

Afghanistan Country Conditions:
Situation of Unaccompanied Children/Orphans

International Refugee Assistance Project

A. RESEARCH REQUEST	2
B. RESEARCH TIMEFRAME	2
C. SOURCES CONSULTED	2
1. United Nations Reports	2
2. Government Reports	3
3. Media Reports	4
D. FINDINGS	4
1. Minors reportedly continue to experience sexual abuse and violence by various actors, including Afghani security forces, the Taliban and relatives.	5
2. Children reportedly continue to experience forced recruitment into Afghan security/police forces and the Taliban, indoctrination, and other violence associated with child soldiers, including serving as human shields and carrying out suicide attacks.....	8
3. According to sources, children are at risk of being forced into dangerous labor, drug trafficking and other illicit activities.	10
4. According to sources, children face significant obstacles and dangers to access to education.....	12
5. According to sources, children, especially those whose family members are or were accused of the “wrong” political affiliation, are at high risk of abduction, detention or other violence as reprisal for their family’s connections.	15
6. According to sources, lack of access to immunization and attacks against healthcare facilities remain ongoing issues in Afghanistan.	16
7. According to sources, civilians, especially children, are vulnerable to injury, maiming and death due to being located in active armed conflict zones, as well as to unique issues relating to internal displacement.	18
8. There are several international frameworks and guidelines already in place with respect to children and unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan and children generally, specifically situations under which they should be considered for international refugee protection.	20
E. APPENDIX	23

This report is intended as background reference material for asylum seekers and their counsel only, to assist in their preparation of their cases. It should not be submitted directly to asylum adjudicators in the United Kingdom or United States.

The information contained in this report is current as of September 2021. It is provide as a service to users and is therefore general and should not be considered or relied on as comprehensive or as legal advice. Nothing contained herein creates an attorney-client relationship between IRAP or any of the law firms that participated in this project and any users of this information.

A. RESEARCH REQUEST

This report provides details on the country conditions of unaccompanied children/orphans living in Afghanistan, for use as reference material in asylum or other humanitarian proceedings.

Are unaccompanied children/orphans in Afghanistan persecuted or otherwise detrimentally affected on account of their status?

B. RESEARCH TIMEFRAME

The earliest source dates from APRIL 2009 and the most recent source dates from SEPTEMBER 2021.

C. SOURCES CONSULTED

All web sources were consulted in AUGUST – SEPTEMBER 2021

1. United Nations Reports

- UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), “Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021”, 26 July 2021, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_poc_midyear_report_2021_26_july.pdf
- UN Security Council, “Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General”, 16 July 2021, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3936068?ln=en#record-files-collapse-header>
- UNAMA and UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), “Preventing Torture and Upholding the Rights of Detainees in Afghanistan: A Factor for Peace”, February 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/AF/2021report/2021-Torture-Public-Report.pdf>
- UNAMA, “Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020”, February 2021, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/afghanistan_protection_of_civilians_report_2020_revs3.pdf
- UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), “Report submitted by Afghanistan under article 8 (1) of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, due in 2005”, 14 August 2020, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3892509?ln=en>
- UNICEF, Preserving Hope in Afghanistan: Protecting Children in the world’s most lethal conflict, December 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/preserving-hope-afghanistan-2019>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan”, 30 August 2018 <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b8900109.html>
- UNAMA, “Midyear Update on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 June 2018”, 15 July 2018, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b5047137.html>
- UNICEF, The situation of children and women in Afghanistan: Facts and figures, 8 June 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/situation-children-and-women-afghanistan>
- UNHCR, “UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan”, 19 April 2016 <https://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>
- UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), “Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key Trends and Incidents Affecting Children’s

Access to Healthcare and Education in Afghanistan”, April 2016,

https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/education_and_healthcare_at_risk.pdf

- UNAMA, UNICEF, OCHA, “Bearing the Brunt of Conflict in Afghanistan: 4-year analysis of six grave violations against children in armed conflict (Sept. 2010-Dec. 2014)”, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/dashboard_on_violations_against_children_affected_by_armed_conflict_in_afghanistan_from_september_2010_to_december_2014.pdf
- Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, “Mission Report: Visit of the Special Representative for Children & Armed Conflict to Afghanistan”, 20-26 February 2010, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/february_2010_-_mission_report_by_the_special_representative_of_the_secretary-children_for_children_in_armed_conflict.pdf
- United Nations – High Commissioner for Refugees: “Aide-mémoire: Special measures applying to the return of unaccompanied and separated children to Afghanistan”, 20 August 2010, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4c91dbb22.html>
- UNHCR, Guidelines on International Protection No. 8: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1(A)2 and 1(F) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, HCR/GIP/09/08, 22 December 2009, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4b2f4f6d2.html>

2. Government Reports

- European Asylum Support Office, Afghanistan – Security Situation, June 2021, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2021_06_EASO_COI_Report_Afghanistan_Security_situation.pdf
- United States Department of State, “2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan”, 30 March 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/afghanistan/>
- European Asylum Support Office, Afghanistan – Key socio-economic indicators: Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat City, August 2020, https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2020_08_EASO_COI_Report_Afghanistan_Key_Socio_Economic_Indicators_Focus_Kabul_City_Mazar_Sharif_Herat_City.pdf
- United States Department of State, “2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan”, 11 March 2020, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/afghanistan/>
- Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, DFAT Country Information Report: Afghanistan, 27 June 2019, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/country-information-report-afghanistan.pdf>
- United States Department of State, “2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan”, 14 March 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/afghanistan/>
- United States Department of State, “2017 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan”, 20 April 2018, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2017-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/afghanistan/>
- United States Department of State, “2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan”, 3 March 2017, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2016-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/afghanistan/>

3. Media Reports

- Ilyas Khan, *Associated Press of Pakistan*, “Haseeb like millions Afghan children paying heavy price of wars due to poverty”, 11 September 2021, <https://www.app.com.pk/features/haseeb-like-millions-afghan-children-paying-heavy-price-of-wars-due-to-poverty/>
 - Sanchita Bhattacharya, *Eurasia Review*, “Afghanistan: A Child’s Nightmare – Analysis”, 17 May 2021, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/17052021-afghanistan-a-childs-nightmare-analysis/>
 - Sayed Salahuddin, *Arab News*, “Afghan refugee helping war widows escape poverty cycle”, 16 January 2021, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1793451/world>
 - Hikmat Noori, *The National News*, “Afghanistan's child miners face life-threatening conditions below ground”, 2 December 2020, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/asia/afghanistan-s-child-miners-face-life-threatening-conditions-below-ground-1.1117929>
 - *Afghanistan Times*, “Afghanistan- 8 million Afghan children deprived of education”, 20 November 2020, <http://www.afghanistantimes.af/8-million-afghan-children-deprived-of-education/>
 - Michael Knowles and Steve Reigate, *The Daily Express*, “Afghanistan children in plea to British families – ‘You don't have misery we have’”, 19 November 2020, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1361999/Afghanistan-children-war-migration-latest-iran>
 - Sanchita Bhattacharya, *Eurasia Review*, “Afghanistan: Children Under Threat – Analysis”, 7 July 2020, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/07072020-afghanistan-children-under-threat-analysis/>
 - Mohammad Zahir Akbari, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, “World Day against Child Labor: Children Shouldn’t Work in Fields but on Dreams”, 16 June 2019, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/topics.php?post_id=23857
 - Mohammad Zahir Akbari, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, “Afghanistan: the front rank of Dangerous Conflict Zone for Children”, 17 February 2019, http://outlookafghanistan.net/topics.php?post_id=22941
 - Sune Engel Rasmussen, *The Guardian*, “‘My grandsons’ fight to avenge their father’: child soldiers in Afghanistan”, 25 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/may/25/child-soldiers-afghanistan-grandsons-fight-to-avenge-their-father>
 - Roshni Kapur, *The Diplomat*, “Bacha Bazi: The Tragedy of Afghanistan’s Dancing Boys”, 23 August 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/08/bacha-bazi-the-tragedy-of-afghanistans-dancing-boys/>
- Musa Khan Jalalza, *Daily News*, “Play boys, forced marriages and prostitution”, 5 July 2011, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/111390/play-boys-forced-marriages-and-prostitution/>

D. FINDINGS

The findings in this report are presented beginning with United Nations reports, moving to government reports and ending with media reports. The findings are presented chronologically within each category of source. The report is divided into the following categories: (1) sexual abuse, violence and trafficking; (2) forced recruitment, child soldiers and human shields; (3) forced labor and drug trafficking; (4) education; (5) abductions; (6) healthcare; (7) specific issues relating to armed conflict and internal displacement; and (8) existing international frameworks with respect to children/unaccompanied minors and asylum consideration.

Children in Afghanistan reportedly continue to experience numerous human rights abuses by various actors, including Afghani security forces, the Taliban and domestic abuse (e.g. by family or relatives). According to sources, children in Afghanistan are “at risk of child-specific forms of persecution, including underage recruitment, child [and drug] trafficking, kidnapping, bonded or hazardous child labour, domestic violence against children, forced and/or underage marriage, child prostitution and child

pornography and the systematic denial of education.”¹ The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) notes that the Taliban and affiliated groups “remain listed for recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals, and abduction, and ISIL-KP remain listed for recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming of children, and attacks on schools and hospitals.”²

These issues and abuses often have a more profound impact on unaccompanied minors. In 2020, the US Department of State noted that “children in orphanages reported mental, physical, and sexual abuse and occasionally were victims of trafficking. They did not have regular access to running water, heating in winter, indoor plumbing, health-care services, recreational facilities, or education.”³ Along with poor living conditions, “as many as 80 percent of children between ages four and 18 in orphanages were not orphans but from families unable to provide them with food, shelter, schooling, or all three.”⁴

Conflict-related violence “continue[s] to erode the rights of children to education, healthcare, freedom of movement and other fundamental rights, as well as family life, playing outdoors and simply enjoying a childhood free of the brutal consequences of war.”⁵ In July 2021, the Secretary-General of the United Nations Security Council said: “I am appalled by the continuing disturbing scale, severity and recurrence of grave violations against children in Afghanistan, who continue to bear the brunt of the armed conflict. I condemn these grave violations against children committed by all parties to the conflict and urge all parties to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.”⁶

1. Minors reportedly continue to experience sexual abuse and violence by various actors, including Afghani security forces, the Taliban and relatives.

According to sources, minors in Afghanistan are sexually abused and exploited by security forces, the Taliban and sometimes their relatives. Boys and younger adolescent males in particular are subject to an abusive practice called bacha bazi whereby older men sexually abuse “dancing boys.” Girls are especially vulnerable to being forced into underage marriage, as well as other forms of rape and abuse. The majority of reported cases of suicide and self-immolation in Afghanistan are by women, and gender-based violence – specifically forced or child marriage – is among the main causes.

• **Sexual abuse by security forces, the Taliban and relatives**

- **“Sexual violence against children, despite its severe nature, is rarely reported and inadequately addressed in Afghanistan.** In 2020, boys and girls continued to be subjected to sexual violence at the hands of parties to the conflict in horrific acts. [...] Although these acts are criminalised, **limited access to justice and a culture of silence, shame, and victim-blaming continued to pose significant challenges to accountability efforts.**”

¹ UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 65, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

² UNAMA, [Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021](#), p. 13, 26 July 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

³ United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 40, last accessed: 23 September 2021

⁴ United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 40, last accessed: 23 September 2021

⁵ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), [Midyear Update on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 June 2018](#), p. 3, 15 July 2018, last accessed: 9 September 2021

⁶ UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 16, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 14, 35, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Child abuse is reported to be widespread; common forms of abuse include physical violence, sexual abuse, abandonment and general neglect. [...] **While most child victims of sexual abuse, particularly girls, are reported to be abused by family members, boys and girls were also reported to be at risk of sexual violence at the hands of local police and pro-government forces, [Anti-Government Elements] (“AGEs”) and ordinary members of society.** [...] Impunity for sexual abuse of children is reported to remain a problem: most abusers are not arrested, and **there are reports of children raped with impunity by security officials and police officers.** Some children who are prosecuted for “moral crimes” are reported to be survivors of abuse rather than perpetrators of crimes; having reported instances of sexual abuse, they are perceived to have brought shame on their family and to be in need of punishment.”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 82-83, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “**Police forces and AGEs** in Afghanistan are listed by the UN Security Council according to Resolution 1612 among parties that ... **commit rape and other forms of sexual violence** against children.”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 45, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Some children in the criminal justice system were victims rather than perpetrators of crime. In the absence of sufficient shelters for boys, **authorities detained abused boys and placed them in juvenile rehabilitation centers because they could not return to their families and shelter elsewhere was unavailable.**”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 9, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- **Bacha bazi**

- “[Y]oung boys reportedly continue to be at risk of *bacha bazi*, a practice in which boys are kept by powerful figures, who make them dance in female clothes for male audiences, and who use them for sexual exploitation. Impunity for sexual abuse of children is reported to remain a problem: most abusers are not arrested, and **there are reports of children raped with impunity by security officials and police officers.** Some children who are **prosecuted for “moral crimes” are reported to be survivors of abuse rather than perpetrators of crimes;** having reported instances of sexual abuse, they are perceived to have brought shame on their family and to be in need of punishment.”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 82-83, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“Government security forces reportedly recruited boys specifically for use in *bacha bazi* in every province of the country.”**

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 17, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- **“Many of the boys [engaged in the practice of *bacha bazi*] are reportedly either kidnapped, or sold by their impoverished families.** Although it occurs nationwide, the practice is reportedly most prevalent in conservative rural areas, particularly among Pashtun groups in the south and southeast and Tajik groups in the north.”

Source: Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [DFAT Country Information Report: Afghanistan](#), ¶ 3.80 – 3.81, 27 June 2019, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- **“Literally translated, *bacha bazi* means ‘playing with kids,’ and is slang for sexual slavery and child prostitution that thrives across Afghanistan [where] [p]repubescent boys between ages of 14 to 18 are sold to wealthy and powerful patrons for entertainment and illicit sex. [...] Beardless and effeminate boys are highly sought after by patrons, often powerful merchants or warlords who can indulge with impunity. Large halls are used as venues for the parties, where the boys dance clad in women’s clothing with bells tied to their feet and a scarf wrapped around their face as they parade for hours. The parties also provide an opportunity for buying and selling. Once the party concludes the boys are sold to the highest bidder or shared for sex. In return they are given small tokens of money and food. [...] This tradition is seeing a revival in the north of the country.** Former commanders in the Northern Alliance are a part of a syndicate that is resurrecting *bacha bazi*, which serves as a status symbol. For those who cannot afford to buy children, DVDs are sold openly on the streets. Some boys are sold by their parents, **others are lured from the streets with the promise of a better life. [...] Poverty and class has amplified the tradition, with destitute children or impoverished families selling their sons to survive.”**

Source: Roshni Kapur, *The Diplomat*, “[Bacha Bazi: The Tragedy of Afghanistan’s Dancing Boys](#)”, 23 August 2014, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- **Gender violence, including forced marriage and rape**

- **“1 in 3 girls are married before their 18th birthday.”**

Source: UNICEF, [The situation of women and children in Afghanistan: Facts and figures](#), 8 June 2018, last accessed: 21 September 2021

- **“Women and girls who flee their homes due to abuse or threats of forced marriage are often themselves accused of vaguely defined or even undefined “moral crimes,” including adultery (*zina*), or “running away from home.”**

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 59, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “The UNFPA Country Representative in Afghanistan noted that, **“The majority of reported cases of suicide and suicide attempts in Afghanistan are women.”** She also stated, “Gender-based violence is among the main causes for women’s suicides and self-immolation. **According to research, the most common reason for self-immolation is forced or child marriage.”**

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 59, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “International and local observers continued to **report widespread early and forced marriages throughout the country.** By law a marriage contract requires verification that the bride is 16 years old (or 15 years old with the permission of her parents or a court), **but only a small fraction of the population had birth certificates.”**

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 39, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “In various districts of the northern provinces, poor and poverty-stricken girls and children are being kidnapped and sold into prostitution. [...] **A heartbreaking story of an Afghan girl who was sold again and again at the hands of criminal mafia groups is indicative of the increasing violence against women. A young girl of poor parents, Benazir was 12 years old when she was forcefully married to an illiterate man. She remained with him for nine years and had four children. After nine years, her husband sold her to a human trafficker. He kept her for a month and sold her to another man; two months later she was sold to a fourth man and after a year she was resold to a criminal.** What happened to Benazir finally nobody knows but she is not the only victim of war criminals in her country. There are thousands of women and girls in Afghanistan whose lives are in danger. Cases of rape are in the thousands, torture and domestic violence in northern Afghanistan is being encouraged by mafia groups.”

Source: Musa Khan Jalalza, *Daily News*, “[Children, particularly orphans, face great risk in Afghanistan advocate says](#)”, 5 July 2011, last accessed: 24 September 2021

2. **Children reportedly continue to experience forced recruitment into Afghan security/police forces and the Taliban, indoctrination, and other violence associated with child soldiers, including serving as human shields and carrying out suicide attacks.**

According to sources, minors in Afghanistan are compulsorily recruited and forced to partake in military action, indoctrinated in madrasas to perpetrate jihad and other violence like suicide attacks, and made to serve as human shields for armed forces and other groups.

• **Recruitment generally, including the impact of the coronavirus (“COVID-19”) pandemic**

- “[From January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020,] **the Taliban were responsible for the recruitment and use of 230 children (88 per cent), all used in combat roles, for instance, to plant improvised explosive devices, to carry out suicide attacks and to participate in hostilities against government forces, as a result of which some were killed or maimed. [...]** Children aged from 13 to 17 years were used in combat and support roles.”

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 5-6, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- “[A]n increase in unemployment and poverty due to the COVID-19 pandemic have made children more vulnerable to recruitment and use by parties to the conflict, especially because they are forced to seek employment to support their families, [and in doing so attempt to join the ranks of parties to the conflict].”

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 14, 34 February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Throughout 2020, the Taliban, Afghan national security forces, and pro-government armed groups continued to recruit children. Anti-Government elements recruited and used children for both combat and service functions. [...] [T]he use of children by Afghan National Police for service and sexual purposes, and to a lesser extent Afghan National Army-Territorial Force and Afghan Local Police use of children for combat functions, remains of grave concern.”

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 33, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “According to UNAMA, the Taliban and ISIS-K continued to recruit and use children for front-line fighting and setting IEDs. While the law protects trafficking victims from prosecution for crimes committed as a result of being subjected to trafficking, there were reports the government treated child former combatants as criminals as opposed to victims of trafficking. Most were incarcerated alongside adult offenders without adequate protections from abuse by other inmates or prison staff. [...] UNAMA reported the Taliban deployed three boys in February [2020] to conduct a suicide attack against an ALP commander in Baghlan Province. One of the children accidentally detonated his IED before reaching the ceremony, killing all three children.”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 17, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “Poverty, unemployment and limited access to basic services, and the absence of social protection, have been key factors driving children to join parties to conflict. According to a February 26, 2020 report, the Taliban has nearly 50,000 children on a waiting list to be suicide ‘martyrs’. Their parents receive thousands of dollars as payment to use their child for this ‘holy cause.’”

Source: Sanchita Bhattacharya, *Eurasia Review*, “[Afghanistan: Children Under Threat – Analysis](#)”, 7 July 2020, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- **Recruitment for religious, ideological and terrorist purposes**

- “Anti-government armed groups recruit the children from religious schools (*madrasas*) to educate them the group’s ideologies, and after being brainwashed under the guise of Jihad, these children are used to carry out suicide bombing and other terrorist attacks.”

Source: UN Committee on the rights of the Child (CRC), [Report submitted by Afghanistan under article 8 \(1\) of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the](#)

[involvement of children in armed conflict, due in 2005](#), p. 5, 14 August 2020, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“Children have also reportedly been trafficked for the purposes of being recruited, trained and used in military operations by the Taliban, including being trained as suicide bombers.”**

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 86, 30 August 2018, last accessed 8 September 2021

- **“Nonstate armed groups, primarily the Taliban and Islamic State in Khorasan Province, accounted for most child recruitment and used children younger than age 12 during the year [2020]. Insurgent groups, including the Taliban, increasingly used children as suicide bombers.”**

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 2-3, last accessed: 23 September 2021

3. According to sources, children are at risk of being forced into dangerous labor, drug trafficking and other illicit activities.

Children, especially those in poverty or street children, are recruited or forced into debt bondage and other forms of forced work, including illicit activities like drug trafficking and prostitution. Survivors of trafficking or bonded labor may be more vulnerable to being re-trafficked or re-subjected to bonded labor.

- **Illicit activities like drug trafficking and prostitution**

- **“The majority of Afghans who fall victim to trafficking are reported to be children. They may be trafficked for the purposes of labour exploitation, in sectors of the economy such as agriculture, brick making, mining, construction, carpet weaving, domestic work and services industries. They may also be exploited in illicit sectors of the economy, such as drug smuggling and production, other criminal activities, forced combat and other forms of violence, and begging. [...] Children are reportedly sometimes sold by their families for financial gain or to settle debts. [...] Some Afghan families, including children, are reported to be trapped in cycles of bonded labour, including in brick-making factories.”**

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 86-87, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“The Government also reportedly arrested, imprisoned or otherwise punished persons who had fallen victim to trafficking, penalizing such persons for crimes such as prostitution or ‘moral crimes.’”**

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 88, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **Debt bondage and other forms of forced labor**

- **“UNHCR considers that people, especially women and children, in particular socio-economic circumstances that create vulnerabilities to trafficking or bonded labour, may be in need of international refugee protection on the basis of a well-founded fear of persecution at the hands of State or non-State actors for reasons of their membership of a particular social group or other relevant Convention grounds, depending on the individual circumstances of the case, combined with a general inability of the State to provide protection from such persecution where the actors of persecution are non-State actors. Individuals falling into the risk profile include survivors of trafficking or bonded labour who may be in a position of heightened vulnerability to being re-trafficked or being re-subjected to bonded labour. In addition, UNHCR considers that individuals who have already fallen victim to trafficking may be in need of international refugee protection on the basis of a well-founded fear of persecution at the hands of the State for reasons of their membership of a particular social group or other relevant Convention grounds, depending on the individual circumstances of the case.”**

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 88, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“Child labour reportedly remains widespread. Manifestations of child labour in Afghanistan are reported to include the worst forms of child labour, such as debt bondage and other forms of forced labour, the use of children in illicit activities including the drug trade, as well as the use of children in prostitution. Children are reportedly also engaged in hazardous work likely to harm their health, safety or morals, such as working in coal mines or brick kilns. Many child labourers are reportedly victims of sexual assault, abuse and violence. [...] Street children are reported to be among the most exposed and vulnerable groups in Afghanistan, with little or no access to government services; poverty and food shortages are reported to be key reasons for families to send their children on to the streets to beg for food and money.”**

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 81-82, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“While reliable figures on the number of street children are not available, the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and Disabled estimated that there are around six million street children in Afghanistan.[...] Some children were also reported to belong to begging rings. Estimates for the total number of children working in Kabul’s streets range from 50,000 to 60,000. Street children who work as vendors are particularly vulnerable to suicide attacks.”**

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 66, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“[C]hildren were exploited in bonded labor, where an initial debt assumed by a worker as part of the terms of employment was exploited, ultimately entrapping other family members, sometimes for multiple generations.”**

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 44, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “Child labor remained a pervasive problem ... [t]here was child labor in the carpet industry, brick kilns, coal mines, and poppy fields. **Children were also heavily engaged in the worst forms of child labor in mining, including mining salt; [...] transnational drug smuggling; and organized begging rings.**”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 45, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- **“Some children were forced by their families into labor with physical violence. Particularly in opium farming, families sold their children into forced labor, begging, or sex trafficking to settle debts with opium traffickers. [...] Children were also subject to forced labor in orphanages run by NGOs and overseen by the government. According to the International Labor Organization and UNICEF, millions more children were at risk of child labor due to COVID-19, because many families lost their incomes and did not have access to social support. Child labor was a key source of income for many families and the rising poverty, school closures, and decreased availability of social services increased the reliance on child labor. Many children already engaged in child labor were experiencing a worsening of conditions and working longer hours, posing significant harm to their health and safety. Aid and human rights groups reported that child labor laws were often violated, and children frequently faced harassment and abuse and earned very little or nothing for their labor. Gender inequalities in child labor were also rising, as girls were particularly vulnerable to exploitation in agriculture and domestic work.”**

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 46, last accessed: 23 September 2021

4. **According to sources, children face significant obstacles and dangers to access to education.**

Attacks on schools and students, forced school closures and quality of education are just some of the issues facing children in Afghanistan. Girls, especially those in rural areas, face threats and violence for attending school and many do not receive an education. Schools are also reportedly used for military purposes.

- **Attacks on teachers and schools**

- “[From January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020,] the country task force verified 132 attacks on schools and education personnel, including schools being attacked (29) and damaged (36), the killing, injury and abduction of education personnel (25), threats against education facilities and personnel (14) and attacks that may have been indiscriminate or disproportionate (28). These attacks occurred in 2019 (70) and 2020 (62), with the majority in the eastern (80), central (52) and north-eastern regions (44).

Armed groups were responsible for 93 attacks on schools and education personnel (70 per cent), which were attributed to the Taliban (78), ISIL-KP (8) and unidentified armed groups (7). The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces were responsible for 26 attacks, attributed to the Afghan National Army (17), the National Directorate for Security (3) and unidentified components of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (6). These attacks included damage to education facilities and property, intimidation of education personnel, raids and looting of education materials. The remaining attacks were attributed jointly to armed groups and the Afghan National Army (6), to international forces (4), to undetermined government forces (1), to cross-border shelling from Pakistan (1) and to unidentified perpetrators (1).

In addition, the Taliban continued to threaten and attack schools for girls and intimidate their personnel. In five attacks, they planted improvised explosive devices that damaged facilities, disrupted classes and impeded children's access to education."

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 9, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- **"Throughout [2020], the Taliban conducted 17 direct attacks on education, including arson, IED attacks, threats, abductions, and targeted killings of personnel.** For example, on 15 July in Takhar province, the Taliban set fire to a high school, entirely destroying the building, including the library and laboratory. The high school previously served a population of roughly 1,000 boys and girls. On 24 October in Balkh province, the Taliban shot and killed a schoolteacher who was on his way home from evening prayers, due to both his work with the Department of Education and because he had voiced anti-Taliban sentiments. From 1 January to 31 December, Taliban also conducted 13 attacks against Afghan national security forces that resulted in closure or incidental damage to 12 schools and injury or death of 18 students."

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 38, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- Incidents of conflict-related violence directly impacting access to education continue to be reported in all regions of the country. **The vast majority of reported incidents were attributed to AGEs, including the Taliban, and included burning of schools, targeted killings and intimidation of teachers and staff, IEDs inside or in the vicinity of schools, rocket attacks against educational facilities, and closure of schools, particularly girls' schools. Schools were reportedly also occupied and used for military purposes, compromising their protected status under international humanitarian law and depriving children of access to education.** Moreover, many schools are reported to remain closed in Afghanistan due to the prevailing local security conditions."

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 23-24, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **Girls face significant obstacles to education**

- **"AGEs are also reported to continue to carry out direct attacks against schools, teachers and students, especially in relation to education for girls. While the majority of reported attacks are attributed to the Taliban, groups affiliated to ISIS are also reported to forcibly close and attack schools and to threaten and intimidate teachers. Threats of crime and abuses by criminal gangs, such as kidnappings, acid attacks and sexual harassment, [...] keep children, especially girls, at home. Other reported obstacles to girls' education in particular include poverty, early and forced marriage, lack of family support, lack of female teachers, lack of sanitation facilities, lack of access to identity documents and long distances to the nearest school."**

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 82-83, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Concerns have been expressed about the fact that official government statistics for school attendance may significantly overestimate the number of children attending school in the country, as well as about the quality of education on offer. **School attendance by girls continued to be substantially lower than for boys, with girls in rural areas most likely to be out of school. High levels of insecurity are a major factor in hampering access to education, especially for girls.**”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 84-85, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Analysis by the World Bank shows wide variation from province to province in the ratio of girls versus boys attending school, [and] [t]hese disparities are mirrored in literacy statistics. [In 2017, Human Rights Watch published a report stating that] **in Afghanistan, only 37 percent of adolescent girls are literate, compared to 66 percent of adolescent boys. Among adult women, 19 percent are literate compared to 49 percent of adult men.**”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 83, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “[Under the Taliban regime, less than] **1 million children, all boys, were attending formal schooling**, [but] the number ha[d] increased to 7 million students, 30% of whom are girls, [since the fall of the regime]. [...] [However, in 2010] 5 million children in Afghanistan do not have access to education, approximately 43% of the total school-age population.”

Source: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, [Mission Report: Visit of the Special Representative for Children & Armed Conflict to Afghanistan](#), p. 10, 20-26 February 2010, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “**COVID-19 also increased violent attacks on schools and teachers, which disproportionately impacted girls’ access to education and vulnerability to child labor.** The UN Security Council reported that nine attacks against schools occurred between April 1 and June 30 [2020]. **Poverty and security concerns frequently lead parents to pull girls out of school before boys.**”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 46, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “On February 3, [2020], the Taliban **burned a girls’ school in Takhar Province**. In July the Taliban **burned a school in the same province after using it as cover to attack ANDSF**. On August 20, the Taliban prevented approximately 200 female university applicants in Badakshan Province from taking their university entrance exams by threatening them with fines.”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 18, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “UNICEF reported that approximately **3.7 million children, 60 percent of whom are girls, were not in school due to discrimination, poverty, lack of access, continuing conflict, and restrictions on girls’ access to education in Taliban-controlled areas, among other reasons.** Only 16 percent of the country’s schools were for girls, and many of them lacked proper

sanitation facilities.”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 37, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “An October 2017 Human Rights Watch report observed that the government provided **fewer schools for girls than boys** and that the **lack of basic provisions** in many schools for security, privacy, and hygiene, including boundary walls, toilets, and water, **also disproportionately affected girls.**”

Source: United States Department of State, [2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 32, last accessed: 23 September 2021

5. **According to sources, children, especially those whose family members are or were accused of the “wrong” political affiliation, are at high risk of abduction, detention or other violence as reprisal for their family’s connections.**

Unaccompanied or orphaned children are at risk of retaliation due to family associations, including children whose family members have been killed due to their affiliations. Detained juveniles frequently lack access to food, healthcare and education, and are often abused while in custody.

- **Abduction and detention**

- “The country task force verified the abduction of 69 children (60 boys and 9 girls), as young as 1 year old, in 2019 (14) and 2020 (55), with the higher numbers in the eastern region (24) and the northern region (21). **Most abductions were attributed to the Taliban (66), followed by pro-government militias (2) and the Afghan National Police (1).**”

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 11, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- “The ANDSF and AGEs are reported to abduct children for various purposes, including reprisals and punishment of the victim’s family members. **Children are also reported to be abducted and/or killed on the basis of accusations of having assisted the opposing party.**”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 85, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “In January [2020], a three-year-old boy was kidnapped for ransom in Kabul. Businesswomen reported they **faced a constant threat of having their children abducted and held for ransom.** The UN secretary-general’s 2019 Children and Armed Conflict Report, released in June, cited **14 verified incidents of child abduction, all of which were of boys as young as 11.** Of the abductions, **12 were attributed to the Taliban and one each to the ANP and a pro-government militia.**”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 16, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “The Taliban also maintain illegal detention facilities throughout the country. The ANDSF discovered and liberated several Taliban detention facilities during the year [2020] and **reported**

that prisoners included children and adults accused of moral crimes or association with the government.”

Source: United States Department of State, [2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 5, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- **Abuse in custody**

- “UNAMA/OHCHR interviewed 85 children [between 10 and 18 years old] deprived of liberty for security- or terrorism-related offences. [...] UNAMA/OHCHR recorded 241 instances of detention of children from the 85 interviewees. **As was the case in the 2017-2018 monitoring period, children remain at a higher risk to be subjected to torture and ill-treatment appears to continue in [National Directorate of Security] (“NDS”) custody.”**

Source: UNAMA and OHCHR, [Preventing Torture and Upholding the Rights of Detainees in Afghanistan: A Factor for Peace](#), p. 20, February 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- “Authorities generally lacked the facilities to separate pretrial and convicted inmates **or to separate juveniles according to the seriousness of the charges against them.** [...] Reports indicated children in juvenile rehabilitation centers across the country **lacked access to adequate food, health care, and education.** Detained children frequently did not receive the presumption of innocence, the right to know the charges against them, access to defense lawyers, and protection from self-incrimination. The law provides for the creation of special juvenile police, prosecution offices, and courts. [In 2020], **[d]ue to limited resources, special juvenile courts functioned in only six provinces (Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Kandahar, Nangarhar, and Kunduz).**”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 5-6, 8, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “There were reports of **children being abused while in custody, to include girls who were raped and became pregnant.** Following the capture of ISIS-K fighters and family members in 2019, children of ISIS-K fighters (including girls married to ISIS-K fighters) were sometimes detained in special centers. The government registered some of these children in school, but **most were not registered and did not receive adequate care.**”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 9, last accessed: 23 September 2021

6. **According to sources, lack of access to immunization and attacks against healthcare facilities remain ongoing issues in Afghanistan.**

To date, children in Afghanistan are at risk of polio and other illnesses due to inadequate medical care, poor living conditions, and campaigns against vaccines and healthcare facilities by the Taliban and other entities.

- **Children are at risk of severe illness due to living conditions across Afghanistan**

- “Despite improvements in some areas, decades of war and conflict have had a severe impact on the health sector. **Afghanistan continues to have one of the highest rates of child malnutrition in the world**”

Source: Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [DFAT Country Information Report: Afghanistan](#), ¶ 2.23, 27 June 2019, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- “Progress has been uneven, benefitting mostly areas that are easier to reach. Afghans living in rural, remote areas or insecure districts are less likely to have access to basic services. For generations who have grown up in the midst of conflict, this has compounded people’s lack of access to — and knowledge about — education, healthcare, water and sanitation and their rights. Women and girls, in particular, continue to be an extremely vulnerable population. [As of June 2018:]
 - 1 in 18 Afghan children fail to reach their first birthday
 - 46% of children aged 12 to 23 months have not received their basic vaccines
 - 2 in 5 children cannot reach full mental or physical development
 - **1 in 4 children** is underweight
 - **1.3 million children under 5 years old need treatment for acute malnutrition**
 - **Almost 50% of improved drinking water sources are contaminated with fecal matter**
 - **Over 4 million people still practice open defecation**
 - **Afghanistan is still battling polio with 14 cases reported in 2017**
 - **31% of adolescent girls are anemic.**”

Source: UNICEF, [The situation of women and children in Afghanistan: Facts and figures](#), 8 June 2018, last accessed: 21 September 2021

- “Generally, children suffer in conflict in different ways to adults because they are physically weaker and their physical, mental, and psychosocial development are heavily affected by the conditions they experience as children. **Thus, a large number of children die in conflict as a result of malnutrition, disease, and lack of health care than from bullets or bombs.** [...] A large number of people live in conflict affected districts with extremely constrained access to health services.”

Source: Mohammad Zahir Akbari, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, “[Afghanistan: the front rank of Dangerous Conflict Zone for Children](#)”, 17 February 2019, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- **Attacks against healthcare facilities in order to prevent the administration of vaccines**

- “[T]he Taliban continued to impede polio vaccination campaigns in the areas under their control. A total of 85 polio cases affecting children were documented in 2019 (29) and 2020 (56). The cases were documented in five regions, including in the southern (58), western (12), south-eastern (8), eastern (4) and northern (3) regions. The spread of the polio cases in these regions can be attributed to many factors, including the Taliban’s ban on house-to-house campaigns in 2018, which has continued in many Taliban-controlled areas, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the cancellation of the vaccination campaign scheduled for July 2020. **As a result of these bans, approximately 2.5 million children missed being vaccinated on National Immunization Day in 2019, a number that increased to approximately 3.3 million children in 2020 in the affected regions.** For example, on 20 January 2020, a polio vaccinator from the non-governmental organization Hewad was killed in Paktiya Province after the Taliban threatened Hewad if it did not stop its polio vaccination programme.”

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 12, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- “In 2015, UNAMA reported that 90,000 children missed immunization and recorded 125 incidents against health facilities.”

Source: UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF and OCHA, [Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key Trends and Incidents Affecting Children’s Access to Healthcare and Education in Afghanistan](#), p. 2, April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“Afghanistan is one of the world’s two remaining countries with endemic polio**, with 20 polio cases reported in 2015 and 28 in 2014 and 14 cases in 2013. Throughout 2015, access and insecurity continued to affect program delivery. A total of 89,873 children could not be vaccinated during the December 2015 Sub-National Immunization days. These children are mostly from Kunar (12,638), Nangarhar (59,650) and Helmand (13,493) provinces. The districts with major access challenges include Chaparhar, Dehbala, Kot, Batikot and Achin districts in Nangarhar province, mainly due to insecurity.”

Source: UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF and OCHA, [Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key Trends and Incidents Affecting Children’s Access to Healthcare and Education in Afghanistan](#), p. 11, April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“[On] May 12, 2020, [m]ilitants in Police uniform attacked the maternity ward in Dasht-e-Barch Hospital killing 24, including newborn babies.** The three attackers, who gained access dressed as Police officers, were all killed by security personnel.”

Source: Sanchita Bhattacharya, *Eurasia Review*, [“Afghanistan: A Child’s Nightmare – Analysis”](#), 17 May 2021, last accessed: 24 September 2021

7. According to sources, civilians, especially children, are vulnerable to injury, maiming and death due to being located in active armed conflict zones, as well as to unique issues relating to internal displacement.

Along with the typical dangers associated with living in armed conflict zones, e.g. suicide attacks and targeted or deliberate killings, children are particularly at risk of harm due to not understanding the gravity of encountering explosive remnants of war (“ERWs”) or improvised explosive devices (“IEDs”). ERWs left behind from previous and current conflicts continue to cause serious harm to children. Internal displacement and lack of proper documentation also poses additional risks of danger and human rights abuses to children.

- **Issues relating to living in active armed conflict zones**

- “[In the first half of 2021,] civilian casualties increased for women, girls, boys, and men. [...] UNAMA documented **record numbers of girls and women killed and injured, as well as record numbers of overall child casualties**. Compared with the first six months of 2020, the number of civilian female children (girls) and female adults (women) killed and injured each nearly doubled. Male child (boy) civilian casualties increased by 36%, and adult male (men) civilian casualties increased by 35%.”

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021](#), p. 1, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“Explosive remnants of war were the third leading cause of child casualties [from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020], with 717 children killed (197) and maimed (520) (12 per cent). In many cases, children were killed or maimed because they touched an explosive remnant of war that they found or they played with the devices or even carried them home.”**

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 7, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- **“[Between January 1 to June 30, 2021,] [w]omen and children continued to suffer disproportionately from the use of [indirect weapons, mainly mortars and artillery] in populated areas, comprising nearly two-thirds of civilian casualties from indirect fire during ground engagements, mainly from the munition impacting them while they took shelter in their homes.”**

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021](#), p. 8, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- **“Children continued to suffer disproportionately from explosive remnants of war, comprising 80 per cent of all civilian casualties from these dangerous devices. Children frequently find explosive remnants of war and think they are toys or scraps of metal, attempting to play with or sell them until they detonate, killing and injuring themselves, and those nearby. Children who survive encounters with explosive remnants of war live with enduring detrimental impact on their quality of life due to loss of limbs, eyesight, other serious injuries, and psychological trauma.”**

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 32, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“There was crying and clamor of the children. They screamed ‘please help us.’ I then saw my son and four other children were wounded. They were all in critical condition. I took my son. There was blood all over his body. I took water and washed his wounds. His stomach, heart and lungs were wounded by the explosion. We would have liked to transfer him to the district hospital, but he died after a few minutes. When he died, he was looking towards me, straight into my eyes, but unable to speak.” – Father of a boy killed by an explosive remnant of war (UNAMA telephone interview with father of victim on 14 September 2020)**

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 30, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **Issues relating to living in politically/militarily contested areas or when living as displaced persons**

- **“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. 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.”**

Source: European Asylum Support Office, [Afghanistan – Key socio-economic indicators: Focus](#)

[on Kabul City, Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat City](#), p. 15, August 2020, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- “According to NRC, the IDPs that fled to Herat have been living in dire conditions in makeshift shelters. 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.”

Source: European Asylum Support Office, [Afghanistan – Key socio-economic indicators: Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat City](#), p. 20, August 2020, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- “[A 2016-17 Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey] found that 61% of urban children were registered at birth, compared to only 22% of rural children. In an email to EASO in 2018, **UNHCR stated that very few children have tazkera**. A *tazkera* is ‘necessary’ in order to access a range of public services, such as education.”

Source: European Asylum Support Office, [Afghanistan – Key socio-economic indicators: Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat City](#), p. 21, August 2020, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- “During [2020], NGOs and government offices reported high numbers of returnee families and their children in border areas, specifically Herat and Jalalabad. The government attempted to follow its policy and action plan for the reintegration of Afghan returnees and IDPs, in partnership with the United Nations; **however, the government’s ability to assist vulnerable persons, many of them unaccompanied minors, remained limited, and it relied on the international community for assistance.**”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 40, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “NGOs noted the **lack of official birth registration for refugee children as a significant challenge and protection concern**, due to the risk of statelessness and potential long-term disadvantage.”

Source: United States Department of State, [2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 25, last accessed: 23 September 2021

8. **There are several international frameworks and guidelines already in place with respect to children and unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan and children generally, specifically situations under which they should be considered for international refugee protection.**

International conventions and organizations have established conditions and considerations with respect to the asylum and refugee claims of children.

- **Afghanistan-specific guidelines**

- **“Depending on the particular circumstances of the case, UNHCR considers that children falling in the following categories may be in need of international refugee protection:**
 - a) Children from areas where either AGEs or elements of the ANSF use underage recruitment;

- b) Survivors and those at risk of harmful traditional practices, including child marriage and forced marriage;
- c) Children from social milieus where bonded or hazardous child labour is practised;
- d) Survivors and those at risk of violence against children (including sexual and gender-based violence), including children from social milieus where such violence is practised;
- e) School-age children, particularly girls; and
- f) Children against whose parents the ANSF or AGEs are seeking to exact reprisals, and children who are accused by the ANSF or AGEs or having assisted the opposing party.”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 86, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Depending on the individual circumstances of the case, [children] may be in need of international protection on the basis of a well-founded fear of persecution at the hands of State or non-State actors for reasons of their membership of a particular social group, their religion, their (imputed) political opinion, or other relevant Convention grounds, combined with a general inability of the State to provide protection from such persecution where the actors of persecution are non-State actors.”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 86, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **International guidelines**

- **“Street children may be considered a particular social group. Children living and/or working on the streets are among the most visible of all children, often identified by society as social outcasts. They share the common characteristics of their youth and having the street as their home and/or source of livelihood.** Especially for children who have grown up in such situations, their way of life is fundamental to their identity and often difficult to change. Many of these children have embraced the term “street children” as it offers them a sense of identity and belonging while they may live and/or work on the streets for a range of reasons. They also may share past experiences such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, and exploitation or being orphaned or abandoned.”

Source: UNHCR, [Guidelines on International Protection No. 8: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, HCR/GIP/09/08](#), p. 20, 22 December 2009, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “The specific circumstances facing child asylum-seekers as individuals with independent claims to refugee status are not generally well understood. Children may be perceived as part of a family unit rather than as individuals with their own rights and interests. This is explained partly by the subordinate roles, positions and status children still hold in many societies worldwide. **The accounts of children are more likely to be examined individually when the children are unaccompanied than when they are accompanied by their families. Even so, their unique experiences of persecution, due to factors such as their age, their level of maturity and development and their dependency on adults have not always been taken into account. Children may not be able to articulate their claims to refugee status in the same way as adults and, therefore, may require special assistance to do so.**”

Source: UNHCR, [Guidelines on International Protection No. 8: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, HCR/GIP/09/08](#), p. 3, 22 December 2009, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “As noted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the refugee definition: **‘must be interpreted in an age and gender-sensitive manner, taking into account the particular motives for, and forms and manifestations of, persecution experienced by children.** Persecution of kin; under-age recruitment; trafficking of children for prostitution; and sexual exploitation or subjection to female genital mutilation, are some of the child-specific forms and manifestations of persecution which may justify the granting of refugee status if such acts are related to one of the 1951 Refugee Convention grounds. **States should, therefore, give utmost attention to such child-specific forms and manifestations of persecution as well as gender-based violence in national refugee status-determination procedures.’**”

Source: UNHCR, [Guidelines on International Protection No. 8: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, HCR/GIP/09/08](#), p. 4, 22 December 2009, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “Alongside age, factors such as rights specific to children, a child’s stage of development, knowledge and/or memory of conditions in the country of origin, and vulnerability, also need to be considered to ensure an appropriate application of the eligibility criteria for refugee status.”

Source: UNHCR, [Guidelines on International Protection No. 8: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, HCR/GIP/09/08](#), p. 4, 22 December 2009, last accessed 23: September 2021

- “These guidelines cover all child asylum-seekers, including accompanied, unaccompanied and separated children, who may have individual claims to refugee status. Each child has the right to make an independent refugee claim, regardless of whether s/he is accompanied or unaccompanied. “Separated children” are children separated from both their parents or from their previous legal or customary primary caregivers but not necessarily from other relatives. In contrast, “unaccompanied children” are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.”

Source: UNHCR, [Guidelines on International Protection No. 8: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, HCR/GIP/09/08](#), p. 5, 22 December 2009, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “Children may also be subjected to specific forms of persecution that are influenced by their age, lack of maturity or vulnerability. The fact that the refugee claimant is a child may be a central factor in the harm inflicted or feared. This may be because the alleged persecution only applies to, or disproportionately affects, children or because specific child rights may be infringed. UNHCR’s Executive Committee has recognized that child-specific forms of persecution may include under-age recruitment, child trafficking and female genital mutilation (hereafter “FGM”). Other examples include, but are not limited to, family and domestic violence, forced or underage marriage,³⁸ bonded or hazardous child labour, forced labour,³⁹ forced prostitution and child pornography. Such forms of persecution also encompass violations of survival and development rights as well as severe discrimination of children born outside strict family planning rules and of stateless children as a result of loss of nationality and attendant rights.”

Source: UNHCR, [Guidelines on International Protection No. 8: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, HCR/GIP/09/08](#), p. 9-10, 22 December 2009, last accessed: 23 September 2021

E. APPENDIX

1. Minors reportedly continue to experience sexual abuse and violence by various actors, including Afghani security forces, the Taliban and relatives.

- “Children may also be trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced marriage. **Afghan women, girls and boys are reported to be especially vulnerable to trafficking for sexual exploitation.**”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 70-71, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “**Police reportedly beat and sexually abused children.** Children who sought police assistance for abuse also reported being **further harassed and abused by law enforcement officials, particularly in *bacha bazi* cases**, which deterred victims from reporting their claims.”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 38, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “**In 2019 human rights defenders exposed the sexual abuse of at least 165 schoolboys from three high schools in Logar Province, alleging that teachers, principals, vice principals, fellow students, and at least one local law enforcement official participated in the abuse. The release of videos of some the rapes and exposure of the scandal led to at least five honor killings of the victims.**”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 38, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “Despite **consistent reports of *bacha bazi*** perpetrated by Afghan National Army, ANP, and Afghan Local Police officials, however, **the government has never prosecuted an official for *bacha bazi***. [...] **Some victims reported that authorities perpetuated abuse in exchange for pursuing their cases**, and authorities continued to arrest, detain, and penalize victims.”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 44, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “**Child abuse is an endemic problem throughout Afghanistan. ... Sexual abuse of children is pervasive – NGOs have reported that extended family members often abuse girls, while men outside their families more frequently abuse boys.** There have been credible reports of religious figures sexually abusing children of both sexes, and of security officials and those connected to the ANP raping children with impunity. **A 2017 AIHRC survey found that 13 per cent of children had been sexually assaulted, 44 per cent had experienced physical violence, and 44 per cent had experienced psychological or emotional violence.**”

Source: Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [DFAT Country Information Report: Afghanistan](#), ¶ 3.74, 27 June 2019, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “[P]laying with boys” or “having sex with boys” [is] an old and ugly Afghan tradition. **Orphan and poor children are picked up from the streets or purchased from their parents who agree to sell them to those wealthy males who are fond of homosexuality. [...] Keeping a boy or *Bacha Bereesh* (a boy without beard) is not illegal and thousands of wealthy people, businessmen and criminal gangs are involved with the play boy business across the country [...]** After the US invasion in 2001, sex trafficking in the country became a profitable business.”

Source: Musa Khan Jalalza, *Daily News*, “[Children, particularly orphans, face great risk in Afghanistan advocate says](#)”, 5 July 2011, last accessed: 24 September 2021

2. **Children reportedly continue to experience forced recruitment into Afghan security/police forces and the Taliban, indoctrination, and other violence associated with child soldiers, including serving as human shields and carrying out suicide attacks.**

- “[A] concerning **increase in recruitment** and use [of children by armed groups] was verified [from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020], which may have been **exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.**”

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 5, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- “A persistent concern was the absence of an effective investigation and disciplinary mechanism for commanding and recruitment officers found responsible for child recruitment and use, and for the falsification of national identification cards (*tazkera*), which may lead to identity manipulation of underage recruits, despite the criminalization of these acts in the revised Penal Code. **Widespread impunity continued, which, combined with the absence of systematic referral pathways for the reintegration of children, as well as of handover protocols for children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, for children screened out through the child protection units and for children released from detention facilities, contributes to exacerbating their vulnerabilities. Indeed, as a result, they are exposed to new grave violations, particularly recruitment and use.** The release of children and inadequate programmatic response by the Government for their reintegration posed significant challenges to their protection and well-being in the absence of a comprehensive reintegration framework and handover protocol.”

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 14-15, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- **The recruitment and use of children by all parties to the conflict, both in support and combat roles, is reported to be observed throughout the country. [...] AGEs are reported to continue to recruit children, both boys and girls, to carry out suicide attacks and as human shields,** as well as to participate in active combat, to plant IEDs, to smuggle weapons and uniforms, and to act as spies, guards or scouts for reconnaissance.”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 44-45, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “UNHCR considers that, depending on the specific circumstances of the case, ... **children living in areas under the effective control of AGEs, or in areas where pro-government forces, AGEs and/or armed groups affiliated to ISIS are engaged in a struggle for control, may be in need of international refugee protection on the ground of their membership of a particular social group**

or other relevant grounds. Depending on the specific circumstances of the case, ... **children living in areas where ALP commanders are in a sufficiently powerful position to forcibly recruit community members into the ALP may equally be in need of international refugee protection on the ground of their membership of a particular social group or other relevant grounds. ... Children who resist forced recruitment may also be in need of international refugee protection on the ground of their (imputed) political opinion or other relevant grounds.”**

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 46, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces were responsible for the recruitment and use of 22 boys, attributed to the Afghan National Police (8), Afghan National Army Territorial Force (4), the Afghan Local Police (1), and the Afghan Local Police and pro-government militias jointly (9). In addition, the recruitment and use of eight boys was attributed to pro-government militias.”

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 5-6, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- “There have been reports of both the Taliban and ISIS-affiliated groups **using schools and madrassas as places for the indoctrination and recruitment of children for use in combat and in combat support functions.**”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 23, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “[P]oor socioeconomic conditions [may] result in families compelling their children to join the Afghan National Security Forces for financial reasons; [recruitment also comes from] lack of adequate capacity and/or information within the [ANSF] for assessing the age of children; lack of clear policy directives; widespread impunity and lack of accountability; limited availability of birth certificates; identity documents that are easily falsifiable. Concerns also remained over the informal use of children for security-related tasks by the ANSF, including the [Afghanistan National Police] (“ANP”) and [Afghanistan Local Police] (“ALP”).”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 46, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “[R]ecruitment and use of children by parties to the conflict more than doubled [from January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2015].”

Source: UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF and OCHA, [Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key Trends and Incidents Affecting Children’s Access to Healthcare and Education in Afghanistan](#), p. 4, April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Reports of recruitment and use of children have been received from all regions. ... **Internally Displaced People (IDP) and isolated populations in conflict-affected areas in particular are at risk of child recruitment into non-state armed groups, including the Taliban, Haqqani network, Hezb-i-Islami and Jamat Sunat al-Dawa Salafia. The Taliban have been listed in the 8th report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict for the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18 years (A/63/785- S/2009/158). Documented cases show that children are also used as suicide bombers by the Taliban. Children involved range from 13-16 years of age and,**

according to testimonies of failed bombers, have been tricked, promised money or otherwise forced to become suicide bombers.”

Source: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, [Mission Report: Visit of the Special Representative for Children & Armed Conflict to Afghanistan](#), p. 5, 20-26 February 2010, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“As revealed from the WoA Assessment, COVID-19 pandemic increased risks for child recruitment and use of children by armed groups, child marriage, and child labour. In its yearly report [for 2020], UNAMA similarly noticed that with the rise of unemployment and poverty, many children became ‘forced to seek employment in order to support their families, and in doing so attempt to join the ranks of parties to the conflict.’”**

Source: European Asylum Support Office, [Afghanistan – Security Situation](#), p. 75, June 2021, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “[A] growing number of minors are recruited to fight in the intensifying war, according to experts. [...] **Even some of the youngest, though not armed, were useful. A six-year-old boy walked between checkpoints with a flashlight to keep soldiers awake.** [...] ‘Whether children are part of a security force, formally or informally, they are still being denied access to education, and to the normal life to which they are entitled,’ [said Danielle] Bell, [human rights director for the UN in Afghanistan].”

Source: Sune Engel Rasmussen, *The Guardian*, [“‘My grandsons’ fight to avenge their father’: child soldiers in Afghanistan”](#), 25 May 2016, last accessed: 24 September 2021

3. According to sources, children are at risk of being forced into dangerous labor, drug trafficking and other illicit activities.

- “The [labor] law prohibits children younger than 14 from working under any circumstances. The law was openly flouted, with poverty driving many children into the workforce. [...] Labor inspectors do not have legal authority to inspect worksites for compliance with child labor laws or to impose penalties for noncompliance. Other deficiencies included the lack of authority to impose penalties for labor inspectors, inadequate resources, labor inspector understaffing, inspections, remediation, and penalties for violations.”

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 45, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- **“The green eyed Haseeb Ahmed, 15, an orphan, left his native place Mazr-i-Sharif due to war and is now doing cobbler job on a roadside in Kabul to feed two young brothers, two sisters and an elderly widowed mother. Heseeb said his father was a labour and supported his family with his meager income but was killed in the long war in Afghanistan and he has to take over responsibility of feeding the family. Now being an elder member of his family, he has no other option but to polish shoes of the people. Talking to APP, he said he also wanted to study and go to school like other boys but could not continue his study owing to poverty and to support his family. [...] This was not only the one story of Haseeb Ahmed, but one could find hundreds of thousands of Haseebs’ who were compelled to leave schools and do a labour job in their tender age.”**

Source: Ilyas Khan, *Associated Press of Pakistan*, “[Haseeb like millions Afghan children paying heavy price of wars due to poverty](#)”, 11 September 2021, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- “For nearly four years, 16-year-old Ali Mohammad Reza put on a plastic helmet fitted with a small battery-powered torch and headed into the Dar-e-Sof coal mines of Samangan province in northern Afghanistan. He was one of hundreds of youths who risk their lives working in mines across the country. **Children, some as young as 4, are employed because they are able to squeeze into small spaces underground and extract the ‘black gold’, a primary source of fuel in Afghanistan.** [...] ‘The deeper you go, the more you are exposed to these very harmful gasses. It was very hard to breathe and it made our heads hurt. I couldn’t sleep at night. I would have body pains and nausea,’ Mohammad said. He said injuries were common and there were times he would remain in bed for weeks while he recovered. [...] Financial hardship forces hundreds of children to remain in the workforce, especially in the mining sector where they are exploited for their size. [...] ‘Years of increasing poverty normalised child labour in the country, but the effects of the pandemic means more families feel forced to send their kids to work, Mariam Atahi, spokeswoman at Save the Children in Afghanistan, said. [...] Mine owners continue to flout safety regulations and labour laws to maximise profit in the absence of government control.”

Source: Hikmat Noori, *The National News*, “[Afghanistan's child miners face life-threatening conditions below ground](#)”, 2 December 2020, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- “The continuity [of] war has caused a huge number of children [to be] subject to hard labor in Afghanistan. [...] Thousands of children have lost their fathers, elders and [are] so compelled to fight for living. For example, yesterday Tolonews gave out an interview conducted with [a] few child laborers in Kandahar province: ‘Five years ago my father passed away, so we don’t have anyone else at home and I am the worker, and I must find money - there is no other way for me.’”

Source: Mohammad Zahir Akbari, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, “[World Day against Child Labor: Children Shouldn’t Work in Fields but on Dreams](#)”, 16 June 2019, last accessed: 24 September 2021

4. According to sources, children face significant obstacles and dangers to access to education.

- “[From January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020], the country task force verified **elevated numbers of attacks on schools (132)**, hospitals (165) and protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals [throughout Afghanistan].”

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 5, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- “Children have a universal right to education, regardless of their circumstances. **In conflict zones such as Afghanistan, direct attacks and threats against teachers, schools, and students, as well as indiscriminate attacks causing incidental damage to the same all hinder children’s access to education.** UNAMA is deeply concerned about the **severe impact of the armed conflict on education country-wide, particularly for girls, who are more likely to be kept out of school when faced with violence and insecurity.**”

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 37, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Halima Sadaf, a member of Jawzjan provincial council, said that the number of schools closed in the province is more than 70, **adding the militant group would even behead those who try to study individually**. He added that more than 30,000 students cannot attend schools due to bans. Azizi said that only four schools that are located in the areas under government control are open. According to officials in Jawzjan province, **the Islamic State burnt down a girl’s school and destroyed 11 other schools in Darzab district. The group reportedly warned locals not to send their daughters to school. They also reportedly sent out announcements where they said schools in Darzab must be closed.**”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#) p. 84-85, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Police forces and AGEs in Afghanistan are listed by the UN Security Council according to Resolution 1612 among parties that ... engage in attacks on schools and/or hospitals in situations of armed conflict.”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 45, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “In 2015, 139,000 children were out of school and UNAMA documented 132 conflict incidents against schools.”

Source: UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF and OCHA, [Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key Trends and Incidents Affecting Children’s Access to Healthcare and Education in Afghanistan](#), p. 2, April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “From 1 January 2013 through 31 December 2015, UNAMA and UNICEF recorded a **growing number of incidents of threats and intimidation against education personnel. Throughout 2015, these incidents increasingly impeded children’s access to education and resulted in school closures, bans on girls’ education and extortion.**”

Source: UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF and OCHA, [Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key Trends and Incidents Affecting Children’s Access to Healthcare and Education in Afghanistan](#), p. 8, April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “In 2015, UNAMA and UNICEF documented 19 incidents where AGEs directly or indirectly limited girls’ access to education. **These incidents included direct restrictions such as: complete bans on education for girls, restrictions of girls’ attendance beyond 4th or 6th grade or explicit prohibitions of girls attending school without a female teacher. The 19 incidents also included other forms of violence which impeded girls’ access to education such as; threats and intimidations, two school-burnings, two improvised explosive device attacks and one incident of abduction.** Of the 14 incidents of threats and intimidation, nine incidents of threats against teachers and students led to the closure or partial closure of 213 schools (including 94 mixed schools that were closed to girls only), affecting at least 50,683 girls. The vast majority of these closures and partial closures took place in Nangarhar and Herat provinces.”

Source: UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF and OCHA, [Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key Trends and Incidents Affecting Children’s Access to Healthcare and Education in Afghanistan](#), p. 8, April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “On 29 January 2015, a group of [AGEs] entered a girls’ high school and detonated an IED. **They left a warning letter stating that girls’ schools were ‘brothels’ and that the community should stop sending girls to school** ... the detonation destroyed three classrooms and created a deep sense of insecurity among parents and students.”

Source: UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF and OCHA, [Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key Trends and Incidents Affecting Children’s Access to Healthcare and Education in Afghanistan](#), p. 16, April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “From 28 April to 16 September 2015, **the Afghan Local Police occupied a school as a base for their operations, and used the chairs and desks as firewood for cooking purposes.** During the occupation, approximately 700 students (340 girls and 360 boys), and 20 teachers (including eight female teachers) were denied access to the school.”

Source: UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF and OCHA, [Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key Trends and Incidents Affecting Children’s Access to Healthcare and Education in Afghanistan](#), p. 19, April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “**Disruption of education services due to conflict related violence is unfortunately not new in Afghanistan. Schools, particularly girls’ schools, continue to close their doors due to insecurity, direct threats and attacks by parties to conflict.** [...] The next generation could be compromised if we cannot protect children’s rights to education” – Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative for the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict.”

Source: UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF and OCHA, [Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key Trends and Incidents Affecting Children’s Access to Healthcare and Education in Afghanistan](#), p. 6, April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “In addition to barriers to education arising from insecurity, throughout 2015, Anti-Government Elements deliberately restricted access of women and girls to education, including closure of girls’ schools, **prohibition of education beyond 4th or 6th grade and complete bans on education for women and girls.**”

Source: UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF and OCHA, [Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key Trends and Incidents Affecting Children’s Access to Healthcare and Education in Afghanistan](#), p. 6, April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “[Between Sept. 2010 to Dec. 2014, UNAMA documented] 883 incidents affecting children’s access to education:
 - **89% of all documented attacks against schools were attributed to [armed opposition groups], including the Taliban.**
 - Attacks included the use of IEDs, burning of school buildings and property, forced closure of schools and the killing, injuring, intimidation and abduction of education personnel.
 - More than 90 incidents of burning of school buildings and property were documented; the majority attributed to the Taliban and local elements opposed to girls’ education.”

Source: UNAMA, UNICEF, OCHA, [Bearing the Brunt of Conflict in Afghanistan: 4-year analysis of six grave violations against children in armed conflict \(Sept. 2010-Dec. 2014\)](#), last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“Violent attacks on schoolchildren, particularly girls, hindered access to education, particularly in areas controlled by the Taliban. The Taliban and other extremists threatened and attacked school officials, teachers, and students, particularly girls, and burned both boys’ and girls’ schools.”**

Source: United States Department of State, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 37, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “UNICEF reported on 192 attacks on schools and school personnel for 2018, which exceeded almost three times the number of attacks registered in 2017. **The attacks were mostly attributed to the Taliban and comprised targeting of schools or killing, injury or abduction of personnel.** UNICEF noted that many parents took their children out of school.

In 2019, schools were attacked in election-related violence as well as general insecurity and cross-fire. **The 2019 presidential election period revealed a peak in targeting school facilities due to the use of government-owned schools as polling centres and caused a ‘long-term impact’ on the access to education.**

The Taliban and other armed groups, e.g. the ISKP, were reported to oppose girls’ access to education and target their attacks against girls’ schools, female students and their teachers. For instance, in August 2019, the local media ... reported that Taliban militias set on fire a school in Shakardara district, Kabul province, in which at least 700 girls were enrolled. In November 2019, VOA reported on the death of nine primary school children on their way to school in Takhar province, due to a Taliban-planted land mine explosion.”

Source: European Asylum Support Office, [Afghanistan – Key socio-economic indicators: Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat City](#), p. 46, August 2020, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “UNAMA expressed concern about an **emerging trend in 2018 of AGEs attacking or threatening to attack education facilities as a form of reaction to pro-government forces’ military operations.** In June 2018, the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) group (see Anti-government elements) expressly **declared its intention to target schools** (particularly girls’ schools) following aerial operations by international and Afghan national security forces in Nangarhar province. ISKP subsequently **conducted 34 attacks on schools, causing 25 deaths and 39 injuries.** Three complex attacks accounted for the majority of casualties in 2018: an attack on the Provincial Education Department in Jalalabad city on 11 June; an attack on the Jalalabad city Education Department on 11 July; and an attack on a Community Nursing and Midwifery Education Institute on 28 July. **ISKP’s campaign also included the placement of IEDs around the proximity of schools to either cause casualties among students and education personnel, or to terrify the community and prevent the education of children.** [...] ISKP’s attacks on education facilities in the east of the country during the second half of the year significantly impeded children’s access to education. UNAMA also documented 10 incidents of Taliban threatening, **closing, burning or targeting schools with rockets, mortars or IEDs in response to military operations or certain actions taken by the Government.** In March 2018, following a decision by the Department of Education to pay the salaries of teachers by bank transfer instead of cash payments – a measure that would reduce the Taliban’s ability to extract ‘taxes’ from teachers – the Taliban issued a directive ordering the closure of 342 schools throughout Kunduz province.”

Source: Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [DFAT Country Information Report: Afghanistan](#), ¶ 2.38 – 2.39, 27 June 2019, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- “The HRW report [on the state of female education in Afghanistan, from 2017] identified a number of barriers that continued to prevent girls accessing schools and remaining through secondary education. **Insecurity and violence stemming from both the ongoing conflict and general lawlessness, including the threat of abduction, kidnapping, acid attack, and sexual harassment, remained the largest single factor.** Other dissuading elements included discriminatory attitudes towards female education by both government officials and community members; early marriage; poverty and child labour; a lack of female teachers; administrative barriers (including requirements for identification and transfer letters); and excessive distance between homes and schools.”

Source: Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [DFAT Country Information Report: Afghanistan](#), ¶ 2.36, 27 June 2019, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “Often uneducated, the women face few options if their husbands die, **while children end up working out of necessity and never receive an education.** “What will happen to these children when they grow up? **Their parents are taken away and they are left alone in poverty and hardship, and they have never been in school,”** Habibzai told Arab News. [...] As [Hanan Habibzai’s] family was displaced by the Afghan-Soviet war of the 1980s, Habibzai knows from his own experience what hunger and poverty mean. **The situation in the country has become even worse now, he said, after the US-led invasion to oust the Taliban in 2001.**”

Source: Sayed Salahuddin, *Arab News*, “[Afghan refugee helping war widows escape poverty cycle](#)”, 16 January 2021, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- “**Around eight million children in Afghanistan are deprived of education due to several challenges of insecurity, conflicts and poverty, authorities said on Friday.** [...] Afghan children bear different types of challenges including poverty, hard work and lack of proper educational system.”

Source: *Afghanistan Times*, “[Afghanistan- 8 million Afghan children deprived of education](#)”, 20 November 2020, last accessed: 24 September 2021

5. According to sources, children, especially those whose family members are or were accused of the “wrong” political affiliation, are at high risk of abduction, detention or other violence as reprisal for their family’s connections.

- “Children are reportedly abducted as a form of reprisal against family members working for or allegedly supporting the Government or international forces.”

Source: UNHCR, “[UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#)”, p. 41, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “[In 2020,] UNAMA also verified 19 incidents of abduction of children involving 55 children, 18 of which were attributed to the Taliban and one to a pro-government armed group.”

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 32, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “[In 2017,] UNAMA documented 18 incidents involving the abduction of 42 children (40 boys and two girls) by Anti Government-Elements. For instance, on 2 November [2017], in Bilchiragh district, Faryab province, the Taliban abducted four boys, aged between four and 10 years, to force their

fathers, both commanders of pro-government armed groups, to withdraw from the area and stop fighting. In addition, UNAMA attributed the abduction of one boy, on [March 25, 2017], in Samagan province, to a pro-Government armed group.”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 85, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “UNHCR considers that separate considerations apply to the situation of family members of individuals who are or who are perceived to be associated with the government, as well as family members of individuals who have or are perceived to have wealth. Where family members, including children, are at risk of kidnapping for ransom for reason of their being related to such individuals, they **may, depending on the individual circumstances of the case, be in need of international refugee protection on the basis of a well-founded fear of persecution at the hands of State or non-State actors for reasons of their membership of a particular social group or other relevant Convention grounds, combined with a general inability of the State to provide protection from such persecution.**”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 100, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “AGEs have been reported to target family members of individuals with the above profiles, both as acts of retaliation and on a “guilty by association” basis. **In particular, relatives**, including women and **children**, of government officials and members of the ANSF **have been subjected to harassment, kidnappings, violence, and killings.**”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 41, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “According to UNAMA sources, **in July 2014 the Taliban was accused of beheading a 15-year-old boy who was the son of a former ANA officer.**”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 42, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “At least 656 boys were held in Juvenile Rehabilitation Centers (JRCs) across Afghanistan for their alleged association with [armed opposition groups] between September 2010 and February 2013. **44% of interviewed juvenile detainees (44 out of 105) reported ill treatment or torture (source: UNAMA Treatment of Conflict-Affected Detainees in Afghan custody report, February 2015).**”

Source: UNAMA, UNICEF, OCHA, [Bearing the Brunt of Conflict in Afghanistan: 4-year analysis of six grave violations against children in armed conflict \(Sept. 2010-Dec. 2014\)](#), last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Detention of children for alleged association with armed groups remains a concern. The detention of children in Afghanistan on security-related charges is in contravention to provisions of the Afghan juvenile code. [...] Of particular concern are children arrested under security-related charges held by the National Directorate of Security (NDS), which also receives cases arrested by ISAF.”

Source: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, [Mission Report: Visit of the Special Representative for Children & Armed Conflict to Afghanistan](#), p. 7, 20-26 February 2010, last accessed: 8 September 2021

6. According to sources, lack of access to immunization and attacks against healthcare facilities remain ongoing issues in Afghanistan.

- **“The wide prevalence of open defecation contributes to making diarrhea disease the second most common cause of death among young Afghan children.** While 80 per cent of families ha[d] access to toilets [as of December 2019], only about half of them are designed to keep waste separate from human contact.”

Source: UNICEF, [Preserving hope in Afghanistan: Protecting children in the world’s most lethal conflict](#), p. 29, December 2019, last accessed: 21 September 2021

- “[A]gainst a backdrop of conflict and insecurity [in 2020-21], children were living in communities that were running out of water because of drought. They were missing out on life-saving vaccines. **Many were so malnourished and lied in hospital beds, too weak to grasp an outstretched finger.**”

Source: Ilyas Khan, *Associated Press of Pakistan*, [“Haseeb like millions Afghan children paying heavy price of wars due to poverty”](#), 11 September 2021, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- “Over the past decade, the Taliban released several statements in support of the polio eradication program. For example, on 13 May 2013, the Taliban issued a public statement expressing support of polio vaccination campaigns with a caveat that campaigns must be led by Afghan personnel and respect Islamic values. **In 2015, however, UNAMA, WHO and UNICEF documented 22 incidents directly affecting vaccination campaigns, mainly attributed to Anti-Government Elements, including Taliban. This included killing, maiming and abduction of vaccinators, threats and intimidation against them, as well as destruction of vaccination kits.** Of the 22 incidents, ten took place in the eastern region.”

Source: UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF and OCHA, [Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key Trends and Incidents Affecting Children’s Access to Healthcare and Education in Afghanistan](#), p. 11, April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

7. According to sources, civilians, especially children, are vulnerable to injury, maiming and death due to being located in active armed conflict zones, as well as to unique issues relating to internal displacement.

- “[From January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020], the country task force verified 6,473 grave violations against 6,131 children (4,358 boys, 1,757 girls and 16 of sex unknown) aged from a few months to 17 years. Of these, 3,412 violations occurred in 2019 and 3,061 violations occurred in 2020. **Killing and maiming remained the most prevalent violation**, with a total of 5,770 children killed (1,635) and maimed (4,135) during the reporting period. **Of concern, the country task force noted that child casualties resulting from complex and suicide attacks (586) increased by 22 per cent compared with the previous two years. ... Armed groups were the main perpetrators of grave violations, predominantly the Taliban (2,730).** The numbers of grave violations attributed to government and pro-government forces were concerning, especially those attributed to the Afghan National Army (1,227), which have been on the increase.”

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 5, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- “[From January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020], [t]he country task force verified the killing (1,635) and maiming (4,135) of 5,770 children (4,016 boys, 1,738 girls and 16 of sex unknown) aged from a few months to 17 years, occurring in 2019 (3,151) and 2020 (2,619). **Child casualties constituted almost one third of all civilian casualties during the reporting period.** Despite a decrease in child casualties compared with the previous two years (6,241), which resulted partly from temporary ceasefires, the United States-Taliban peace agreement, the ongoing intra-Afghan peace negotiations and a reduction of military operations by some of the parties, one concerning trend was **that child casualties from complex and suicide attacks increased during the reporting period.**”

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#) p. 5, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- “[From January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020,] [a]rmed groups were responsible for **46 per cent of child casualties**, namely the killing (602) and maiming (2,031) of 2,633 children (1,946 boys, 684 girls and 3 of sex unknown), **with the vast majority attributed to the Taliban (2,178), followed by ISIL-KP (285), unidentified armed groups (166) and jointly to the Taliban and ISIL-KP (4). Government and pro-government forces were responsible for 35 per cent of child casualties**, namely the killing (745) and maiming (1,250) of 1,995 children (1,191 boys, 791 girls and 13 of sex unknown).”

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 7, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- “[From January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020,] [g]round engagements between government and pro-government forces and armed groups remained the leading cause of child casualties, with 2,410 children killed (575) and maimed (1,835) (42 per cent), followed by non-suicide attacks by armed groups involving the use of improvised explosive device, which accounted for 1,092 children killed (297) and maimed (795) (19 per cent). Of concern, **the country task force verified an increase in child casualties (1,092) resulting from non-suicide improvised explosive devices compared with the previous two years (1,062).**”

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 7, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- “[From January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020], [s]uicide and complex attacks by armed groups accounted for 10 per cent of child casualties, with 586 children killed (79) and maimed (507), marking a 22 per cent increase compared with the previous two years (482). For example, on 1 July 2019, the Taliban conducted a complex attack on the logistics and engineering hub of the Ministry of Defence in the Puli Mahmood Khan area, Kabul Province. Suicide attackers detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device near a fuel station, allowing two armed attackers with National Directorate for Security uniforms to enter the compound and open fire. **Approximately 300 students were in their classrooms in their school located in the building, from which the attackers also took up firing positions during the attack. Seven civilians, including 1 boy, were killed and 14 civilians, including 21 boys and 7 girls, were maimed, and six schools were damaged. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.**”

Source: UN Security Council, [Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary General](#), p. 8, 16 July 2021, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- **“Child casualties comprised 32 per cent of all civilian casualties, comprised of 20 per cent boys and 12 per cent girls.** Between 1 January and 30 June 2021, UNAMA documented 1,682 child casualties (468 killed and 1,214 injured), a 55 per cent increase compared to the first six months of 2020.¹⁰ This included 622 girl casualties (171 killed and 451 injured) and 1,041 boy casualties (293 killed and 748 injured). Girl casualties nearly doubled, marking the highest level ever recorded by UNAMA, and boy casualties increased by 36 per cent.

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021](#), p. 4-5, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- **“Children were on at least one occasion deliberately targeted.** The most shocking incident being the [May 8, 2021] attack outside the Sayed ul-Shuhada school in Kabul city, which resulted in more than 300 civilian casualties, mostly girls and young women, for which no party claimed responsibility.”

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021](#), p. 5, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- **“Children comprised 30 per cent of all civilian casualties in 2020, the same percentage as in 2019.** Between 1 January and 31 December 2020, UNAMA documented 2,619 child casualties (760 killed, 1,859 injured), a 17 per cent decrease in comparison to 2019. Girls comprised 32 per cent of all child casualties whereas boys constituted 68 per cent.”

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 30, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “In 2020, [AGEs] caused 42 per cent of all child casualties in 2020, amounting to 1,098 child casualties (281 killed, 817 injured). The Taliban was responsible for 36 per cent, ISIL-KP for two per cent and undetermined [AGEs] for four per cent.”

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 31, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Child Casualties from Explosion in Gelan District, Ghazni Province, 18 December 2020: On 18 December 2020, at approximately 13:30 hours, an explosion occurred near a rickshaw in the Aghu Jan area of Gelan district, Ghazni province. The blast killed one 18-year-old man and 11 children (six boys and five girls), ranging in age from a five-year-old girl to a 16-year-old boy. UNAMA also documented injuries to a salesman who was the driver of the rickshaw and 11 other children (six girls and five boys) all between the age of six and 11 years old. ... Information from the local community indicated that the rickshaw was driven by a shopkeeper who travels around villages to sell and buy items from residents. **Children had reportedly approached the shopkeeper with an explosive remnant of war that they wanted to sell to him as scrap metal. The shopkeeper reportedly refused to buy the ordnance and an argument ensued between him and the children which led to the detonation of the explosive remnant of war.** [...] NATO Resolute Support condemned the “indiscriminate killing” of children. [...] This incident highlights that parties to the conflict can, and must, do more to protect children from the harm that the armed conflict in Afghanistan causes, be it from explosive remnants of war, IEDs, or other incident types.”

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 33, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“The Taliban caused 45 per cent of all civilian casualties in 2020, and ISIL-KP was responsible for eight per cent.** UNAMA could not attribute the remaining nine per cent of civilian casualties caused by [AGEs] to either the Taliban or ISIL-KP. The number of civilian casualties attributed to these undetermined [AGEs] more than doubled in 2020, compared to 2019.”

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 41, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “I am deeply concerned about the impact on women and children, who made up 43 percent of all civilian casualties in 2020.” –Deborah Lyons, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 4, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- **“The conflict in Afghanistan continues to take the lives of children, and [in 2020] the country is one of the deadliest places in the world to be a child.** Children suffer protracted and extreme risk of harm, including killing and maiming from ground engagements, non-suicide IEDs, unexploded ordnance/explosive remnants of war and landmines, aerial attacks and abductions.”

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 30, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Sixty-four per cent of victims [of various incidents of armed conflict in 2020] indicated that the incident had affected their ability to participate in social and cultural activities such as going to a mosque for prayers, attending funerals and weddings, and spending time with relatives. One young man in the eastern region described the social consequences that his family suffered after the loss of his father in a targeted killing: ‘Following the incident, me and my siblings are now orphans. We feel also distant socially from our extended family as my father was an important link and was engaging more with other relatives and community members...Our social status was greatly affected following my father’s death. When he was alive, we were better connected with the outside world, including through participation in gatherings like weddings, extended family meetings and other social and cultural activities. Since his death, we are now being sidelined.’”

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 82, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Following the [February 29, 2020] United States-Taliban agreement, UNAMA documented a reduction in civilian casualties from large scale attacks in urban centres by Anti-Government Elements, especially the Taliban, and from airstrikes by international military forces. However, this was partially offset by **increases in civilian casualties from targeted killings by Anti-Government Elements, Taliban pressure-plate IEDs, and Afghan Air Force airstrikes, as well as a continuation of high levels of harm to civilians from ground engagements.**”

Source: UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2020](#), p. 11, February 2021, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “7,349 children [were] killed or injured in 3,911 separate incidents between Sept. 2010 and Dec. 2014
 - **51% (3,814) were perpetrated by [armed opposition groups] (including Taliban, Haqqani Network and Hizb-e-Islami); 17% (1,244) by ANSF and pro-government forces** (Including international military forces and pro-government armed groups/militias); and, 31% (2,291) by undetermined parties to the conflict (due to indirect fire, Explosive Remnant of War (ERWs) and cross-border shelling).
 - An estimated 521m² of land is contaminated with ERW. At least 1,275 children (887 boys, 154 girls and 234 sex undetermined) were killed or maimed in ERW incidents. **Child casualties consistently increased during the four years, reaching 81% of all reported ERW casualties in 2014.**”

Source: UNAMA, UNICEF, OCHA, [Bearing the Brunt of Conflict in Afghanistan: 4-year analysis of six grave violations against children in armed conflict \(Sept. 2010-Dec. 2014\)](#), last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “**Children are increasingly victims of IED attacks by non-state actors, including the Taliban**, but have also been caught in the cross-fire on several occasions between International Military (IM) forces and anti-Government elements (AGEs). **There are repeated reports of non-state actors’ deliberate use of children as human shields in addition to the regular practice of such groups of firing from heavily populated areas in contravention to relevant provisions of international humanitarian law.**”

Source: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, [Mission Report: Visit of the Special Representative for Children & Armed Conflict to Afghanistan](#), p. 4, 20-26 February 2010, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “The issue of civilian casualties, particularly child casualties, continues to be of great concern. With the deterioration of the security situation since the Special Representative’s last visit [in July 2008], **children have increasingly been victim of suicide attacks by Taliban and other anti-government elements (AGE) which targeted national and international security forces, government structures and associated individuals. Children have also suffered due to the lack of respect for the principle of distinction of civilians and combatants among AGE forces when they militarily engage national and international forces.** Children have also continued to be victim of air strikes and other ANSF and ISAF operations. The Special Representative noted that the UN had confirmed that 131 children were killed as a result of air strikes and 22 in night raid operations by ISAF and ANSF in 2009.”

Source: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, [Mission Report: Visit of the Special Representative for Children & Armed Conflict to Afghanistan](#), p. 8, 20-26 February 2010, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “**ERW caused disproportional harm to children, who constituted 80% of all civilian casualties from ERW [in 2020].** Moreover, as noted by UNAMA and UNOCHA, children injured by ERW suffer from long-lasting impacts of the injuries due to physical disabilities and psychological trauma. **AGEs were responsible for 42% of child casualties in 2020.** [...] Airstrikes constituted the fourth leading cause of child casualties (299 casualties, including 146 deaths and 153 injured).”

Source: European Asylum Support Office, [Afghanistan – Security Situation](#), p. 74, June 2021, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- “[In 2019], [m]edia regularly reported cases of **children killed and injured after finding unexploded ordinance**. [In the first six months of 2019,] [c]hildren comprise[d] **84 percent of civilian casualties from ERWs**. In one incident on April 14, 2019 near a high school in Laghman Province, **an ERW killed seven boys and maimed eight others when they began to play with it.**”

Source: United States Department of State, [2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 16, last accessed 23 September 2021

- “On April 2, [2018], Afghan Air Force helicopters struck a madrassa in Dasht-e Archi District, Kunduz Province, in an operation targeting Taliban forces. **The strike caused at least 107 casualties, according to UNAMA, including 81 children.**”

Source: United States Department of State, [2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan](#), p. 13, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- “[UNAMA] reiterates concern that [in the first six months of 2018,] **children again comprised 89 per cent of civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war.**”

Source: UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), [Midyear Update on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 June 2018](#), p. 3, 15 July 2018, last accessed: 9 September 2021

- “**On May 8, 2021**, terrorists carried out a Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device attack in front of the Sayed Al-Shuhada School in the Afghan capital city, Kabul, killing at least 68 children and injuring 165 others. **On April 25, 2021**, seven civilians including two children were killed in an Afghan Air Force airstrike in the Darawolang village of Jalrez District of Wardak Province. **On April 10, 2021**, a roadside bomb killed two children and injured a woman in the Zwandohadira area of Arghandab District, Kandahar Province. [...] **December 18, 2020**: At least 15 children were killed when a motorbike laden with explosives blew up near a religious gathering in Gilan District of Ghazni Province. The children had gathered at a home to recite verses of the Holy Quran, a regular activity on Friday, when the blast took place. **October 24, 2020**: 24 people including teenaged students were killed in a suicide blast at the Kawsar-e-Danish education centre in Kabul. Islamic State claimed responsibility in a statement on Telegram, without providing evidence. **May 12, 2020**: Militants in Police uniform attacked the maternity ward in Dasht-e-Barch Hospital killing 24, including newborn babies. The three attackers, who gained access dressed as Police officers, were all killed by security personnel. **June 20, 2020**: At least three children were killed in a mine explosion in Paikamari village in Ferozkoh city of Ghor Province. **June 18, 2020**: A mortar bomb blast inside a seminary in the Ishkamish District of Takhar Province killed nine seminary students. Six students were also injured in the explosion.”

Source: Sanchita Bhattacharya, *Eurasia Review*, “[Afghanistan: A Child’s Nightmare – Analysis](#)”, 17 May 2021, last accessed: 24 September 2021

- “**June 20, 2020**: At least three children were killed in a mine explosion in Paikamari village in Ferozkoh city of Ghor Province. **June 18, 2020**: A mortar bomb blast inside a seminary in Ishkamish District of Takhar Province killed nine seminary students. Six students were also injured in the explosion. **April 1, 2020**: A roadside bomb killed six children while they were travelling with their family in a minivan in Helmand Province. **February 12, 2020**: Five children were killed and three sustained injuries as a mine went off in Dasht-e-Archi District of Kunduz Province. [...] 152 children were killed (and 265 were injured) in Afghanistan in terrorism-linked incidents in the first three

months of 2020. [...] **November 27, 2019:** Eight children were killed when the vehicle they were travelling in hit a land mine in Kunduz Province. **November 4, 2019:** Four children were killed in mine blast in an unspecified location of Baghlan Province. **November 2, 2019:** Nine children were killed when a mine exploded as they walked to school, in an unspecified location of Takhar Province. **July 25, 2019:** Three children, along with six women were killed in a roadside mine blast in the Wazir area of Khogyani District of Nangarhar Province. **May 9, 2019:** Four children were killed in an explosion triggered by an Improvised Explosive Device explosion in Dawlatabad District of Faryab Province. **April 14, 2019:** Seven children were killed while they were playing outside their houses, when a discarded mortar shell blew up in Dasram area, a village in the outskirts of Mihtarlam city in Laghman Province. [...] **Fatalities alone are no measure of the quantum of suffering inflicted on the children of Afghanistan: physical disability, recruitment by militants, destruction of education system, drug addiction, child labour, physical and sexual abuse, and the sheer, crippling exposure to the brutalities of war, of personal loss, and of relentless uncertainty, have scarred generations.”**

Source: Sanchita Bhattacharya, *Eurasia Review*, “[Afghanistan: Children Under Threat – Analysis](#)”, 7 July 2020, last accessed: 24 September 2021

8. There are several international frameworks and guidelines already in place with respect to children and unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan and children generally, specifically situations under which they should be considered for international refugee protection.

- “Asylum claims made by children including any examination of exclusion considerations for former child soldiers, need to be assessed carefully and in accordance with the UNHCR Guidelines on child asylum claims.”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 86, 30 August 2018, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “In the case of unaccompanied and separated children from Afghanistan, UNHCR considers that in addition to the requirement of meaningful support of the child’s own (extended) family or larger ethnic community in the area of prospective relocation, it must be established that relocation is in the best interest of the child. The return of unaccompanied and separated children to Afghanistan is furthermore subject to the minimum safeguards identified in the 2010 *Aide-mémoire: Special Measures Applying to the Return of Unaccompanied and Separated Children to Afghanistan*.”

Source: UNHCR, [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), p. 86, 19 April 2016, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- “Special measures for unaccompanied and separated children:
 - (i) The Government of (sending country) will ensure that unaccompanied and separated children are not returned to Afghanistan, unless return is decided upon in a formal procedure which contains all necessary safeguards, assesses all solutions available to a child, and ensures that the child’s best interest is a primary consideration. The child shall be fully informed and consulted at all stages of this process and provided with appropriate counselling and support.
 - (ii) The Government of (sending country), with the cooperation of the Government of Afghanistan, will ensure that genuine efforts are made to trace family members. If family members are successfully traced, the Government of (sending country) in cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan will ensure through an individual assessment that the family is willing and able to receive the child. The outcome of this assessment (where applicable) will inform the decision on return.

(iii) Where family tracing is unsuccessful, return to a child-care institution in Afghanistan may be considered as a last resort option. In such a case, full documentation of tracing efforts should be handed over to the caregiver in Afghanistan, to facilitate continuation of tracing efforts after return. The Government of (sending country) will ensure in cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan that specific and adequate reception and care arrangements are put in place prior to return. As a minimum, reception and care arrangements should include:

- Receiving the child at the airport followed by immediate access to appropriate accommodation, support for basic needs, access to education and health care.
- The appointment of a caregiver with appropriate qualifications and training, including in child-protection, who has been formally assigned responsibility for the child and is able to exercise legal capacity where necessary.
- An individual plan for the child's sustainable reintegration, drawn up in collaboration with the child and his/her guardian in (sending country) and which is based on an assessment of access upon return to food, housing, health care, education, vocational training and employment opportunities. The Government of (sending country), working with the Government of Afghanistan, will ensure this plan is formally shared with the above-mentioned caregiver in Afghanistan.
- Adequate and ongoing post-return evaluation."

Source: UNHCR: [Aide-mémoire: Special measures applying to the return of unaccompanied and separated children to Afghanistan](#), p. 2, 20 August 2010, last accessed: 8 September 2021

- "Even at a young age, a child may still be considered the principal asylum applicant."

Source: UNHCR, [Guidelines on International Protection No. 8: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees](#), HCR/GIP/09/08, p. 5, 22 December 2009, last accessed: 23 September 2021

- "Both objective and subjective factors are relevant to establish whether or not a child applicant has a well-founded fear of persecution. An accurate assessment requires both an up-to-date analysis and knowledge of child-specific circumstances in the country of origin, including of existing child protection services."

Source: UNHCR, [Guidelines on International Protection No. 8: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees](#), HCR/GIP/09/08, p. 7, 22 December 2009, last accessed: 23 September 2021