



Home Office

# **Country Information and Guidance**

## **Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation**

**Version 3.0**

**July 2016**

# Preface

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

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

## Country Information

The COI within this document has been compiled from a wide range of external information sources (usually) published in English. Consideration has been given to the relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity, currency, transparency and traceability of the information and wherever possible attempts have been made to corroborate the information used across independent sources, to ensure accuracy. All sources cited have been referenced in footnotes. It has been researched and presented with reference to the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the [European Asylum Support Office’s research guidelines, Country of Origin Information report methodology](#), dated July 2012.

## Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve the guidance and information we provide. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this document, please email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

## Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

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

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Information about the IAGCI’s work and a list of the COI documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector’s website at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>

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# Guidance

Updated 21 July 2016

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Basis of Claim

- 1.1.1 That the general humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is so severe as to make removal a breach of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR); and/or:
- 1.1.2 That the security situation in Afghanistan presents a real risk which threatens life or person such that removal would be in breach of Article 15(c) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 ('the Qualification Directive').

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## 2. Consideration of Issues

### 2.1 Credibility

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

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### 2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 Anti-government elements (AGEs) and pro-Government armed groups have been responsible for serious human rights abuses (see [Actors in the conflict](#) and [Nature and levels of violence](#)).
- 2.2.2 If it is accepted that the person has been involved with these groups, then decision makers must consider whether one of the exclusion clauses (from asylum and/or humanitarian protection) is applicable.
- 2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses, discretionary leave and restricted leave, see the [Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection](#), the [Asylum Instruction on Discretionary Leave](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Restricted Leave](#).

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## 2.3 Assessment of risk

### i. General points

- 2.3.1 A state of civil instability and/or where law and order has broken down does not in itself give rise to a well-founded fear of persecution for a Refugee Convention reason.
- 2.3.2 However, even where a person comes from a place where there is a state of civil instability and/or where law and order has broken down, they may still have a well-founded fear of persecution for a Refugee Convention reason and be entitled to asylum. This might include, but is not limited to, being targeted because they are perceived to support the government and/or international forces. See the country information and guidance on [Afghanistan: persons supporting or perceived to support the government and/or international forces](#); [Afghanistan: women fearing gender based harm/violence](#); [Afghanistan: sexual orientation and gender identity](#).
- 2.3.3 It is only if the person does not qualify under the Refugee Convention that decision makers need to make an assessment of the need for protection firstly under Article 3 of the ECHR and, if that is unsuccessful, under Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive.

### ii. Humanitarian situation

- 2.3.4 The armed conflict in Afghanistan has led to a significant number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), estimated to number 948,000 as of June 2015. The worst affected areas overall are the west, central and southern regions. Increasing numbers of IDPs live in informal settlements in Afghanistan's major urban centres. Displaced persons, compared to their Afghan counterparts, were more likely to be illiterate; to have lower rates of school enrolment; to have lower household incomes, whilst living in larger households; to be unemployed; and to be food insecure (see [Internally displaced persons \(IDPs\)](#)).
- 2.3.5 Displaced women and girls were considered to be at disproportionate risk of harm, living with fewer freedoms and opportunities than when living in their own homes and villages. Displaced females face significant enhanced gendered constraints to accessing education, health and employment opportunities. The overcrowded living situation increases the risks of violence for women. Many are subjected to domestic violence and forced marriages. Special displacement-related vulnerabilities refer not only to inadequate livelihood opportunities and standard of living but also to the situation of children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and victims of violence, including domestic violence (see [Impact on women and children](#) and, for general information on the position of women in Afghanistan, the country information and guidance on [Afghanistan: women fearing gender-based harm/violence](#)).
- 2.3.6 The Upper Tribunal in the country guidance case [AK \(Article 15\(c\)\) Afghanistan CG \[2012\] UKUT 00163\(IAC\)](#) (18 May 2012) held that there was little evidence of significant numbers of the urban poor and IDP population in Kabul suffering destitution or inability to survive at subsistence levels (paragraph 225). It further noted that, whilst the importance of return and

reintegration packages for UK returnees to Kabul should not be exaggerated, they did, nevertheless, place returnees in a better position than that of other IDPs (paragraph 224).

- 2.3.7 Since the country guidance case of [AK](#) was promulgated in 2012, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has not deteriorated to the extent that it represents, in general, a real risk of harm contrary to Article 3 of the ECHR (see [Humanitarian situation](#)).
- 2.3.8 However, decision makers must consider on the facts of the case whether a returnee, by reason of his or her individual vulnerability, may face a real risk of harm contrary to Article 3 of the ECHR as a result of the humanitarian situation. Factors to be taken into account include age, gender, medical conditions, ill-health, disability, the effect on children, other family circumstances, housing opportunities, the ability to sustain themselves and available support structures.

iii. [Security situation](#)

- 2.3.9 Unlike Article 3 ECHR, Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive applies only to civilians, who must be genuine non-combatants and not those who are party to the conflict. This could include former combatants who have genuinely and permanently renounced armed activity.
- 2.3.10 In the country guidance case of [AK](#), which considered evidence up to early 2012, the Upper Tribunal (UT) held that, despite a rise in the number of civilian deaths and casualties and an expansion of the geographical scope of the armed conflict in Afghanistan, the level of indiscriminate violence in the country taken as a whole was not at such a high level as to mean that, within the meaning of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive, a civilian faces a real risk to his life or person solely by being present in the country (paragraph 249. B(ii))
- 2.3.11 The Upper Tribunal in [AK](#) held that those parts of Kabul city where returnees are most likely to live are ‘the poorest areas of the city or its environs’ and have been less affected by indiscriminate violence, stating that the ‘great majority [of attacks] have concentrated on areas where the government or international organisations have their offices or where their employees frequent’ (paragraph 226). (For more recent information on the security situation in Kabul, see [Kabul](#)).
- 2.3.12 The Tribunal further held that, even in the provinces worst affected by violence, (which may now be taken to include Ghazni but not to include Kabul), the level of indiscriminate violence did not reach the Article 15(c) threshold (paragraph 249Bii and iii). In regard to Kabul city, the UT found that, ‘... given the fact that this has a reported population of around 5 million and that Kabul province does not feature in any list of the most violent provinces, the argument for any engagement of the Article 15(c) threshold, if based primarily on civilian deaths, is even weaker [than Kandahar and Helmand, the provinces with the highest number of civilian deaths, and Ghazni, a province with a significant rise in violent incidents]’ (paragraph 219) (see also [Geographical distribution of violence](#)).

- 2.3.13 Since the promulgation of [AK](#) in May 2012 the number of civilian deaths and injuries in Afghanistan has increased according to UNAMA figures (which may under-report numbers). In 2015 UNAMA documented 11,002 civilian casualties (3,545 deaths and 7,457 injured); an increase of 4 per cent compared to 2014, and 21 per cent compared to 2013 (see [Casualties of the conflict](#)).
- 2.3.14 The worst affected areas for security related incidents were southern, eastern and south-eastern regions, which experienced 70 per cent of all incidents, with Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Kunar and Nangarhar being the most volatile provinces. In 2015, the Taliban captured 24 district centres compared to three in 2014. Although most district centres were quickly retaken by pro-government forces, several remained under Taliban control for weeks, including in Faryab, Helmand, Kunduz, Sari Pul and Takhar provinces. The Afghan government retains control of Kabul, major transit routes, provincial capitals, and nearly all district centres. Although there have been a number of security incidents in Kabul since mid-2015 and into 2016, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) are generally capable and effective at protecting the major population centres, or not allowing the Taliban to maintain their hold for a prolonged period of time (see [Geographical distribution of violence](#) and [Kabul](#)).
- 2.3.15 Nevertheless, the proportion of civilians injured or killed by security-related incidents remains low. 0.03% of the population were injured or killed (when taking the 2015 UNAMA numbers against a population estimate of around 32 million).
- 2.3.16 Under UNHCR's assisted returns programme, 3,766 Afghan refugees, mostly from Pakistan and Iran, returned to Afghanistan during the first four months of 2016. This was considerably lower than the 21,502 returnees during the same period in 2015, and slightly less than during the same period in 2014. The driving factor for 55 per cent of returnees from Pakistan interviewed by UNHCR was cited as the improvement in the security situation. Returns occurred to 30 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces; over 50 per cent returned to central and eastern regions. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) recorded 83,128 spontaneous returns from Pakistan between January and 30 November 2015. UNHCR cited the lower return trend in 2016 as being largely due to 'high levels of unemployment and lack of livelihood opportunities, limited access to land, shelter and basic services, particularly in areas of high return, and increased insecurity' (see [Returns and reintegration](#)).
- 2.3.17 In the judicial review of [HN & Ors, R \(on the application of\) v Secretary of State for the Home Department \(JR - scope - evidence \(IJR\) \[2015\] UKUT 437 \(IAC\) \(27 July 2015\)](#) the Upper Tribunal held that "Within the limitations of a judicial review challenge and the hearing which has taken place we find no warrant for departing from the current country guidance promulgated in [AK](#). In particular, we find that the evidence falls short of satisfying the stringent Article 15(c) test" (paragraph 98). That finding was upheld by the Court of Appeal on 3 March 2016: [HN & SA \(Afghanistan\) \(Lead Cases Associated Non-Lead Cases\), R \(on the application of\) v The Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2016\] EWCA Civ 123](#).

- 2.3.18 Even though there is no general Article 15(c) risk, decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors relevant to the person's individual circumstances which might nevertheless place them at risk.
- 2.3.19 For guidance on humanitarian protection and Article 15(c), including consideration of enhanced risk factors, see the [Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection](#).
- 2.3.20 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.4 Internal relocation

### i. Kabul

- 2.4.1 In the country guidance case of [AK](#), when assessing whether Kabul city was a viable internal relocation alternative, the Upper Tribunal held that 'it is necessary to take into account (both in assessing "safety" and "reasonableness") not only the level of violence in that city but also the difficulties experienced by that city's poor and also the many Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living there'. It noted, however, that 'these considerations will not in general make return to Kabul unsafe or unreasonable' (Paragraph 249, B, (iv)).
- 2.4.2 The Upper Tribunal held that 'Nevertheless, this position is qualified (both in relation to Kabul and other potential places of internal relocation) for certain categories of women. The purport of the current Home Office OGN [February 2012 OGN, 3.10.8] on Afghanistan is that whilst women with a male support network may be able to relocate internally, "...it would be unreasonable to expect lone women and female heads of household to relocate internally" and the Tribunal sees no basis for taking a different view' (Paragraph 249, B, (v)). That position remains unchanged (see also paragraph 2.3.16 above, and [Impact on women and children](#)).

### ii. Outside Kabul

- 2.4.3 In [AK](#), the Upper Tribunal observed that 'In relation to Ghazni... we note that it is accepted that there are significant numbers of districts in that province under Taliban control (although not the city itself) and we do not exclude that, for most civilians in such districts that is a factor that may make it unreasonable for them to relocate there, although that is not to say that a person with a history of family support for the Taliban, would have difficulties; much will depend on the particular circumstances of the case. Outside Taliban controlled districts, however, we do not find that internal relocation would in general be unreasonable' (paragraph 244).
- 2.4.4 Although not making a finding, the Upper Tribunal made the following observation concerning internal travel: '... we are bound to say that nothing in the evidence before us indicates that the main routes of travel from Kabul to other major cities and towns experience violence at an intensity sufficient to engage Article 15(c) for the ordinary civilian. The position may be different when it comes to travel from the main cities and towns to villages: we note in this regard that Dr Giustozzi...said that "[m]ost indiscriminate violence occurs in the shape of pressure mines, which are indiscriminate by nature.



The risk is mainly on the roads connecting the provincial and district cities to the villages.” Routes of this kind may be under the control of the Taliban and/or other insurgents and hence will require a case-by-case approach. It is true that the FCO, among others, has issued travel guidance warning against travel to certain parts of Afghanistan (including Ghazni) but they have not done so seeking to apply legal criteria’ (paragraph 245) (see also [Geographical distribution of violence](#)).

- 2.4.5 For further guidance on internal relocation, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.5 Certification

- 2.5.1 Where a claim falls to be refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

- 2.5.2 For further information and guidance on certification, see the appeals instruction on [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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## 3. Policy summary

- 3.1.1 Country guidance caselaw has established that the level of indiscriminate violence in Afghanistan taken as a whole is not at such a high level as to mean that, within the meaning of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive, a civilian faces a real risk to his life or person solely by being present in the country.
- 3.1.2 Despite an increase in civilian casualties since the country guidance caselaw was handed down in 2012, the violence is not at such a level that there is a general Article 15(c) risk. A person’s individual circumstances might nevertheless place them at risk - if there are personal factors that affect their individual risk then the lower the level of indiscriminate violence required before the person is entitled to HP. Each case must be considered on its facts.
- 3.1.3 Similarly, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has not deteriorated to the extent that it represents, in general, a real risk of harm contrary to Article 3 of the ECHR, although individual factors must be taken into account.
- 3.1.4 Whilst return or relocation to Kabul is not considered, in general, to be unsafe or unreasonable, decision makers must take account of the city’s current humanitarian and security situation. It is unreasonable to expect lone women and female heads of household to relocate internally in the city.
- 3.1.5 The Afghan government remains in control of all major population centres. Internal relocation outside of Taliban-controlled areas is not considered, in general, to be unsafe or unreasonable, although individual factors must be taken into account.

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# Country Information

Updated 14 June 2016

## 4. Sources

4.1.1 For recent news and events in Afghanistan see:

[British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group \(BAAG\)](#)

[IRIN](#)

[Pajhwok Afghan News](#)

[TOLONews](#)

[United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan \(UNAMA\)](#)

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## 5. Actors in the conflict

5.1.1 The Security Council Report (SCR), an independent and impartial organisation, whose mission is to advance the transparency and effectiveness of the UN Security Council, reported in its June 2016 Monthly Forecast for Afghanistan that:

‘On 21 May [2016], a US drone strike in Baluchistan province, Pakistan, killed Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, the leader of the Taliban. US President Barack Obama said in a statement that “Mansour rejected efforts by the Afghan government to seriously engage in peace talks” and that the Taliban should enter the reconciliation talks. Pakistan, which apparently was informed of the attack only after the fact, issued a statement on 22 May denouncing the attack as a violation of the country’s sovereignty.’<sup>1</sup> Speaking to Al Jazeera on 26 May, a spokesman for the Taliban confirmed Mansour’s death and announced it’s new leader as Haibatullah Akhunzada.<sup>2</sup>

5.1.2 As regards Hezb-i-Islami, the SCR noted:

‘While reconciliation efforts with the Taliban have stalled, the government reached an agreement on 18 May with insurgent leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, head of the Hezb-i-Islami militant group. The group was at the height of its power before the Taliban took over the country in 1997 but has been less active in recent years. The proposed agreement would reportedly grant Hekmatyar and his group amnesty for past offences (the group is accused of numerous human rights abuses) and the release of specified

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<sup>1</sup> Security Council Report, June 2016 Monthly Forecast Afghanistan, 31 May 2016, [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2016-06/afghanistan\\_17.php](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2016-06/afghanistan_17.php), date accessed 3 June 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Al Jazeera, Afghan Taliban: Haibatullah Akhunzada named new leader, 26 May 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/afghan-taliban-haibatullah-akhunzada-leader-160525045301080.html>, date accessed 3 June 2016.

Hezb-i-Islami prisoners. In addition, the government would pledge to make efforts to remove Hekmatyar from international sanctions list.<sup>3</sup>

- 5.1.3 The Jamestown Foundation reported that, according to media reports dated March 2016, in the northern province of Balkh ‘the black flag of IS [Islamic State (Daesh)] has been seen in the province’s Zare and Koshanda districts.’ IS presence was also known in the provinces of Faryab, Helmand, and Nangarhar.<sup>4</sup> Sources estimated there were approximately 7,000 to 8,500 Daesh members based in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>
- 5.1.4 According to data compiled by The Long War Journal (TLWJ), published 21 December 2015, the Taliban controlled 40 districts in Afghanistan and contested another 39. TLWJ provided an interactive map of the controlled and contested districts.<sup>6</sup> The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) published its Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment on 12 April 2016<sup>7</sup>, which included a map of Taliban and IS controlled and contested areas.<sup>8</sup>
- 5.1.5 For information on Anti-Government Elements (AGEs), see the country information and guidance on [Afghanistan: persons supporting or perceived to support the government and/or international forces](#), and the [EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan Security situation](#), which also contains details of Pro-Government Forces.

See also [Geographical distribution of violence](#).

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## 6. Nature and levels of violence

### 6.1 Overview

- 6.1.1 The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported in its Afghanistan 2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview, published November 2015, that:

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<sup>3</sup> Security Council Report, June 2016 Monthly Forecast Afghanistan, 31 May 2016, [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2016-06/afghanistan\\_17.php](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2016-06/afghanistan_17.php), date accessed 3 June 2016.

<sup>4</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan’s North, Terrorism Monitor Volume: 14 Issue: 7, 1 April 2016, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=45268&cHash=3e8e6a58a36e0f18ef93c53268c48964#.V1Fnrvn5zMo](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=45268&cHash=3e8e6a58a36e0f18ef93c53268c48964#.V1Fnrvn5zMo), date accessed 3 June 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Giustozzi, Dr. A., The Islamic State in ‘Khorasan’: a nuanced view, 5 February 2016, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), <https://rusi.org/commentary/islamic-state-khorasan-nuanced-view>, date accessed 3 June 2016.

<sup>6</sup> The Long War Journal, Taliban controls or contests nearly all of southern Afghan province, 21 December 2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/12/taliban-controls-or-contests-nearly-all-of-southern-afghan-province.php>, date accessed 3 June 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Institute for the Study of War, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/afghanistan-partial-threat-assessment-april-12-2016>, date accessed 3 June 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Institute for the Study of War, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment – Map, 12 April 2016, <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/12%20APR%20AFG%20MAP%20FINAL%20PDF%20smaller%20FINAL.pdf>, date accessed 3 June 2016.

'Afghanistan's security situation has dramatically deteriorated following the drawdown of international forces [the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) launched on 1 January 2015 following the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)<sup>9</sup>]. National Security Forces are stretched as they engage with non-state armed groups (NSAG) on multiple fronts, fighting to secure expanding areas of contested territory. The widespread number of provinces simultaneously affected by conflict is a distinguishing characteristic of 2015 prompting a large-scale protection crisis affecting 6.3 million people.

'Use of improvised explosive devices (IED) and indiscriminate tactics remain. However the intensified fighting is now characterised by more armed clashes and a substantial increase in attacks on district centres, hitting at the heart of communities and prompting widespread fear and uncertainty. With the increasing proximity of fighting to population centres, the impact on civilians has escalated. Destruction of property, violence and intimidation is common, and boys and girls have been forcibly recruited into armed opposition groups and militias.'<sup>10</sup>

#### 6.1.2 The US Department of Defense reported that:

'In the second half of 2015, the overall security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated with an increase in effective insurgent attacks and higher ANDSF [Afghan National Defence and Security Forces] and Taliban casualties. Though the insurgency remains resilient, the Afghan government remains in control of all major population centers and continues to deny the Taliban strategic ground throughout the country. The Taliban have remained active in their traditional strongholds, namely in Helmand in the south and Logar and Wardak in the east, and also created a sense of instability for brief periods of time in other parts of the country, such as in Kunduz in northern Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the Taliban were unable to hold territory they had wrested away from ANDSF control. The ANDSF consistently retook ground they had temporarily lost to the Taliban. Although the ANDSF maintain a significant capability advantage over the insurgency, insurgents are improving in their ability to find and exploit ANDSF vulnerabilities, making the security situation still fragile in key areas and at risk of deterioration in other places.'<sup>11</sup>

#### 6.1.3 Since his last report on 10 December 2015, the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) reported on 7 March 2016 on an increasingly volatile security situation in Afghanistan. The UNSG stated that '... the conflict grew in intensity and scope, resulting in high casualties and displacement among Afghan civilians. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces

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<sup>9</sup> NATO, Resolute Support Mission (RSM): Key Facts and Figures, May 2016, [http://www.rs.nato.int/images/media/20160518\\_rsmplacemat.pdf](http://www.rs.nato.int/images/media/20160518_rsmplacemat.pdf), date accessed 14 June 2016.

<sup>10</sup> OCHA, Afghanistan: 2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview, November 2015, [https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Afghanistan/afg\\_2016\\_hno\\_final\\_20151209.pdf](https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Afghanistan/afg_2016_hno_final_20151209.pdf), page 7, date accessed 20 May 2016.

<sup>11</sup> US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2015, [http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1225\\_Report\\_Dec\\_2015\\_-\\_Final\\_20151210.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1225_Report_Dec_2015_-_Final_20151210.pdf), page 1, date accessed 9 June 2016.

continued to face significant challenges in effectively countering the threats of insurgent groups across the country.<sup>12</sup>

#### 6.1.4 The SCR reported:

‘The insurgency continues to take a heavy toll on the population and Afghan security forces. The Taliban’s increased activity and military gains in the country – as well as activity by Al-Qaida and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in various areas in the east – have been met with resistance by Afghan security forces with the assistance of NATO. In April [2016], the Taliban announced its annual spring offensive, vowing large-scale attacks against government strongholds to oust the government from power. Reacting to one such attack targeting civilians, Council members issued a press statement on 19 April, condemning a terrorist attack in Kabul by the Taliban that claimed at least 28 lives and injured more than 300 people.’<sup>13</sup>

See also [Kabul](#).

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## 6.2 Casualties of the conflict

6.2.1 The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) noted that ‘During 2015, Taliban issued 84 public statements related to protecting civilians and civilian property in armed conflict.’ Despite such statements UNAMA ‘continued to document Taliban attacks in public places, which harmed civilians indiscriminately.’<sup>14</sup>

6.2.2 UNAMA documented a total of 58,736 civilian casualties (21,323 deaths and 37,413 injured) between 1 January 2009 and 31 December 2015. In 2015 UNAMA recorded the highest number of civilian casualties – 11,002 (3,545 deaths and 7,457 injured) – since recording began in 2009; an increase of 4 per cent compared to 2014, and 21 per cent compared to 2013.<sup>15</sup>

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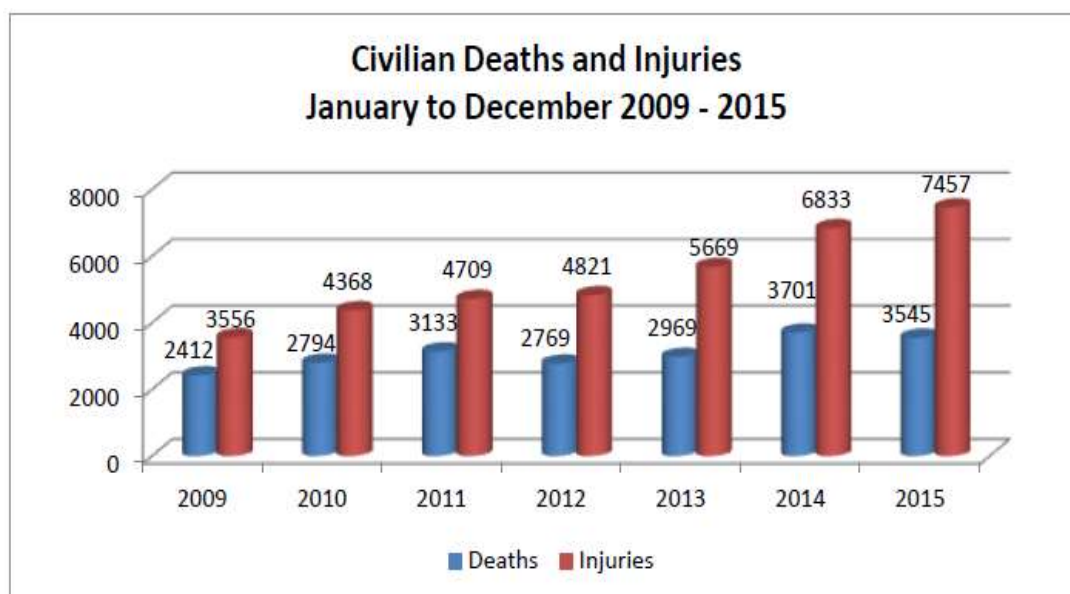
<sup>12</sup> UN Secretary-General (UNSG), The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 March 2016, A/70/775–S/2016/218, available at:

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/56f2667d4.html>, paragraph 3, date accessed 20 May 2016

<sup>13</sup> Security Council Report, June 2016 Monthly Forecast Afghanistan, 31 May 2016, [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2016-06/afghanistan\\_17.php](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2016-06/afghanistan_17.php), date accessed 3 June 2016.

<sup>14</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc\\_annual\\_report\\_2015\\_final\\_14\\_feb\\_2016.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf), pages 53-54, date accessed 17 May 2016.

<sup>15</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc\\_annual\\_report\\_2015\\_final\\_14\\_feb\\_2016.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf), page 1, date accessed 17 May 2016.



UNAMA Annual Report 2015.<sup>16</sup>

- 6.2.3 UNAMA attributed 62 per cent of all civilian casualties in 2015 to AGEs and 17 per cent to Pro-Government Forces (14 per cent to Afghan national security forces, two per cent to international military forces and one per cent to pro-Government armed groups). Ground engagements in which a civilian casualty could not be attributed to a specific party attributed to 17 per cent of casualties. Four per cent of casualties resulted from unattributed explosive remnants of war.<sup>17</sup> Note that UNAMA does not claim that statistics presented in its report are complete and it may be underreporting civilian casualties given limitations inherent in the operating environment.<sup>18</sup>
- 6.2.4 Between 1 January and 31 March 2016, UNAMA documented 1,943 civilian casualties (600 deaths and 1,343 injured), marking an overall increase in civilian casualties of two per cent compared to the same period in 2015 with a 13 per cent decrease in deaths but an 11 per cent increase in injuries. Almost a third of civilian casualties were children. As in 2015, the highest number of total civilian casualties were caused by ground engagements, followed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), complex and suicide attacks, as well as targeted killings.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc\\_annual\\_report\\_2015\\_final\\_14\\_feb\\_2016.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf), page 1, date accessed 17 May 2016.

<sup>17</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc\\_annual\\_report\\_2015\\_final\\_14\\_feb\\_2016.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf), page 3, date accessed 17 May 2016.

<sup>18</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc\\_annual\\_report\\_2015\\_final\\_14\\_feb\\_2016.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf), page ii, date accessed 17 May 2016.

<sup>19</sup> UNAMA, UN Chief in Afghanistan: Do More Now To Protect Civilians - UNAMA Releases Civilian Casualty Data for the First Quarter of 2016, 17 April 2016, <https://unama.unmissions.org/un-chief-afghanistan-do-more-now-protect-civilians-unama-releases-civilian-casualty-data-first>, date accessed

### 6.3 Impact on women and children

6.3.1 Having examined the third report of the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan (Reporting period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2014), the UN Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict expressed its grave concern over the 'deteriorating situation of children affected by the conflict in Afghanistan, particularly the significant increase in child casualties, the continuing recruitment and use of children in violation of applicable international law, as well as attacks on hospitals, schools and the military use of schools, particularly affecting girls' education, by all parties to the conflict.'<sup>20</sup> Covering the period from January to December 2015, the Report of the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict noted that 'Children were disproportionately affected by the intensifying conflict in Afghanistan. The number of child casualties verified by the United Nations has risen by 14 per cent since 2014 and reached the highest number ever recorded. One in four civilian casualties in 2015 was a child.'<sup>21</sup>

6.3.2 UNAMA noted with concern that, during the first three months of 2016: '... increased fighting in populated areas continues to kill and injure women and children at higher rates than the general population. The Mission has documented a five per cent increase in women casualties (195 women casualties – 52 deaths and 143 injured) and a 29 per cent increase in child casualties (610 children casualties – 161 deaths and 449 injured) compared to the first three months of 2015. Ground engagements caused the highest number of women casualties, followed by suicide and complex attacks, and IEDs. For children, ground engagements killed and maimed the most, followed by unexploded ordinance and IEDs.'<sup>22</sup> UNAMA noted that in 2015 'Anti-Government Elements continued to target prominent women human rights defenders and women working in public life, including police and parliamentarians, as well as women with relatives serving in the security forces.'<sup>23</sup>

See also [Health workers, humanitarian workers and journalists](#).

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20 May 2016.

<sup>20</sup> UN Security Council, Conclusions on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan : Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, 11 May 2016, S/AC.51/2016/1, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/573abb024.html>, paragraph 4, date accessed 20 May 2016.

<sup>21</sup> UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary-General, 20 April 2016, S/2016/360, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/360&referer=/english/&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/360&referer=/english/&Lang=E), paragraph 21, date accessed 7 June 2016.

<sup>22</sup> UNAMA, UN Chief in Afghanistan: Do More Now To Protect Civilians - UNAMA Releases Civilian Casualty Data for the First Quarter of 2016, 17 April 2016, <https://unama.unmissions.org/un-chief-afghanistan-do-more-now-protect-civilians-unama-releases-civilian-casualty-data-first>, date accessed 20 May 2016.

<sup>23</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc\\_annual\\_report\\_2015\\_final\\_14\\_feb\\_2016.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf), page 14, date accessed 17 May 2016.

6.3.3 For information on violence against women and girls during the fall of Kunduz city to the Taliban in September/October 2015, see the [UNAMA Special Report on Kunduz Province](#).

#### 6.4 Health workers, humanitarian workers, and journalists

6.4.1 The US Department of State reported in its Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2015 (USSD HR Report 2015) that:

‘The security environment continued to have a negative effect on the ability of humanitarian organizations to operate freely in many parts of the country. Insurgents deliberately targeted government employees and aid workers.

‘Suspected Taliban members attacked NGO offices, vehicles, guesthouses, restaurants, and hotels frequented by NGO employees. Violence and instability hampered development, relief, and reconstruction efforts. NGOs reported insurgents, powerful local individuals, and militia leaders demanded bribes to allow groups to bring relief supplies into the country and distribute them. In June unidentified attackers abducted and later released several members of a mine removal team from HALO Trust, a mine clearance agency, in Logar Province. In September the UN World Food Program temporarily suspended operations in Badakhshan Province after unidentified attackers stopped five UN vehicles and burned them.’<sup>24</sup>

6.4.2 The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) provided information on the situation of Afghan citizens who work for NGOs or international aid organisations, dated between 2012 and January 2016. The IRB noted:

‘Sources from 2015 state that the security situation in Afghanistan impedes the work of civil society and humanitarian organizations .... Sources published within the past two years further report that there has been an increase in attacks on aid agencies in districts where the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) have transferred security operations to Afghan forces .... The 2014 APPRO report indicates that since 2006, Afghanistan has become increasingly dangerous for NGOs to operate, with increased NGO worker casualties, either from targeting or as “collateral victims” ... . The International NGO Safety Organization, a British charity that “supports the safety of aid workers by establishing safety coordination platforms in insecure contexts” ..., states that incidents where NGOs were directly targeted were “rare” in 2015 ... However, the same source indicates that there were prominent cases in 2015 where Afghan NGOs were targeted by armed groups due to a belief that their work violated cultural or religious customs or that the organizations were perceived to be “non-neutral” entities ...’<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> US Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2015, Afghanistan, 13 April 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252957>, Section 1g, date accessed 7 June 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Afghanistan: Situation of Afghan citizens who work for NGOs or international aid organizations, and whether they are targeted by the Taliban; attacks against schools and incidents of violence against students, teachers, and the educational sector; state response (2012-January 2016), 22 February 2016, AFG105413.E, available at:



- 6.4.3 In 2015 UNAMA documented ‘63 incidents targeting hospitals and health personnel by Anti-Government Elements – a 47 per cent increase compared to 2014. Taliban perpetrated 36 of the incidents and ISIL/Daesh fighters perpetrated 12 (11 threats and intimidation incidents and one abduction). Tehrik Taliban Pakistan perpetrated one while UNAMA could not attribute responsibility to any group in 14 cases.’<sup>26</sup>
- 6.4.4 As reported by Human Rights Watch, data collected from NGOs by the Agency Coordinating Body of Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR), between 1 March 2015 and 10 February 2016, recorded at least 92 incidents of attacks or interference with hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, medical personnel (including doctors, nurses, dentists, and support staff), medical vehicles, and medical supplies.<sup>27</sup>
- 6.4.5 Khaama Press reported on the death of a security guard for UNAMA, who was killed in a shooting incident in Kabul on 20 May 2016. A member of staff was also wounded in the incident. At the time of reporting, no group had claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>28</sup>
- 6.4.6 For information on the targeting of aid workers and human rights defenders during the fall of Kunduz city to the Taliban in September/October 2015, see the [UNAMA Special Report on Kunduz Province](#).

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## 6.5 Abductions

### 6.5.1 The USSD HR Report 2015 stated:

‘There continued to be reports of disappearances attributed to security forces, and insurgent groups were reportedly also responsible for disappearances and abductions ... . In November unidentified gunmen abducted at least 14 Hazara men from buses traveling in Zabol Province. As of December the location of the hostages was unknown. UNAMA received credible reports of the disappearance of at least 26 individuals taken into Afghan National Police (ANP) custody in Kandahar Province in 2013 and 2014. Their status remained unknown.

‘The Ministry of Interior reported 113 abduction cases during 2014 and 151 abduction cases from January to September [2015]. The Taliban targeted government workers and citizens perceived to be cooperating with the international community ... . On February 24, insurgents kidnapped 31 Hazara men from a bus in Zabol Province. The abductors released 19 of the

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<http://www.refworld.org/docid/56d7f1994.html>, date accessed 6 June 2016.

<sup>26</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc\\_annual\\_report\\_2015\\_final\\_14\\_feb\\_2016.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf), page 20, date accessed 17 May 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Watch, No Protection, No Respect: Health Workers and Health Facilities Under Attack 2015 and Early 2016, 23 May 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/57441f434.html>, page 16, date accessed 6 June 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Khaama Press, UNAMA security guard killed, staff member wounded in Kabul shooting incident, 20 May 2016, <http://www.khaama.com/unama-security-guard-killed-staff-member-wounded-in-kabul-shooting-incident-01007>, date accessed 3 June 2016.

hostages in May and eight in November; four others remained missing as of November. In June a Dutch NGO worker was abducted and released 81 days later; no group claimed responsibility.<sup>29</sup>

6.5.2 On the abduction of children, the UN Secretary-General reported that in 2015:

‘The verified number of children abducted more than tripled compared with 2014. A total of 92 children (74 boys, 4 girls and 14 of unknown sex) were abducted in 23 incidents, including incidents linked to the killing of seven children and sexual violence against a child. The abductions of 69 children were attributed to the Taliban (two killed), 3 to ISIL-affiliated groups (all killed) and 12 to undetermined armed groups. An incident involving eight children remains unattributed.’<sup>30</sup> (see also [Impact on women and children](#)).

6.5.3 Reporting on abductions of humanitarian workers, the IRB noted that:

‘Sources report that humanitarian workers in Afghanistan have been targeted for kidnapping and abduction... . AIHRC reports that NGO and aid workers may also be kidnapped for use by insurgents to bargain for prisoner exchanges ... or in order to put pressure on the government ... . According to the AAN analyst, it is possible that “for ideological reasons,” people who have worked for “visibly American” organizations may face a greater risk of being targeted ... .

‘UNAMA indicates that during the first 6 months of 2015, anti-government groups carried out 15 abduction incidents, kidnapping 44 humanitarian aid workers and NGO staff, of which 6 were killed, 1 remains captive, and the others were released ... . A UN report produced in September 2015 states that 90 aid workers had been abducted in the first 7 months of 2015 ... .’<sup>31</sup>

6.5.4 On 2 June 2016 UNAMA expressed its concern at the recent spate of abductions, hostage-taking and summary executions carried out against passengers travelling in civilian vehicles. UNAMA noted:

‘Armed Taliban personnel executed at least 10 men from a group of nearly 200 men, women, and children that they forcibly removed from three civilian buses on 30 May in the Ali Abad district of Kunduz province. Many passengers were mistreated by the assailants in order for them to identify those with connections to the Government or security forces. In addition to

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<sup>29</sup> US Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2015, Afghanistan, 13 April 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252957>, Sections 1b and 1g, date accessed 7 June 2016.

<sup>30</sup> UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary-General, 20 April 2016, S/2016/360, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/360&referer=/english/&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/360&referer=/english/&Lang=E), paragraph 29, date accessed 7 June 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Afghanistan: Situation of Afghan citizens who work for NGOs or international aid organizations, and whether they are targeted by the Taliban; attacks against schools and incidents of violence against students, teachers, and the educational sector; state response (2012-January 2016), 22 February 2016, AFG105413.E, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56d7f1994.html>, date accessed 6 June 2016.

10 men who were subsequently murdered, the fate of a further 10 passengers remains unknown.

'In a separate incident on 1 June, armed attackers abducted 25 civilian men and women who were travelling in two vehicles in the Balkh Ab district of the northern province of Saripul. All passengers were reported to be from the Hazara community. While four women and one elderly man were subsequently released, the fate of the 20 others remains unknown.'<sup>32</sup>

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## 7. Geographical distribution of violence

### 7.1 Overview

7.1.1 The [EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan Security situation](#) provided a regional description of the security situation in the provinces.

### 7.2 Taliban controlled areas

7.2.1 The UNSG reported that the United Nations recorded 22,634 security incidents in 2015, a 3 per cent increase compared to 2014. Of those security incidents, 70 per cent occurred in southern, eastern and south-eastern regions, with Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Kunar and Nangarhar being the most volatile provinces. The reported added:

'The Taliban expanded its territorial reach in 2015, temporarily capturing 24 district centres in the north (in Badakhshan, Baghlan, Faryab, Jawzjan, Kunduz, Sari Pul and Takhar provinces), in the west (in Badghis and Farah provinces), in the east (in Nuristan Province) and in the south (in Helmand and Kandahar provinces), in addition to temporarily seizing the provincial capital of Kunduz. This represents a significant increase compared with 2014, when the Taliban captured only three centres. Even though most district centres were quickly retaken by pro-government forces, several remained under Taliban control for weeks, including in Faryab, Helmand, Kunduz, Sari Pul and Takhar provinces.'<sup>33</sup>

### 7.3 Kunduz

7.3.1 UNAMA published a special report on Kunduz province following the capture of Kunduz city by the Taliban on 28 September 2015. Summarising its findings and preliminary figures on civilian casualties, UNAMA noted that it had:

'... received credible reports of 848 civilian casualties (289 deaths and 559 injured) that occurred in Kunduz city and surrounding districts between 28 September and 13 October [2015]... The vast majority of casualties

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<sup>32</sup> UNAMA, UNAMA concerned by civilian abductions and hostage-taking, 2 June 2016, <http://unama.unmissions.org/unama-concerned-civilian-abductions-and-hostage-taking>, date accessed 7 June 2016.

<sup>33</sup> UN Secretary-General (UNSG), The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 March 2016, A/70/775-S/2016/218, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56f2667d4.html>, paragraphs 12-14, date accessed 20 May 2016.

documented so far resulted from ground fighting that could not be attributed solely to one party, and 67 of these casualties (30 deaths and 37 injured) resulted from an airstrike carried out by international military forces on a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital on 3 October.<sup>34</sup>

#### 7.4 Government controlled areas

7.4.1 The US Department of Defense reported in December 2015 that:

‘The Afghan government retains control of Kabul, major transit routes, provincial capitals, and nearly all district centers. The ANDSF are generally capable and effective at protecting the major population centers, or not allowing the Taliban to maintain their hold for a prolonged period of time. At the same time, the Taliban have proven capable of taking rural areas and contesting key terrain in areas such as Helmand while continuing to conduct high-profile attacks (HPA) in Kabul. From January 1 to November 16, 2015, there were 28 HPAs in Kabul, a 27 percent increase compared to the same time period in 2014.’<sup>35</sup> (See also [Kabul](#)).

7.4.2 The Jamestown Foundation reported on 1 April 2016 that ‘Five months after the fall of Kunduz, Taliban forces started to focus on Baghlan, another strategically-located province in northern Afghanistan... By February, Taliban fighters had established strongholds in Dand-e-Ghori area, in the west of Pole Khomri, in Dande Shahbuddin, in Kokchenar, and in nine other villages west of Pole-Khomri.’<sup>36</sup>

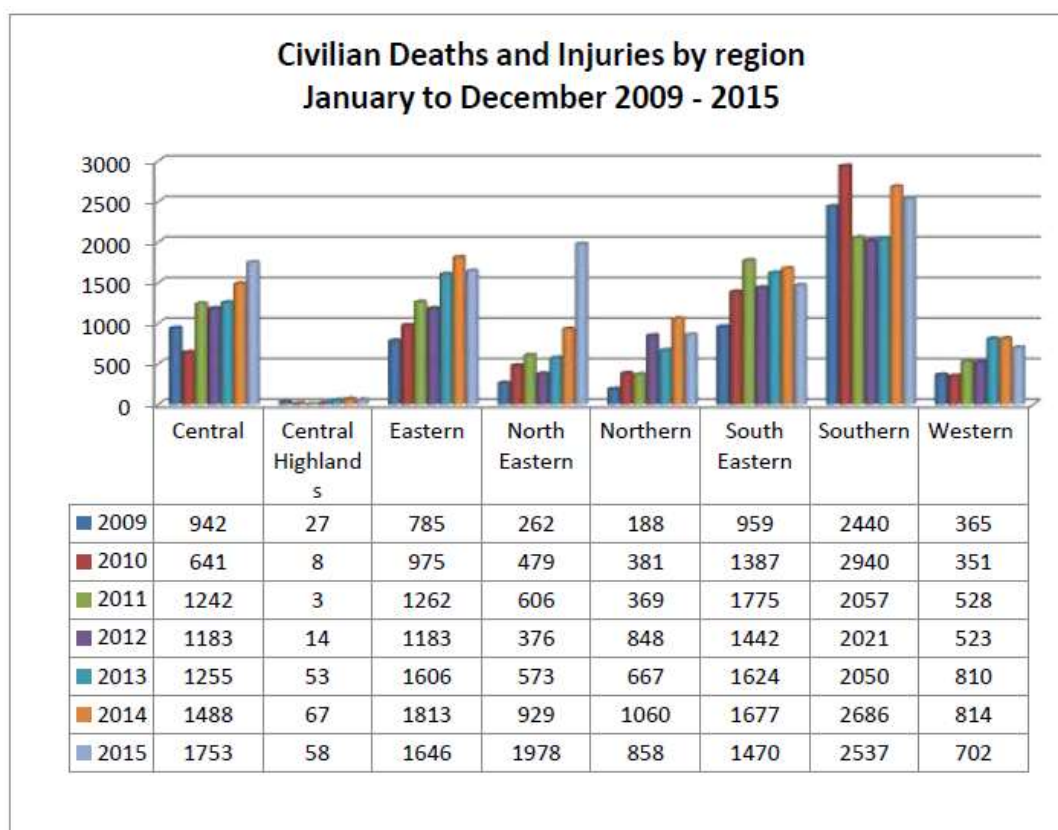
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<sup>34</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report on Kunduz Province, December 2015, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/special\\_report\\_on\\_kunduz\\_province\\_12\\_december\\_2015.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/special_report_on_kunduz_province_12_december_2015.pdf), page i, date accessed 2 June 2016.

<sup>35</sup> US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2015, [http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1225\\_Report\\_Dec\\_2015\\_-\\_Final\\_20151210.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1225_Report_Dec_2015_-_Final_20151210.pdf), page 17, date accessed 9 June 2016.

<sup>36</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan’s North, Terrorism Monitor Volume: 14 Issue: 7, 1 April 2016, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=45268&cHash=3e8e6a58a36e0f18ef93c53268c48964#.V1Fnrvn5zMo](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=45268&cHash=3e8e6a58a36e0f18ef93c53268c48964#.V1Fnrvn5zMo), date accessed 3 June 2016.

## Civilian casualties by region 1



UNAMA Annual Report 2015.<sup>37</sup>

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## 7.5 Kabul

7.5.1 UNAMA stated that in 2015 'In the central region, notably in Kabul city, complex and suicide attacks caused an 18 per cent increase in civilian casualties [compared to 2014].'<sup>38</sup>

7.5.2 The US Department of State's Country Report on Terrorism noted two significant terrorist incidents in Kabul in 2015:

- On June 22, a Taliban suicide bomber and six gunmen attacked the Parliament building in Kabul as lawmakers met to consider the appointment of a new defense minister. A Taliban fighter detonated a car loaded with explosives outside the Parliament gates, and six gunmen attempted to enter the building. One civilian was killed and approximately 30 civilians were wounded in the attack;

<sup>37</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc\\_annual\\_report\\_2015\\_final\\_14\\_feb\\_2016.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf), page 8, date accessed 17 May 2016.

<sup>38</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc\\_annual\\_report\\_2015\\_final\\_14\\_feb\\_2016.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf), page 8, date accessed 17 May 2016.

- On August 7, terrorists launched three attacks in Kabul. In the first attack at 1:00 a.m., a massive VBIED [vehicle-borne improvised explosive device] in a truck driven by a suicide attacker detonated in the center of Kabul, killing 15 people and wounding more than 240 civilians. In the second attack, a Taliban suicide bomber killed 26 police cadets and wounded another 27 when he blew himself up outside the gates of a police academy. The bomber was dressed in police uniform and detonated his explosive vest after approaching a group of cadets who were standing outside the academy. In a separate Taliban attack, one RSM service member and eight Afghan contractors were killed.<sup>39</sup>

7.5.3 As documented by UNAMA, 'On 15 October [2015], Anti-Government Elements rigged a magnetic-IED to a Corolla vehicle and detonated it in front of a mobile phone shop in Kabul city. The explosion killed one civilian and injured six others.'<sup>40</sup>

7.5.4 The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office listed recent major attacks on Kabul in 2016:

- 1 January – a restaurant visited by international civilians was attacked in central Kabul, killing at least 1 person;
- 4 January – a vehicle borne explosive device was used to attack a military convoy near the airport in Kabul;
- 4 January – a large vehicle borne explosive device was used to attack a military base near Kabul airport;
- 20 January – a vehicle borne explosive device and a magnetic explosive device were used in an attack on an Afghan news agency, killing at least 7 people;
- 19 April – a large vehicle borne explosive device was used in a complex attack in a residential area of Kabul during rush hour, reportedly killing at least 60 people.<sup>41</sup>

7.5.5 On 25 May 2016 a suicide bomber targeted a minibus carrying court employees in Kabul, killing 10 people. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. In a statement, the Taliban said the attack was carried out as revenge for the killing of six Taliban members, convicted of terrorism, who were hanged at a Kabul prison earlier in May.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> US Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2015, Chapter 2. Country Reports: South and Central Asia Overview, 2 June 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257518.htm>, Afghanistan, date accessed 7 June 2016.

<sup>40</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc\\_annual\\_report\\_2015\\_final\\_14\\_feb\\_2016.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf), page 40, date accessed 17 May 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Foreign Travel Advice Afghanistan, updated 29 April 2016, still current at 3 June 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/afghanistan>, date accessed 3 June 2016.

<sup>42</sup> In Homeland Security, Taliban bomber hits court minibus in Kabul, killing 10, 26 May 2016, <http://inhomelandsecurity.com/taliban-bomber-hits-court-minibus-kabul-killing-10/>, date accessed 3

7.5.6 For recent news and events in Afghanistan see [Sources](#).

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## 8. Humanitarian situation

### 8.1 Internally displaced persons (IDPs)

#### 8.1.1 OCHA reported:

'Intensified fighting and growing fear caused by insecurity and intimidation has displaced thousands of people throughout Afghanistan. Twenty-one of thirty four provinces had recorded some level of forced displacement in the summer of 2015. Constrained humanitarian access hinders assessments, thus preventing verification of the full extent of displacement and undermining the provision of assistance and services. Displacement affects all individuals differently with needs, vulnerabilities and protection risks evolving over time due to exhaustion of coping mechanisms and only basic emergency assistance provided following initial displacement. Inadequate shelter, food insecurity, insufficient access to sanitation and health facilities, as well as a lack of protection, often result in precarious living conditions that jeopardises the well-being and dignity of affected families.'<sup>43</sup> The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) noted that 'IDPs struggle to meet specific needs resulting from their displacement, in particular when it comes to accessing water, food, adequate housing and employment. These challenges are most pronounced in areas where they are inaccessible or invisible to humanitarian responders and as their displacement becomes more protracted.'<sup>44</sup>

8.1.2 Reporting on conflict-induced internal displacement in 2015, UNHCR estimated that 384,480 individuals/ 63,432 families were forced to leave their places of origin due to conflict, representing a 96 per cent increase compared with 2014. A further 87,000 were displaced due to the conflict in Kunduz in September 2015. UNHCR added that 31 out of 34 provinces were affected by conflict, either generating displacement or hosting large populations of IDPs. Most IDP families were hosted by extended family or acquaintances.<sup>45</sup> The IDMC estimated that, as of the end of June 2015, 948,000 people in Afghanistan were living in displacement as a result of conflict and violence.<sup>46</sup> Amnesty International cited 1.2 million people were

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June 2016.

<sup>43</sup> OCHA, Afghanistan: 2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview, November 2015, [https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Afghanistan/afg\\_2016\\_hno\\_final\\_20151209.pdf](https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Afghanistan/afg_2016_hno_final_20151209.pdf), page 8, date accessed 20 May 2016.

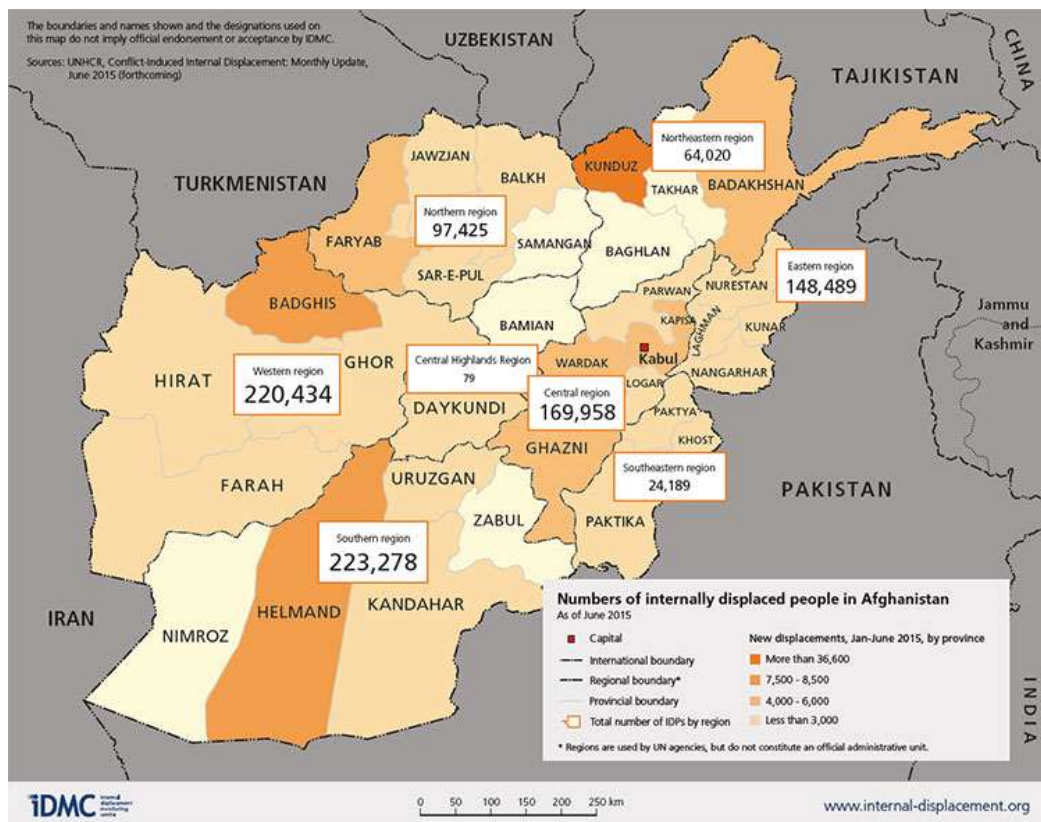
<sup>44</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Afghanistan: New and long-term IDPs risk becoming neglected as conflict intensifies, 16 July 2015, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/afghanistan/2015/afghanistan-new-and-long-term-idps-risk-becoming-neglected-as-conflict-intensifies>, date accessed 14 June 2016.

<sup>45</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Afghanistan: Conflict-induced Internal Displacement 2015: The Year In Review, April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5722fbf74.html>, pages 2 and 4, date accessed 7 June 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Afghanistan: New and long-term IDPs risk becoming neglected as conflict intensifies, 16 July 2015, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/afghanistan/2015/afghanistan-new-and-long-term-idps-risk-becoming-neglected-as-conflict-intensifies>

displaced in Afghanistan as of April 2016.<sup>47</sup> OCHA noted in its bulletin, dated April 2016, that over the first four months of 2016, 118,000 had fled their homes due to the conflict – an average of 1,000 a day.<sup>48</sup>

#### IDPs Afghanistan as of June 2015 1



IDMC map, June 2015.<sup>49</sup>

- 8.1.3 Increasing numbers of IDPs live in informal settlements in Afghanistan's major urban centres. Displaced persons, compared to their Afghan counterparts, were more likely to be illiterate; to have lower rates of school enrolment; to have lower household incomes, whilst living in larger households; to be unemployed; and to be food insecure. Displaced women and girls were considered to be at disproportionate risk, living with fewer freedoms and opportunities than when living in their own homes and

[east-asia/afghanistan/2015/afghanistan-new-and-long-term-idps-risk-becoming-neglected-as-conflict-intensifies](http://www.internal-displacement.org/east-asia/afghanistan/2015/afghanistan-new-and-long-term-idps-risk-becoming-neglected-as-conflict-intensifies), date accessed 14 June 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Amnesty International, Afghanistan: "My children will die this winter" Afghanistan's Broken Promise to the Displaced, 31 May 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA1140172016ENGLISH.PDF>, page 13, date accessed 14 June 2016.

<sup>48</sup> OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan, Issue 51, 1-30 April 2016, [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/afg\\_humanitarian\\_bulletin\\_2016\\_april.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/afg_humanitarian_bulletin_2016_april.pdf), page 3, date accessed 20 May 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Afghanistan: New and long-term IDPs risk becoming neglected as conflict intensifies, 16 July 2015, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/afghanistan/2015/afghanistan-new-and-long-term-idps-risk-becoming-neglected-as-conflict-intensifies>, date accessed 14 June 2016.



villages. According to a research study investigating the impacts of IDPs living in poor urban settlements, displaced females face significant enhanced gendered constraints to accessing education, health and employment opportunities. They have lost freedoms, social capital and networks they may have previously enjoyed.<sup>50</sup>

- 8.1.4 Citing various sources, UNHCR noted the city of Kabul had seen the biggest population increase of Afghan cities, with an estimated 3.5 million residents as of 2015. The report noted that:

‘Kabul has reportedly received close to 40 per cent of all new conflict-induced IDPs in Afghanistan since 2002. Some estimates put the percentage of Kabul’s population living in informal settlements at 70 per cent... In the Kabul Informal Settlements (KIS), designated sites of protracted IDPs, returnees and other urban poor targeted for humanitarian assistance, 80 per cent of a population of about 55,000 people are reportedly severely or moderately food insecure.’<sup>51</sup>

- 8.1.5 The May 2015 report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences noted that ‘The overcrowded living situation increases the risks of violence for women. Many of them are subjected to domestic violence and forced marriages. Furthermore, the switch in traditional housing conditions, including the move from rural to urban environments, have an effect on women’s freedom of movement, as they cannot benefit from the protection of their courtyards, gardens and villages.’<sup>52</sup> (See also [Impact on women and children](#)).

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## 9. Returns and reintegration

- 9.1.1 OCHA reported in its Humanitarian Needs Overview that:

‘Voluntary repatriation, spontaneous returns and deportations have all increased considerably during the first six months of 2015, compared with the same period in 2014. Returnee monitoring continues to raise concerns about intimidation and pressure exerted on refugees coercing their return. Assistance packages provided to refugee returns at transit centres typically last less than two months. Follow up of returnees highlight significant challenges and concerns around long-term reintegration. Circumstances for

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<sup>50</sup> Schmeidl, Dr. S. and Tyler, D., ‘Listening to women and girls displaced to urban Afghanistan’, NRC and TLO, January 2015, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5513bec24.html>, Executive summary page 8, date accessed 14 June 2016..

<sup>51</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016, HCR/EG/AFG/16/02, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>, pages 29-30, date accessed 14 June 2016.

<sup>52</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo; Addendum; Mission to Afghanistan, 12 May 2015 [http://www.ecoi.net/file\\_upload/1930\\_1433945982\\_a-hrc-29-27-add-3-eng.doc](http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1930_1433945982_a-hrc-29-27-add-3-eng.doc), paragraph 27, date accessed 14 June 2016.

undocumented returns are exacerbated due to their lack of documentation and increased legal vulnerability.<sup>53</sup>

- 9.1.2 A total of 58,463 Afghan refugees were repatriated to Afghanistan in 2015.<sup>54</sup> Under UNHCR's assisted returns programme, 3,766 Afghan refugees, mostly from Pakistan and Iran, returned to Afghanistan during the first four months of 2016. This was considerably lower than the 21,502 returnees during the same period in 2015, and slightly less than the 3,862 returnees during the same 2014 period. UNHCR noted that the high return figure in 2015 was mainly due to push factors faced by Afghans in Pakistan following the Peshawar school terrorist attack in December 2014. UNHCR cited the low return trend in 2016 as being largely due to 'high levels of unemployment and lack of livelihood opportunities, limited access to land, shelter and basic services, particularly in areas of high return, and increased insecurity.'<sup>55</sup>
- 9.1.3 The driving factor for 55 per cent of returnees from Pakistan interviewed by UNHCR was cited as the improvement in the security situation. Returns occurred to 30 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces; over 50 per cent returned to central and eastern regions. UNHCR also recorded the enforced return of 57,919 undocumented (non-refugees) Afghan nationals from Iran, and 6,486 from Pakistan between 1 January and 30 April 2016.<sup>56</sup> The International Organization for Migration (IOM) recorded 83,128 spontaneous returns from Pakistan between January and 30 November 2015.<sup>57</sup>
- 9.1.4 In April 2016 Refugee Support Network (RSN) published a report documenting the experiences of former unaccompanied asylum seeking children forcibly returned to Afghanistan from the UK. RSN monitored 25 returnees over a period of 18 months (March 2014 to December 2015) and reported on the difficulties experienced by them, which included: insecurity; a lack of family and social networks; problems in finding work or continuing education; and mental health problems. Over half the returnees (15) said they planned to leave Afghanistan again and, by the end of the research period, six had left and the whereabouts of 11 others was unknown.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> OCHA, Afghanistan: 2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview, November 2015, [https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Afghanistan/afg\\_2016\\_hno\\_final\\_20151209.pdf](https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Afghanistan/afg_2016_hno_final_20151209.pdf), page 9, date accessed 20 May 2016.

<sup>54</sup> UN Secretary-General (UNSG), The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 March 2016, A/70/775–S/2016/218, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56f2667d4.html>, paragraph 42, date accessed 27 May 2016

<sup>55</sup> UNHCR, Afghanistan – Voluntary Repatriation and Border Monitoring Monthly Update, 01 January – 30 April 2016, 30 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/573c09e94.html>, page 1, date accessed 27 May 2016.

<sup>56</sup> UNHCR, Afghanistan – Voluntary Repatriation and Border Monitoring Monthly Update, 01 January – 30 April 2016, 30 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/573c09e94.html>, pages 4-6, date accessed 27 May 2016.

<sup>57</sup> International Organization for Migration, Return of Undocumented Afghans from Pakistan, Update as of 30 November 2015, [https://afghanistan.iom.int/sites/default/files/Reports/return\\_of\\_undocumented\\_afghans\\_from\\_pakistan\\_-\\_update\\_as\\_of\\_30\\_nov\\_2015.pdf](https://afghanistan.iom.int/sites/default/files/Reports/return_of_undocumented_afghans_from_pakistan_-_update_as_of_30_nov_2015.pdf), date accessed 27 May 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Refugee Support Network, After Return, April 2016, [https://refugeesupportnetwork.org/sites/default/files/files/After%20Return\\_RSN\\_April%202016.pdf](https://refugeesupportnetwork.org/sites/default/files/files/After%20Return_RSN_April%202016.pdf),

- 9.1.5 For up to date information about returns to Afghanistan see the International Organization for Migration Afghanistan [Quarterly Updates](#).
- 9.1.6 Statistics on returns to Afghanistan from the UK are available on the [gov.uk](#) website.

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pages 6-7, date accessed 27 May 2016.

# Version Control and Contacts

## Contacts

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

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

## Clearance

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was cleared:

- version **3.0**
- valid from **25 July 2016**

## Changes from last version of this guidance

Updated country information

Updated guidance, to include the outcome of the judicial review of [HN & Ors, R \(on the application of\) v Secretary of State for the Home Department \(JR - scope - evidence \(IJR\) \[2015\] UKUT 437 \(IAC\) \(27 July 2015\)\)](#) and the subsequent appeal: [HN & SA \(Afghanistan\) \(Lead Cases Associated Non-Lead Cases\), R \(on the application of\) v The Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2016\] EWCA Civ 123](#).

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