly higher'.⁴¹⁷ Herat Regional Hospital, located in the centre of Herat City, was the main hospital serving four provinces (Herat, Badghis, Ghor, Farah and Nimroz) with specialised tertiary level health services, including the treatment of hundreds of conflict wounded referrals from the area. The hospital received 1 000-1 500 patients per day on average and had the capacity of 650 beds.⁴¹⁸

However, UNOCHA reported in September 2018 that basic and secondary health care facilities in Herat City had become insufficient to cope with the large numbers of IDPs that had come to Herat City because of the drought and conflict in their home districts. The occupancy rates of the Regional Pediatric Hospital, for example, have risen to 150 %.⁴¹⁹

Jebrael health centre north-west of Herat City was providing basic health services to about 60 000 people in the densely populated area with an average of 300 visitors a day, most of whom visited the immunization and general outpatient units.⁴²⁰ According to the provincial director of health, Herat had 65 private health clinics in April 2017. However, Herat residents complained that 'many private healthcare centers have changed healthcare services into a business' and also about the low quality of medicines, lack of treatment facilities and doctors' ability to diagnose diseases properly. As a result a number of Heratis chose to travel abroad for treatment.⁴²¹

In Herat, according to a MedCOI informant, there was a public hospital providing both outpatient and inpatient treatment by a psychiatrist or psychologist, and it was available free of charge with the possibility of free medication if available. There was also a private hospital providing these treatments. The private facility charged AFN 250 to 450 for a consultation visit and AFN 1 500 to 6 000 per night

⁴¹² WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

⁴¹³ MedCOI Project, Afghanistan Accessibility Info, BDA-20180417-AF-6802, 25 April 2018

⁴¹⁴ Bjelica, J. and Ruttig, T., Voluntary and Forced Returns to Afghanistan in 2016/17: Trends, statistics and experiences, AAN, 19 May 2017, [url](#)

⁴¹⁵ MedCOI Project, Afghanistan Accessibility Info, BDA-20180417-AF-6802, 25 April 2018

⁴¹⁶ Asylos, Afghanistan: Situation of young male 'Westernised' returnees to Kabul, August 2017, [url](#), p. 64

⁴¹⁷ Samuel Hall, Urban Poverty Report - A Study of Poverty, Food Security and Resilience in Afghan Cities, 2014, [url](#), p. 48

⁴¹⁸ WHO, Construction of Triage Area in Herat Regional Hospital, Project Proposal, 29 September 2017, [url](#), p. 2

⁴¹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Drought Response, Situation Report No. 2 (as of 16 September 2018), 20 September 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁴²⁰ World Bank (The), Community Health Care Increases Access to Medical Services in Herat Province, 1 November 2016, [url](#)

⁴²¹ Tolo News, Herat Residents Criticize 'Lack of Treatment Facilities', 7 April 2017, [url](#)

for inpatient treatment. The informant mentioned that for a person with low financial means, the cost for inpatient treatment would be below AFN 2 500 per night.⁴²²

According to a video report by BBC and an article by National Public Radio there was only one 'high-security psychiatric facility' in Afghanistan, located in Herat and run by the Red Crescent. The Red Crescent Secure Psychiatric Institution was meant for patients considered to be the 'most dangerous' and who were said to be often chained and sedated. It is noted that many of the 300 patients have to stay in the facility permanently, because there were no adequate outpatient mental health services available.⁴²³

Disabilities, both mental and physical, were pervasive among the IDP population in Herat.⁴²⁴

As stated by the World Bank, the System Enhancement for Health Action in Transition (SEHAT) program aiming to expand the scope, quality and coverage of health services, set up 814 health posts in Balkh province. The health services at the 90 health facilities operating in the province were implemented by the NGO Bakhtar Development Network contracted by MoPH.⁴²⁵

According to the German development agency GIZ, the Abu Ali Sinha Balkhi Regional Hospital in Mazar-e Sharif served as the central hospital for Balkh province and was the referral hospital for the northern region, receiving all the accident and emergency cases and acting as a major general hospital for the clinics in the surrounding districts.⁴²⁶

There were approximately 10-15 hospitals in Mazar-e Sharif, most of them private, and 30-50 health clinics.⁴²⁷ An ICRC orthopedic centre, which has been serving patients for almost three decades, was located in Mazar-e Sharif. The centre, which served 19 000 people in 2017, was forced to temporarily close for two months when a patient shot dead an ICRC staff member in the end of 2017.⁴²⁸

According to the Guardian, Afghanistan's first private neuro-psychiatric clinic, Alemi hospital, was located in the outskirts of Mazar-e Sharif. In 2016 the hospital saw up to 120 patients a day, six days a week, some of them travelling long distances to reach the hospital.⁴²⁹ In Mazar-e Sharif, according to a MedCOI informant, there were two facilities providing mental health service. It was mentioned that Alemi hospital had 'relatively better staff and service', but also that the facility was able to provide treatment only with medication and 'its expertise and abilities are not sufficient in psychotherapy'. Moreover, the facility 'lacks qualified therapists and capacity for taking decision about the approaches of the treatment'.⁴³⁰ Another article about Alemi hospital also stated that the facility was capable to assist 80 to 120 patients a day but was mostly able to provide medication only.⁴³¹

Balkh was among the provinces of Afghanistan where the proportion of women with access to health care was the highest.⁴³²

⁴²² MedCOI Project, Afghanistan Accessibility Info, BDA-20180425-AF-6813, 5 June 2018

⁴²³ BBC, Inside Afghanistan's only high security mental institution, 8 February 2018, [url](#) [online video]; NPR, Afghanistan's Lone Psychiatric Hospital Reveals Mental Health Crisis Fueled By War, 14 February 2018, [url](#)

⁴²⁴ UN-Habitat et al., Inter-Agency Durable Solutions Initiative - Profile and Response Plan of Protracted IDP Settlements in Herat, October 2016, [url](#), p. 6

⁴²⁵ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Residents Benefit from Improved Quality Healthcare in Balkh Province, 23 April 2017, [url](#)

⁴²⁶ FFO and GIZ, Securing Basic Medical Care, March 2014, [url](#), p. 1

⁴²⁷ Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Fact-Finding Mission Report Afghanistan, [source: Representative of an international NGO], April 2018, [url](#), p. 37

⁴²⁸ New York Times (The), He Killed a Red Cross Worker: 'I Will Go to Hell for What I Did', 7 April 2018, [url](#)

⁴²⁹ Guardian (The), 'My Liver is Bleeding': Life inside an Afghan Psychiatric Hospital - in Pictures, 5 February 2016, [url](#)

⁴³⁰ MedCOI Project, Afghanistan Availability Info BMA-9776, 24 June 2017

⁴³¹ de Rond, M. and Rakita, M., Why there is no PTSD in Afghanistan, Medium, 28 November 2016, [url](#)

⁴³² Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 184

9. Housing, water and sanitation

9.1 Urbanisation

Afghanistan's annual urban population growth rate is among the highest in the world: estimates vary between 3.4 and 4.4 %.⁴³³ Long-term estimates predict nearly 40 % urban population in 2050 and 50 % in 2060. Kabul has been the centre of the growth, and the rest of the urban population is concentrated mostly in four other city regions: Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, Kandahar and Jalalabad.⁴³⁴

Despite the growth of the urban population, Afghanistan still remains a predominately rural society with 20.7 million people living in rural areas, 6.9 million in urban areas and 1.5 million nomadic Kuchis, meaning an estimated 23.8 % of the population live in the cities.⁴³⁵ The large majority (72 % based on ALCS figures for 2016-17) of Afghanistan's urban population lives in slums or inadequate housing, with an average urban household size estimated at 7.3 persons.⁴³⁶

The urban population in Afghanistan grows both due to natural growth and a significant number of IDPs and returnees. The World Bank attributes much of the urban population growth to natural growth rather than rural-urban migration⁴³⁷ while other publications point at internal migration, displacement and returns from neighbouring countries as the main contributors to urbanisation.⁴³⁸ The World Bank also found that between 1999 and 2010, Afghanistan experienced urban areas growing faster than the urban population, 'suggesting an increasing prevalence of lower-density sprawl'.⁴³⁹

Housing conditions of the Afghan population are described as 'overall poor' with almost 44 % living in overcrowded housing with the average number of people per room at 3.2.⁴⁴⁰ The slum population living in the cities was estimated at five million people or 72.4 % of the total urban population.⁴⁴¹ Most housing in Afghanistan consists of irregular, detached or semi-detached houses or regular detached houses. A large proportion consists of hillside dwellings. There are blocks of flats or apartments but almost only in Kabul City.⁴⁴² 86 % of urban houses in Afghanistan can be classified as slums, according to the UN-Habitat definition. The State of Afghan Cities report found that '[a]ccess to adequate housing is a major challenge for the majority of urban Afghans [...] poverty and inequality are the harsh reality for roughly one-third of all urban households. This combined with a lack of affordable housing options and an oversupply at the top end of the formal housing market results in a difficult housing situation for low- and even many middle-income Afghans'.⁴⁴³

A 2014 study on Afghanistan's urban poor found that '[i]nformal settlements are considered to be the main recipients of the urban poor, who suffer in particular from a lack of access to basic services as well as from a lack of security of tenure'.⁴⁴⁴

⁴³³ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Country Profile, n.d., [url](#); Kammeier, H. D. and Issa, Z., Urban Governance in Afghanistan: Assessing the New Urban Development Programme and Its Implementation, AREU, June 2017 [url](#), pp. 4-5

⁴³⁴ Kammeier, H. D. and Issa, Z., Urban Governance in Afghanistan: Assessing the New Urban Development Programme and Its Implementation, AREU, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 15-16

⁴³⁵ Afghanistan CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 19

⁴³⁶ Afghanistan CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 26

⁴³⁷ World Bank (The), Leveraging Urbanization in Afghanistan, 2016, [url](#)

⁴³⁸ Samuel Hall, Urban Poverty Report - A Study of Poverty, Food Security and Resilience in Afghan Cities, 2014, [url](#), p. 15

⁴³⁹ World Bank (The), Leveraging Urbanization in Afghanistan, 2016, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁰ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 207

⁴⁴¹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 214

⁴⁴² Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 210-214; Afghanistan, State of Afghan Cities 2015, Volume One, 2015, [url](#), p. 86

⁴⁴³ Afghanistan, State of Afghan Cities 2015, Volume One, 2015, [url](#), p. 86

⁴⁴⁴ Samuel Hall, Urban Poverty Report - A Study of Poverty, Food Security and Resilience in Afghan Cities, 2014, [url](#), p. 47

9.2 Land and property laws

According to UNAMA ‘the Afghanistan Constitution, passed in 2004, authorizes personal land ownership and protects land from state seizure unless the seizure is to secure a public interest and the owner is provided with prior and just compensation.’⁴⁴⁵ The problem of land tenure in Afghanistan is, nevertheless, very complicated: the land and properties are grabbed by military commanders, ethnic leaders, wealthy people with illegal revenues, governmental officials and ANP officers.⁴⁴⁶ There are plenty of conflicts related to inheritance. Many land owners have no official documents. Others claim the right to property on the basis of forged documents. Many people hold their land on a customary basis or as a result of an oral agreement. Most returnees cannot claim their property rights because it is occupied by others.⁴⁴⁷

According to UNAMA, more than 70 % of all serious crimes in Afghanistan have roots in land ownership disputes. Most cases, both in formal and informal justice systems, are also related to property disputes.⁴⁴⁸ Formal mechanisms include courts and settlement commissions established by local authorities. Most cases, however, are solved by the informal system of local *shuras* or *jirgas*. Enforcement of their decisions is usually effective but informal in its nature and cannot be registered with a formal system. Consequently, most land owners are landless according to the law.⁴⁴⁹ Governmental institutions lack the capacity to provide control and ensure land management.⁴⁵⁰

The restoration of land rights and property ownership remains a major challenge for the reintegration of returning refugees.⁴⁵¹ An estimated 70 % of urban dwellings are located in informal settlements.⁴⁵² The term informal settlement covers a wide range of situations and according to analyst Foschini ‘potentially encompasses local language terms such as *ghayr-e qanuni* (illegal), *ghayr-e plani* (outside the plan), *be naqsha* (without permission), and *zorabad* (forceful usurpation)’.⁴⁵³

A new Presidential Decree⁴⁵⁴ on land allocation was enacted in 2018 in order to resolve many of these problems.⁴⁵⁵ *Arazi*, Afghanistan’s independent land authority, is tasked to allocate suitable state land to the displaced population by creating a land bank, through which suitable land is identified.⁴⁵⁶ A process is underway to develop guidelines, criteria and procedures relating to the Presidential Regulation, involving *Arazi*, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, the Office of the Chief Executive, UNHCR, IOM and UN-Habitat.⁴⁵⁷ The Afghan Ministry for Urban Development differentiates between informal settlements occupied by landless squatters on public land that is habitable and those built on land owned privately.⁴⁵⁸

After the adoption of the new presidential decree, the Afghan government has started to issue land occupancy certificates for all residents of informal urban areas that are on state-owned land in order to protect the dwellers from the threat of eviction. The aim of the programme is to produce and issue one million occupancy certificates by 2020. A City for All programme led by the government and

⁴⁴⁵ UNAMA, The Stolen Lands of Afghanistan and its People, August 2014, [url](#), p. 11

⁴⁴⁶ UNAMA, The Stolen Lands of Afghanistan and its People, August 2014, [url](#), p. 10

⁴⁴⁷ Bjelica, J., Afghanistan’s Returning Refugees: Why Are So Many Still Landless?, AAN, 29 March 2016, [url](#); Gaston, E. and Dang, L., Addressing Land Conflict in Afghanistan, June 2015, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁴⁸ UNAMA, The Stolen Lands of Afghanistan and its People, August 2014, [url](#), p. 10

⁴⁴⁹ UNAMA, The Stolen Lands of Afghanistan and its People, August 2014, [url](#), p. 36

⁴⁵⁰ UNAMA, The Stolen Lands of Afghanistan and its People, August 2014, [url](#), p. 10

⁴⁵¹ Bjelica, J., Afghanistan’s Returning Refugees: Why Are So Many Still Landless?, AAN, 29 March 2016, [url](#)

⁴⁵² Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 214

⁴⁵³ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 19

⁴⁵⁴ Presidential Decree 305 of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the Identification and Allocation of Suitable Land for the Re-integration and Construction of Affordable Housing for Returnees, Internally Displaced Persons and Families of Martyrs of the Country’s Security and Defence Forces. This replaced Presidential Decree 104 (2005).

⁴⁵⁵ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 22

⁴⁵⁶ UN-Habitat, Improving Access to State Land for Returnees and IDPs in Afghanistan, March 2018, [url](#), p. 18

⁴⁵⁷ UNHCR Afghanistan, e-mail, 9 November 2018. UNHCR made this addition during review of the report.

⁴⁵⁸ Guardian (The), Pressure Builds in ‘Powderkeg’ Kabul as Refugees Return Home, 15 March 2018, [url](#)

supported by UN-Habitat surveyed properties in Afghan provincial cities and found only 17 % are in possession of a formal title deed.⁴⁵⁹

9.3 Water and sanitation

According to ALCS data from 2007-08 until 2016-17, access to clean water and adequate sanitation and hygiene has improved significantly in terms of access to appropriate services of sanitation and especially drinking water.⁴⁶⁰ However, sanitation still continues to be poor compared to other countries in the region, and access to drinking water still remains a problem for many Afghans.⁴⁶¹ Access to basic services, such as water supply and sanitation, were generally better in the cities compared to the countryside.⁴⁶² ALCS 2016-17 found that only 36 % of the Afghan population were using safely managed drinking water services and rural people had much less facilities (25.1 %) compared to the urban population (75.3 %).⁴⁶³ According to UNICEF, only 12 % of Afghanistan's population had access to sanitary toilets.⁴⁶⁴

9.4 Situation for IDPs and returnees

As stated by ALCS 2016-17, a greater share of migrants lived in urban areas compared to those who never moved (46.2 % against 19.2 %).⁴⁶⁵ According to UNHCR, 'IDPs and returnees have increasingly chosen to move to urban or semi-urban areas where they often live with host community families, in rented or shared accommodation, or in collective shelters.'⁴⁶⁶

A UNHCR survey conducted in 2017-18 found that the majority of returnee and IDP populations were renting their homes: 58 % of 2016-17 returnees and 69 % of IDPs. Around 22 % of 2016-17 returnees and 20 % of IDPs reported living in other arrangements, such as staying with extended family, squatting, or living in an informal settlement. Returnees and IDPs owned their homes less often than the general population, which is explained by the UNHCR to be related to the lengthy period of their displacement, the high percentage of returnees born outside Afghanistan, and the fact that 38 % of former refugees do not settle in their province of origin upon return. Returnees were more likely to own their homes compared to IDPs: around 20 % of 2016-17 returnees report owning their homes compared to 11 % of IDPs. Returnees and IDPs in rural Afghanistan were more likely to own their homes compared to their urban counterparts.⁴⁶⁷

According to IOM Afghanistan's DTM Baseline Mobility Assessment conducted in December 2017 in 15 provinces of highest return and displacement, more than 100 000 IDPs and returnees lived in improvised shelters or tents or without any shelter at all. More than half of those were in Nangarhar province.⁴⁶⁸

A 2016 NRC and Samuel Hall study found that IDPs settling in urban and peri-urban areas were more likely to live in temporary shelters, tents or camp-like settings. 43 % of urban IDPs lived in cramped conditions and overcrowded spaces compared to 35 % of rural IDPs. While housing conditions could vary by region, 63 % of the surveyed IDPs rated theirs as poor or very poor.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁵⁹ UN-Habitat, Afghanistan Launches an Innovative Land Management Initiative, 26 February 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁰ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 207

⁴⁶¹ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 207; Asia Foundation, Survey of the Afghan People 2017, November 2017, [url](#), p. 29

⁴⁶² Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 43-44

⁴⁶³ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 216

⁴⁶⁴ UNICEF, Afghanistan Annual Report 2017, February 2018, [url](#), p. 47

⁴⁶⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 43-44

⁴⁶⁶ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 22

⁴⁶⁷ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁴⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan, Issue 73 (1-28 February 2018), 25 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁶⁹ NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next?, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 25

According to a Samuel Hall, NRC and IDMC research, rising rents force households to move again and seek out cheaper housing.⁴⁷⁰

According to UNHCR data, 65 % of 2016-2017 returnees and 56 % of IDPs reported that they had the same access to water as the host community. Urban returnees and IDPs were more likely to have equal access to water compared to rural ones.⁴⁷¹

Sanitation conditions were also difficult, although 68 % of respondents could use a traditional covered latrine, 9 % had no access to toilet facilities at all. The related health consequences could be significant for women, girls, people with disabilities and the elderly in particular. For those who had to share facilities exposure to gender-based violence was also a concern.⁴⁷²

9.5 Situation in the three cities

Kabul is ranked as the fifth fastest growing city in the world with an average annual growth rate of 4.74 %.⁴⁷³ According to an International Growth Centre (IGC) research, an estimated 70 % of Kabul's population lived in informal settlements defined as 'areas of housing either constructed on land to which the occupants have no legal claim, and/or areas of housing units that do not comply with planning and building regulations'.⁴⁷⁴ Most of the new construction in the city falls under this category⁴⁷⁵ and the density of inhabitants in informal areas can be more than double that of formal areas.⁴⁷⁶ According to IGC, 'informal settlements in Kabul offer crucial low-cost housing to the majority of residents in the city'.⁴⁷⁷ Fabrizio Foschini noted that while informal settlements have prevented a major homelessness crisis, the unmanaged growth worsened existing problems such as lack of sewerage system and inefficient disposal of waste. Poorly constructed houses in locations with limited accessibility 'have compounded the hardship of the returnees, economic migrants, and internally displaced who populate these areas'.⁴⁷⁸

A City for All programme led by the government and supported by UN-Habitat surveyed properties in Kabul and found that only 14 % were in possession of a formal title deed, which was less than in other provincial cities (17 %).⁴⁷⁹

The price of formal housing in Kabul was around USD 35 000 – 500 000 when average monthly household income in Kabul and the Central region was estimated at USD 208 in 2017.⁴⁸⁰ Renting is on the increase in the urban areas of Afghanistan, but only in Kabul it is considered a common practice.⁴⁸¹ Of Kabul's households, about 64.9 % own their dwelling and 27.6 % rent the units where they live.⁴⁸² According to analyst Foschini, there is a tendency for new settlers to settle according to their place of origin, which allows them to benefit from *qawmi* support from their social networks to occupy and enclose land.⁴⁸³ Many urban households accommodate extended family members from rural areas who have come to the city looking for work, and this is particularly frequent in Kabul. Such households also tend to be multigenerational and to host elderly relations.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁰ NRC, IDMC & Samuel Hall, *Escaping War: Where to Next?*, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 26

⁴⁷¹ UNHCR, *Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report*, May 2018, [url](#), p. 18

⁴⁷² NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, *Escaping War: Where to Next?*, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 26

⁴⁷³ City Mayors Statistics, *The World's Fastest Growing Cities and Urban Areas from 2006 to 2020*, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁴ Collier, P. et al., *Policy Options for Kabul's Informal Settlements*, IGC, January 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁷⁵ Guardian, *Pressure Builds in 'Powderkeg' Kabul as Refugees Return Home*, 15 March 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁶ Foschini, F., *Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid*, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 20

⁴⁷⁷ Collier, P. et al., *Policy Options for Kabul's Informal Settlements*, IGC, January 2018, [url](#), p. 17

⁴⁷⁸ Foschini, F., *Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid*, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 20

⁴⁷⁹ UN-HABITAT, *Afghanistan Launches an Innovative Land Management Initiative*, 26 February 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁰ Collier, P. et al., *Policy Options for Kabul's Informal Settlements*, IGC, January 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁸¹ Afghanistan, CSO, *Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17*, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 207

⁴⁸² Afghanistan, CSO, *Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17*, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 209

⁴⁸³ Foschini, F., *Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid*, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 20

⁴⁸⁴ Foschini, F., *Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid*, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 12

Providing basic services, such as water, sanitation and electricity, has been difficult to the growing informal settlements that have emerged on the centrally located hills of Kabul.⁴⁸⁵ According to Asia Foundation's 2017 Survey of the Afghan People, significant proportions of Afghans living in Kabul and other central areas (23.7 %) reported issues with drinking water as one of the biggest local problems.⁴⁸⁶

Kabul City remains one of the world's few national capitals without a central sewerage system. As a result, it has seen related human pollution and health problems compounded by the large increase in its population and by other types of pollution, mainly vehicle traffic.⁴⁸⁷ Instead of a sewage system, individual septic tanks are used that are often situated close to water wells. The leakage of sewage into groundwater is considered a main cause of water contamination in the city.⁴⁸⁸

Kabul is regarded as one of the world's most water-stressed cities.⁴⁸⁹ The groundwater level has declined sharply in recent years due to increased demand for water and excess pumping.⁴⁹⁰ The majority of the shared water points and wells in the capital are contaminated by domestic and industrial wastewater released into the Kabul River, posing grave health concerns.⁴⁹¹ ALCS 2016-17 found that almost half of the population in Kabul had basic sanitation services, meaning a facility that is not shared and where excreta are either safely disposed or removed.⁴⁹²

The consumption of water in Kabul has increased unsustainably, causing a striking imbalance between availability and demand of water.⁴⁹³ The quality of ground water has decreased, making access to clean water increasingly difficult.⁴⁹⁴ The yearly demand for water is estimated to be more than 32 million cubic metres a year, while the groundwater recharge in the Kabul river basin, upon which the city is wholly reliant for its water supply, has dwindled to less than 28 million cubic metres.⁴⁹⁵ The Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Corporation (AUWSSC) of Afghanistan estimates that just 32 % of Kabul's population has access to running water, and only 10 % of residents receive potable water.⁴⁹⁶ The city's inadequate water system forces those people who can afford it to drill their own wells.⁴⁹⁷ Many poor residents of Kabul living in the suburbs and on the rocky hills of the city depend on public taps often far from their homes. It is usually the job of young children, often girls, to fetch the water.⁴⁹⁸ According to AUWSSC, there were around 72 private companies illegally supplying water to thousands of families across Kabul City in 2018.⁴⁹⁹

According to Jolyon Leslie a number of residential enclaves (*shahrak*) have appeared around Herat in recent years. Most buildings in Herat have been built after 2001. Property prices increased till 2011, accelerating the property boom, which was also fuelled by money from the drugs trade. After 2014, prices fell about 20-30 %. The urban density is very high and the settlements pattern quite regular although most buildings do not conform to a master plan. There were cases of land-grabbing in Herat city by officials and other powerful individuals that operated with impunity.⁵⁰⁰

61.3 % of respondents to a 2016 survey on Herat reported owning their own house. 23.4 % of the households are reportedly renting their housing unit. 92.1 % of households in Herat had improved

⁴⁸⁵ Collier, P. et al., Policy Options for Kabul's Informal Settlements, IGC, January 2018, [url](#), p. 12

⁴⁸⁶ Asia Foundation, Survey of the Afghan People 2017, November 2017, [url](#), p. 29

⁴⁸⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#) p. 18

⁴⁸⁸ Kazemi, S.R., The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁹ Amin, M. and Adeh, E.H., Water Crisis in Kabul Could Be Severe if Not Addressed, SAIS Review, 22 August 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁰ Asia Foundation, As Kabul Grows, Clean Water a Step Toward State Legitimacy in Afghanistan, 28 March 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹¹ Asia Foundation, As Kabul Grows, Clean Water a Step Toward State Legitimacy in Afghanistan, 28 March 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹² Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 226

⁴⁹³ Kazemi, S.R., The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁴ Kazemi, S.R., The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, [url](#)

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⁴⁹⁷ Reuters, Afghan Capital's Thirsty Residents Dig Deep to Combat Drought, Overuse, 28 February 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁸ Kazemi, S.R., The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁹ Kazemi, S.R., The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁰ Leslie, J., Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, USIP, 2015, [url](#), pp. 8-10

sanitation facilities and 42.8 % were staying in houses with roofs made of cement.⁵⁰¹ In Herat City, an estimated 5 % of the population is living in soft structures or tents.⁵⁰²

Of the urban population in Herat, 81.2 % has access to improved water sources, 90.7 % used electricity as a source for lighting and 92.1 % has an improved sanitation facility.⁵⁰³ APPRO found in April 2016 that 80 % of the residents in Herat City have access to grid power, 70 % to water, and 30 % to sewage services.⁵⁰⁴ In 2016, the Salma Hydro Power Project was opened. The new dam is believed to improve access to electricity and water in Herat and its surroundings.⁵⁰⁵

Herat City lacks a central sewage system. The leakage of sewage into groundwater is considered a main cause of water contamination in the city: groundwater has gone down some 7–12 metres and been polluted.⁵⁰⁶ The majority of residents in Herat City drew their drinking water from pipes or wells.⁵⁰⁷

With regards to seven protracted IDP settlements within Herat municipal boundaries UNHCR found that the majority of dwellings were single room mud brick that did not offer sufficient protection from the elements. A large number of families lived in makeshift dwelling and tents which offered even less protection from weather events. The status of ownership for most of the land was unclear: the majority was contested by local Herati residents and families in Minaret, Naw Abad, Police Station and Shaidayee received multiple eviction threats.⁵⁰⁸ Water and sanitation were found to be a serious issue in all the settlements surveyed by UNHCR. A large number of families had no access to latrines and many relied on communal water points with issues of congestion and water quality.⁵⁰⁹

The north-western provinces of Afghanistan were particularly affected by the drought in 2018.⁵¹⁰ Herat has been the destination for about 60 000 people who have been displaced from their homes due to drought.⁵¹¹ These people reside in overcrowded camps in and around Herat City. The 7 400 displaced families, according to NRC assessment, resided in 174 sites on the outskirts of Herat city on the road to Badghis. They suffered from malnutrition and none of the children in the displacement sites attended school.⁵¹² UNOCHA reported sanitation gaps in September 2018 as a result of the arrival of large numbers of drought and conflict-affected IDPs.⁵¹³

According to a 2015 survey, the majority inhabitants in Mazar-e Sharif own their houses (66.5 %) while 24.5 % rent their accommodation. More than half of the houses in the city are constructed from mud or soil with wood logs, the rest from lime with bricks and metal, cement or other materials. Most have earth (70 %) or cement (26 %) floor. With 99.7 %, Shortepa had the highest proportion of households owning their housing units at the district level, while Mazar-e Sharif had only 66.5 %.⁵¹⁴ Most people have access to improved sources of drinking water (76 %), usually piped or from the wells. 92 % of households have improved sanitation facility.⁵¹⁵

⁵⁰¹ Afghanistan, CSO, Final Report of Herat Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey, 7 March 2017, [url](#), pp. 83, 86-87

⁵⁰² APPRO, Afghanistan Rights Monitor: Baseline Report, April 2016, [url](#), pp. 50-51

⁵⁰³ Afghanistan, CSO, Final Report of Herat Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey, 7 March 2017, [url](#), pp. 74, 76, 88

⁵⁰⁴ APPRO, Afghanistan Rights Monitor: Baseline Report, April 2016, [url](#), p. 50

⁵⁰⁵ Afghanistan Times, Modi, Ghani inaugurate long-awaited Salma Dam project, 4 June 2016, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁶ Kazemi, S.R., The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, [url](#)

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⁵⁰⁸ UNHCR, Profile and Response Plan of Protracted IDP Settlements in Herat, October 2016, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁰⁹ UNHCR, Profile and Response Plan of Protracted IDP Settlements in Herat, October 2016, [url](#), p. 6

⁵¹⁰ Bjelica, J., Less Rain and Snowfall in Afghanistan: High Level Of Food Assistance Needed Until Early 2019, AAN, 30 July 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹¹ NRC, Millions of Afghans Face Risks of Drought Related Displacement, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹² Bjelica, J., Less Rain and Snowfall in Afghanistan: High Level Of Food Assistance Needed Until Early 2019, AAN, 30 July 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Drought Response, Situation Report No. 2 (as of 16 September 2018), 20 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁵¹⁴ Afghanistan, CSO, Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey Balkh, 5 January 2015, [url](#), pp. 79-83

⁵¹⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey Balkh, 5 January 2015, [url](#), pp. 70, 84

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Annex II: Terms of Reference

- Socio-economic indicators
 - Business environment
 - Employment
 - Poverty
 - Food security
 - Housing
 - Education
 - Medical care
- Mobility and internal travel
 - Legal requirements to travel within Afghanistan
 - Situation of and access to airports in the cities of Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e Sharif
 - Operational international and domestic flights
- Situation of vulnerable groups, in relation to the above topics
 - Internally Displaced Persons
 - Returnees
 - Women
 - Children

