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# Afghanistan: Development, UK aid, and the future

## Summary

- 1 The withdrawal of US and coalition forces and the Taliban capture of Kabul
- 2 UK aid spending
- 3 Aid to post-Ghani Afghanistan
- 4 Progress since 2001
- 5 Future needs, future threats

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## Summary

On 15 August 2021, the Taliban captured Kabul. The Presidency of Ashraf Ghani collapsed after he left the country.

US and coalition forces had been in the process of withdrawing from Afghanistan, with the intention of completing this process by 11 September 2021. Some troops have now been deployed to the country to help evacuate diplomatic staff, foreign nationals and Afghan civilians employed by the coalition.

The Taliban's effective control of Afghanistan could have significant consequences for the delivery of aid, and the maintenance of development progress achieved since 2001. Afghanistan remains one of the world's [least developed countries](#), according to UN measurements.

Previous international development spending from the UK had sought to ensure the Governments of Ghani and his predecessor, Hamid Karzai, would have capacity to maintain security and ensure that Afghanistan [did not act as a sanctuary for terrorist and other extremist groups](#). UK aid helped deliver essential services, drive economic growth, and address the causes of instability.

Since 2001, around 150,000 British service personnel have served in Afghanistan. Of these, 457 were killed. Since the US-led invasion in 2001, an estimated [241,000 combatants \(including UK and other forces\), civilians, aid workers and others have died](#) in the Afghanistan and Pakistan conflict zone.

This briefing summarises the amount of aid provided by the UK and its coalition partners, progress made since 2001, the potential impact of Taliban rule, and how aid may now be delivered and refocused in Afghanistan.

Updates on the governance of Afghanistan can be found in the Library briefing, [Afghanistan: Fall of the Government and the transition of power](#).

## Progress since 2001

Since 2001, around [\\$65 billion in aid](#) has been provided to Afghanistan, including [£3.5 billion from the UK](#) (around 8 percent of the total). UK aid has focused on [improving governance and providing humanitarian assistance](#).

Notable improvements include the [increased participation of girls in school](#), though their participation remains at a lower levels than boys, and [greater political representation](#) for women.

While the country is [mineral rich](#), much of its population [remains dependent on agriculture](#) and the Government has struggled to raise sufficient revenue to cover its security and civil functions. Currently, [80 percent of its budget](#) is funded by international donors. Opium production also [remains high](#), and is a [significant income source for the Taliban](#).

The country had developed a [relatively diverse and independent media](#), but [corruption](#) and [election fraud](#) remained significant concerns despite coalition efforts to strengthen Afghan democracy.

## Planned commitments to Afghanistan

The UK and its partners intended to continue providing aid to the Government of Ashraf Ghani once coalition forces had left. For 2021, the UK [pledged £155 million](#) in aid, a reduction from the £290 million it delivered in 2019. The aid was intended to focus on education, child mortality, infrastructure, and the pandemic. The UK also announced £15 million in emergency funding to the World Food Programme to address food shortages in the country.

UK aid and development assistance was [subsequently increased in August 2021 to £286 million for 2021](#) (see below).

Many donors, including the UK, had made their aid commitments conditional on seeing improvements in [Afghanistan's governance and human rights record](#).

## The impact of greater Taliban influence and control

The Taliban controlled almost all of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 and had a [repressive rule](#) that neglected basic social services, restricted the rights of women, and conducted extra-judicial killings and punishments.

During the second round of the Doha Peace talks, beginning in 2018, Taliban representatives have suggested a willingness to [moderate their stance on some issues](#), such as girls' education and allowing NGOs to continue to work. However, many of these commitments remain at the general level and are likely to represent a position adopted for diplomatic negotiations rather than a change in policy. In some parts of Helmand Province, for example, the Taliban [has already closed schools to girls](#). Other schools have been subject to [deadly attacks](#).

Years of conflict, the impact of the pandemic, ongoing violence and weak governance mean Afghanistan will continue to face significant development challenges.

Minority groups are also likely to come under increased threats if order is weakened. Most Hindus and Sikhs have already left the country, and the Hazaras, who are mostly Shia Muslims in a [Sunni-majority country](#), have been subject to [violent attacks](#) by the Taliban and other groups.

## Aid, humanitarian assistance and the Taliban

In August 2021, the UN Security Council called for the [continued delivery of humanitarian aid and access of humanitarian workers to the country](#), a position supported by the UK and US.

### UK aid spending

The Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, has said the UK will work with partners to hold the Taliban to account and seek to [encourage the establishment of an inclusive Afghan Government](#). Measures to enforce this may include sanctions or holding back aid. The US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, has [adopted a similar position](#).

Addressing the Commons on 18 August 2021, the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, said UK humanitarian and development assistance to Afghanistan would be [increased to £286 million in 2021](#). The Government will also seek international support to deliver humanitarian projects in the wider region.

In September 2021, the Government announced that up to [£30 million of this funding](#) would be available to Afghanistan's neighbours to support regional stability and support refugees. £10 million will be available to the UN Refugee Agency and its partners to [provide urgent humanitarian assistance](#). This is the first tranche of the £286 million of funding.

### Statements by G7 Leaders

In 2021, the UK holds the G7 Presidency. The Government has said it will use its Presidency, in addition to its UN Security Council Membership, to [“address the humanitarian plight” of Afghanistan](#). The G7 Meeting in August called for its members to cooperate together and with neighbouring countries to Afghanistan [to support Afghan refugees and host communities](#). Leaders also reaffirmed their commitment to protecting the development progress made since 2001 in areas such as women's rights.

### Delivery of aid by UN agencies and NGOs

UN agencies such as the World Food Programme and UNICEF [say they intend to remain in Afghanistan](#) to provide and coordinate aid. However, the UN Secretary General has said [some reprisals against UN staff by the Taliban have taken place](#).

There may also be some individual agreements that allow some services and NGOs to remain effective—the Taliban has [made an agreement with Unicef](#) to allow it to provide schools. The [Halo Trust has also been allowed to conduct mine clearance](#) work.



# 1 The withdrawal of US and coalition forces and the Taliban capture of Kabul

During the draw-down of coalition forces in Afghanistan, the Taliban staged a rapid advance and captured the Afghan capital, Kabul, on 15 August 2021. It is now in [effective control of Afghanistan](#), holding all major cities and border crossings.<sup>1</sup>

The Taliban is expected to form a government, following talks in Kabul. Taliban spokespeople have said this will be an “open, inclusive Islamic Government.” Which groups will be included within it, is currently uncertain.<sup>2</sup>

Both the UK and US have said they would not accept the Taliban as the legitimate Government of Afghanistan if it took power by force and fails to uphold the basic rights of Afghans, including women and girls.<sup>3</sup>

The Library briefing, [Afghanistan: Fall of the Government and the transition of power](#) provides further detail on recent developments.

Prior to the Taliban’s capture of Kabul, local militia groups and former warlords, many organised along ethnic lines, had [been regrouping and remobilising](#).<sup>4</sup> The continuing presence of [Islamic State in the east](#) of the country, and the diverging interests of neighbouring countries, means Taliban rule may not be stable. Lack of central government control over the regions, continued conflict, or [return to civil war](#), remain possibilities.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> BBC News, [Mapping the advance of the Taliban in Afghanistan](#), 15 August 2021

<sup>2</sup> The Guardian, [Taliban declares “war is over in Afghanistan” as foreign powers exit Kabul](#), 16 August 2021; Al-Jazeera, [Afghanistan under the Taliban: What do we know so far?](#), 17 August 2021

<sup>3</sup> US Department of State, [Secretary Antony Blinken with Jake Taper of State of the Union](#), 15 August 2021; Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [If the Taliban abuse basic human rights, they cannot expect legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people or the international community](#), 16 August 2021

<sup>4</sup> Gandhara, [Afghanistan sees resurgence of warlords, in familiar echo of civil war](#), 22 April 2021

<sup>5</sup> The Independent, [What is the relationship between the Taliban and ISIS?](#), 16 August 2021; Reuters, [Russia beefs up Tajik base, warns of ISIS fighters in Afghanistan](#), 28 July 2021; Stimson Center, [ISKP and Afghanistan’s future security](#), 6 August 2021; BBC News, [Afghanistan heading for civil war—UK Minister](#), 13 August 2021; The Guardian, [Taliban in power may find themselves fighting their own insurgents](#), 18 August 2021

## 2 UK aid spending

Afghanistan has a high-level of aid dependency. Grants had financed around 75 percent of public spending under the Presidency of Ashraf Ghani (2014-21).<sup>6</sup>

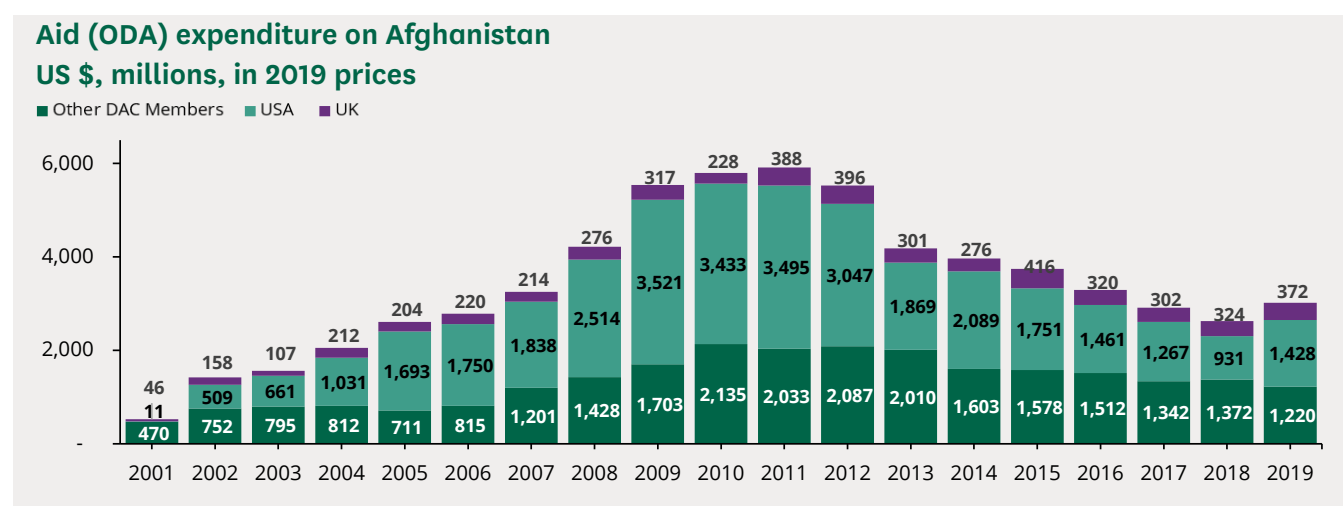
### 2.1 Spending to 2019

The UK Government provided [£3.5 billion of Official Development Assistance \(ODA\)](#) to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2021.<sup>7</sup>

ODA refers to aid intended to promote the economic development and the welfare of developing economies. Such assistance must be reported to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The OECD publishes levels of ODA spending by the thirty members of its [Development Assistance Committee \(DAC\)](#). These include France and the USA, but excludes states such as China, which is also a significant aid donor.

From 2001 to 2019, [DAC members delivered US \\$65 billion in ODA to Afghanistan](#) (2019 prices). The US was the largest donor, providing 54 percent of ODA over the period. The UK has provided around 8 percent.



Note: Does not include funding by multilateral, non-DAC member countries or private donors.

Source: OECD, [Aid \(ODA\) Disbursements to countries and regions. \[DAC2a\]](#), accessed 9 July 2021

<sup>6</sup> WBG, [Afghanistan: Public expenditure update](#), 2019, p6

<sup>7</sup> HL Deb, [24 June 2021](#), c 158GC; FCDO, [UK to provide £30 million of life-saving supplies for Afghan refugees](#), 3 September 2021

Afghanistan is one of the largest recipients of UK bilateral ODA in Asia, commonly receiving the second highest amount in the region. The figures below show aid delivered through bilateral channels (excluding, for example, multilateral aid spent by the World Bank).

From 2009 to 2019, Afghanistan received 12.6 percent of UK bilateral ODA to Asia, above India (12.2 percent) and behind Pakistan (15.5 percent).

### Top five recipients of UK bilateral ODA in Asia, 2009-2019 £ millions, not adjusted for inflation

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total	% Bilateral aid to Asia
Pakistan	£139	£193	£207	£189	£338	£266	£374	£463	£402	£331	£305	£3,208	15.5%
Afghanistan	£208	£152	£264	£274	£212	£198	£300	£235	£227	£249	£290	£2,610	12.6%
India	£408	£421	£283	£292	£268	£279	£186	£93	£90	£95	£108	£2,522	12.2%
Bangladesh	£160	£148	£230	£196	£272	£208	£164	£149	£176	£190	£256	£2,149	10.4%
Syria	£1	£1	£1	£40	£139	£130	£258	£352	£314	£231	£223	£1,688	8.2%

Note: Includes bilateral funding only. Does not include multilateral aid—that which is given to international organisations such as the World Bank. Most multilateral funding is controlled by the bodies themselves, rather than the UK.

Source: FCDO, [Table A4B. Total UK Bilateral ODA by country—Asia](#), July 2021

## 2.2

## Intended plans for 2021/22

### Most commitments pre-dated the Taliban's capture of Kabul in mid-August 2021

At the Afghanistan Conference, held in Geneva in November 2020, the UK Government originally [pledged £155 million in aid](#) for 2021, compared to the £290 million it delivered in bilateral aid in 2019. The UK also pledged £15 million in emergency support to the UN World Food Programme. In several years, the UK has [exceeded its aid pledges to the country](#)—for example, the UK's pledge of £750 million for 2016-2020 was exceeded by £75 million.<sup>8</sup>

In August 2021, the Prime Minister said UK aid would [be increased to £286 million in 2021](#) (see section 3.2).

Aid intended to focus on reducing child mortality rates, ensuring access to education, supporting infrastructure, and addressing the pandemic.

In June 2021, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) confirmed that Afghanistan [would be one of 34 countries that will receive bilateral ODA](#) from the Department in 2021/22.<sup>9</sup>

Section 3.4 discusses the potential form aid to Afghanistan may take now that the Taliban have captured Kabul.

<sup>8</sup> FCDO, [UK pledges £155 million aid to support peace and stability in Afghanistan](#), 24 November 2020

<sup>9</sup> [Foreign Secretary to International Development Committee](#), 3 June 2021

## Conditions of UK aid

While the Presidency of Ashraf Ghani remained in place, the UK [said its funding after 2021](#) would be “closely linked” to the progress of peace negotiations with the Taliban and advances in poverty reduction, human rights, democratic governance and the protection of women and minorities.<sup>10</sup> This in line with the [Afghanistan Partnership Framework \(APF\)](#), which Afghanistan under President Ghani, and donor countries, were party to.<sup>11</sup>

## UK aid reductions

Some UK programmes have been subject to reductions or delays due to the Government’s [decision to reduce aid spending in 2021](#) from 0.7 percent to 0.5 percent of Gross National Income in response to the pandemic’s impact on the UK’s economy and public finances.<sup>12</sup>

For example, [War Child UK](#) report that a delay to funds from UK Aid Match means the charity will receive £0.5 million of funding in April 2022, rather than July 2021. This will impact on the provision of vocational training for Afghan children.<sup>13</sup> Women for Women International report a [female empowerment project is also to be closed](#), impacting on 6,000 women.<sup>14</sup>

In August 2021, the FCDO announced that UK scholarships for Afghan students would be paused because of the conflict in Afghanistan. Around 35 people were affected.<sup>15</sup> Following criticism, the Prime Minister said the Government [would try and ensure the students get visas](#) to travel to the UK. Students had feared the scholarships would make them Taliban targets.<sup>16</sup>

The FCDO state they have “by and large” [protected programmes](#) in Afghanistan, but its focus on the pandemic had meant some changes.<sup>17</sup>

The UK Government does not expect partners funded by the FCDO to remain in any areas [where they cannot operate safely](#) or without interference.<sup>18</sup> Greater Taliban influence is likely to lead to further changes and disruptions to UK aid programmes in the country.

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<sup>10</sup> FCDO, [UK pledges £155 million aid to support peace and stability in Afghanistan](#), 24 November 2020

<sup>11</sup> 2020 Afghanistan Conference, [APF](#), November 2020

<sup>12</sup> Commons Library, [Reducing the UK’s aid spending in 2021](#)

<sup>13</sup> War Child UK, [UK aid match funding delay](#), 25 May 2021

<sup>14</sup> [Women for Women International written evidence to the IDC](#), May 2021

<sup>15</sup> BBC News, [UK scholarships for Afghan students paused](#), 15 August 2021

<sup>16</sup> The Guardian, [Boris Johnson intervenes over visas for Afghan students](#), 15 August 2021

<sup>17</sup> HL Deb, [26 May 2021](#), c982

<sup>18</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [The UK and Afghanistan: Government response](#), 12 March 2021, p16

International commitments pre-date the Taliban's capture of Kabul in mid-August 2021

## Wider international reductions

In the November 2020 pledging conference, [international donors committed around \\$12 billion for Afghanistan to 2024](#). This represented a drop of around \$3.2 billion from that pledged for 2016-2020. Like the UK, donors put conditions on funding, in attempts to insert leverage into then-peace process between the Taliban and Government of Ashraf Ghani.<sup>19</sup>

While the US initially said it would hold back half of the \$600 million it pledged for 2021, making it dependent on progress in peace talks, in June the Biden Administration said the funds [would now be committed](#).<sup>20</sup>

## 2.3

## Priorities of UK aid spending: 2001 to 2019

UK aid mainly focused on supporting the functioning of the Afghan Government and providing humanitarian assistance. It also sought to cut poverty, reduce threats to the UK from extremism, and discourage illegal immigration.<sup>21</sup> It also sought to counter the flow of drugs out of Afghanistan, by providing alternatives to poppy cultivation.<sup>22</sup>

In 2019, 44 percent of UK bilateral ODA extended to Afghanistan was for government and civil society programmes, and 22 percent on humanitarian assistance. Note these figures, shown in the table below, include money spent within an accounting period and exclude amounts returned or unspent.<sup>23</sup>

In 2001/2 and 2002/3, humanitarian assistance constituted the largest proportion of bilateral aid spending by the Department for International Development (DFID). However, aid to support governance, civil society, and security has constituted the largest proportion of UK commitments since 2003/4.<sup>24</sup>

UK aid to Afghanistan is primarily delivered through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) and UN Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF). UK aid to support the country's response to the coronavirus pandemic was directed through both funds.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Reuters, [Foreign aid to Afghanistan could reach \\$12 billion over four years, some with conditions](#), 24 November 2020

<sup>20</sup> White House, [Fact sheet: Continued US support for a peaceful, stable Afghanistan](#), 25 June 2021

<sup>21</sup> Department for International Development (DFID), [Afghanistan: Country profile](#), July 2018

<sup>22</sup> HL Deb, [11 July 2018](#), c938

<sup>23</sup> FCDO, [Statistics on international development: Final UK aid spend 2019](#), 9 March 2021

<sup>24</sup> Figures to 2009/10 relate to DFID bilateral spending only. PQ 46224 [[Afghanistan: Overseas aid](#)], 15 March 2011; DFID, [Statistics on international development: Final aid spend 2018](#), 2019, p40; DFID, [Operational plan Afghanistan 2011-2015](#), June 2013, section 4

<sup>25</sup> PQ 5185 [[Afghanistan: Coronavirus](#)], 1 June 2021

<b>UK bilateral ODA to Afghanistan, by sector, in 2019</b>		
<b>Amounts extended (£, thousands)</b>		
	Amount	% Spend
<b>Government and civil society</b>		
Participation in international peacekeeping operations	58,554	18.6%
Public sector policy and administrative management	50,581	16.0%
Removal of land mines and explosive remnants of war	9,000	2.9%
Civilian peace-building, conflict prevention and resolution	4,343	1.4%
Elections	4,073	1.3%
Security system management and reform	3,269	1.0%
Public finance management (PFM)	2,521	0.8%
Decentralisation and support to subnational government	2,033	0.6%
Ending violence against women and girls	973	0.3%
Human rights	673	0.2%
Democratic participation and civil society	559	0.2%
Anti-corruption organisations and institutions	546	0.2%
Legal and judicial development	481	0.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>137,605</b>	<b>43.6%</b>
<b>Humanitarian aid</b>		
Material relief assistance and services	39,600	12.5%
Relief co-ordination and support services	14,376	4.6%
Emergency food assistance	13,200	4.2%
Multi-hazard response preparedness	2,264	0.7%
Immediate post-emergency reconstruction and rehabilitation	251	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>69,690</b>	<b>22.1%</b>
<b>Multisector / Cross-cutting</b>		
Rural development	24,628	7.8%
Urban development and management	9,840	3.1%
Multisector education/training	2,731	0.9%
Multisector aid	114	0.0%
Bio-diversity	70	0.0%
Non-agricultural alternative development	28	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37,410</b>	<b>11.9%</b>
<b>Total administrative costs of donors (non-sector allocable)</b>	<b>30,866</b>	<b>9.8%</b>
<b>Production sectors</b>		
Agricultural development	22,177	7.0%
Trade policy and administrative management	38	0.0%
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) development	32	0.0%
Trade facilitation	32	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,279</b>	<b>7.1%</b>
<b>Education</b>		
Education policy and administrative management	6,150	1.9%
Teacher training	990	0.3%
Advanced technical and managerial training	860	0.3%
Vocational training	815	0.3%
Higher education	491	0.2%
Basic life skills for youth and adults	26	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,332</b>	<b>3.0%</b>
<b>Healthcare</b>		
Basic healthcare	4,920	1.6%
Health education	321	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,241</b>	<b>1.7%</b>
<b>Economic Infrastructure and services</b>		
Hydro-electric power plants	2,460	0.8%
Privatisation	25	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,485</b>	<b>0.8%</b>
<b>Total culture and culture and recreation</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>0.2%</b>
<b>Total food assistance</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>0.0%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>315,545</b>	

Note: "Amount extended" is the value of gross disbursements over a given accounting period. It will therefore differ from pledged amounts, commitments and net figures. "Culture" and "culture and recreation" are separate classifications that have been merged in the table.

Source: FCDO, [Data underlying the SID publication: Final aid spend 2019](#), 9 March 2021

These funding plans pre-dated the Taliban's capture of Kabul and are likely to change

## Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF)

From 2014 to 2021, the UK [planned to provide £678 million](#) to the multilateral ARTF fund, which provides resources for basic services, infrastructure, and Afghan governance.<sup>26</sup>

These funding plans pre-dated the Taliban's capture of Kabul and are likely to change.

This a multi-donor fund, managed by the World Bank, that [works with the Afghan Government](#) to reduce poverty, deliver essential services (such as literacy and health services), and implement reforms. It has provided up to 30 percent of the Afghan Government's civilian budget.<sup>27</sup> It has [supported the improvement of](#) public auditing, sought increases in domestic revenue, and improved access to water, education and health.<sup>28</sup>

In 2020, the [FCDO evaluation](#) said it remained an "essential" programme that increases UK development influence and ensures the fiscal stability and legitimacy of the Afghan Government. The Department ranked it A+, the highest possible score, but said its risk rating is "major," due to security concerns, instability and the risk of aid being diverted.<sup>29</sup>

## Humanitarian programmes

From 2019 to 2024, the UK was due to [provide £187 million](#) through the Afghanistan Multi Year Humanitarian Programme. This would be delivered through the UN AHF and other bodies. The programme supports humanitarian preparedness and response, refugees, and the capacity of Afghan organisations to support vulnerable groups.<sup>30</sup>

In 2020, the UK provided [\\$29.0 million of the \\$60.3 million allocated to the AHE](#), making it the largest contributor. The UN AHF supported the country respond to the pandemic, funding an intensive care unit, sanitation facilities, cash assistance to vulnerable people, and humanitarian air services when commercial flights were suspended.<sup>31</sup>

## Other UK projects

UK aid has also addressed poverty and gender inequality. For example, the [Girls' Education Challenge Fund](#) works in many low- and middle- income states, including Afghanistan, to improve girls' participation in schools and

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<sup>26</sup> FCDO DevTracker, [Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, 2014-2021](#), updated 5 April 2021; FCDO, [Annual Review \(6\) 204158](#), March 2021. Note budgets are subject to change.

<sup>27</sup> ARTF, [Rebuilding together](#), undated, accessed 9 July 2021

<sup>28</sup> ARTF, [ARTF results matrix, January-June 2020](#), 2020

<sup>29</sup> FCDO, [Annual Review \(6\) 204158](#), March 2021, sections A and D

<sup>30</sup> FCDO DevTracker, [Afghanistan Multi-Year Humanitarian Programme Phase 2](#), updated 11 February 2021. Note budgets are subject to change.

<sup>31</sup> AHF, [Annual report](#), 2020, pp11, 13

support them into work.<sup>32</sup> It currently has [two projects in the country](#), seeking to improve opportunities for nearly 80,000 girls.<sup>33</sup> To 2022, the FCDO is also funding a project to scale up the provision of [gender-based violence response services](#). This will be delivered in 12 provinces by the UN Family Planning Agency.<sup>34</sup>

The UK has run several projects to improve the training of local police and [security forces](#), and to support [peace building and social cohesion](#).<sup>35</sup> Some of these are funded via the UK's [Conflict, Stability and Security Fund](#).<sup>36</sup>

The UK previously ran a [retraining programme](#) for local Afghans who supported UK military and civilian staff in the country.<sup>37</sup>

The Library paper, [Resettlement scheme for locally employed civilians in Afghanistan](#), provides more information on support for such civilians from 2012.

The UK has also previously run programmes to [reduce poppy cultivation](#) by introducing alternative crops and income sources for farmers.<sup>38</sup> [Mine clearance work](#) has also been funded.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> FCDO DevTracker, [Girls' Education Challenge Fund \(Phase II\)](#), updated 28 June 2021

<sup>33</sup> Girls' Education Challenge, [Country briefing: Afghanistan](#), March 2021

<sup>34</sup> FCDO DevTracker, [Gender Based Violence Response Services Phase 2](#), updated 14 October 2020

<sup>35</sup> For example, FCDO DevTracker, [Afghanistan support to the peace process](#), accessed 9 July 2021; FCDO Dev Tracker, [Afghan National Army Trust Fund](#), accessed 9 July 2021

<sup>36</sup> Home Office, CSSF and FCDO, [CSSF: Programme summaries for South Asia and Afghanistan 2020 to 2021](#), 15 July 2020

<sup>37</sup> FCDO DevTracker, [Locally Employed Civilian Training-Afghanistan](#), 27 September 2019

<sup>38</sup> FCDO DevTracker, [Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development Facility](#), 19 August 2018

<sup>39</sup> FCDO DevTracker, [Afghanistan demining programme](#), accessed 26 July 2021



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## 3 Aid to post-Ghani Afghanistan

### 3.1 Conditions for continuing aid

Several states have said future aid to Afghanistan will be conditional on maintaining the rights of Afghans, including women and girls. Aid relating to security and defence from coalition states is expected to end.

The Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, has said the UK will work with partners to hold the Taliban to account and seek to [encourage the establishment of an inclusive Afghan Government](#). Measures to enforce this may include sanctions or holding back aid. Security aid will be discontinued, but humanitarian relief will not be conditional on what the Taliban does.<sup>40</sup>

The US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, has also said the US [would not recognise the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan](#) if it does not uphold the basic rights of Afghans, including women and girls. He said the US would not lift sanctions against the Taliban if this did not occur. Assistance from the international community, he said, would not be forthcoming if these basic rights are not protected.<sup>41</sup>

The UK currently holds the Presidency of the G7. Following a virtual meeting of the group in August, its [members pledged to cooperate together and with neighbouring countries to Afghanistan](#) to support Afghan refugees and host communities. Leaders also reaffirmed their commitment to protecting the development progress made since 2001 in areas such as women's rights.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.2 Aid spending announcements

#### United Kingdom

Addressing the Commons on 18 August 2021, the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, said UK humanitarian and development assistance to Afghanistan

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<sup>40</sup> Reuters, [UK indicates Afghanistan sanctions possible](#), 16 August 2021; [BBC Today Programme 17 August 2021](#), at 02:21:29

<sup>41</sup> US Department of State, [Secretary Antony Blinken with Jake Tapper of State of the Union](#), 15 August 2021

<sup>42</sup> Number Ten, [G7 Leaders Statement on Afghanistan](#), 24 August 2021

would be [increased to £286 million in 2021](#). The Government will also seek international support to deliver humanitarian projects in the wider region.<sup>43</sup>

In September 2021, the Government announced that up to [£30 million of this funding](#) would be available to Afghanistan's neighbours to support regional stability and support refugees. £10 million will be available to the UN Refugee Agency and its partners to [provide urgent humanitarian assistance](#). This is the first tranche of the £286 million of funding.<sup>44</sup>

The Shadow International Development Secretary, Preet Kaur Gill MP, has called for an [increase in humanitarian aid spending for countries](#) neighbouring Afghanistan and for a plan to secure the continuation of aid programmes, such as those for women and girls. The International Development Committee Chair, Sarah Champion MP, has argued that the UK should fulfil pledged donations “quickly and completely.”<sup>45</sup>

The organisation Bond and British and Irish Agencies in Afghanistan Group have [urged the UK Government](#) to reverse reductions in UK aid spending and mobilise international funding to support Afghanistan.<sup>46</sup>

## European Union and European Countries

Several European states have suspended development aid to the country. These include Germany and Sweden.<sup>47</sup> The European Union has suspended payments for development but has subsequently [announced €200 million in humanitarian assistance](#) to Afghanistan and neighbouring states. This is in addition to pledges by individual EU states.<sup>48</sup>

Prior to the Taliban capture of Kabul on 16 August 2021, the German Foreign Minister said on 12 August the country [would not support Afghanistan financially](#) if the Taliban gained control over the country and enforces Sharia law.<sup>49</sup> The German Government have now [pledged €100 million in aid](#) for Afghans displaced by the conflict.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Number Ten, [The Prime Minister's opening statement on Afghanistan](#), 18 August 2021

<sup>44</sup> FCDO, [UK to provide £30 million of life-saving supplies for Afghan refugees](#), 3 September 2021

<sup>45</sup> Devex, [Raab: UK could withhold aid to Afghanistan to hold Taliban to account](#), 16 August 2021

<sup>46</sup> Bond, [Next steps for humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan](#), 19 August 2021

<sup>47</sup> AP Press, [Taliban vows to honour women's rights but within Islamic law](#), 17 August 2021; The Local, [Sweden halts aid for Afghanistan but vows it's "not abandoning the people."](#) 17 August 2021; Devex, [EU, Germany cut off development aid to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan](#), 18 August 2021

<sup>48</sup> EEAS, Afghanistan: Press remarks by the High Representative Josep Borrell [...], 17 August 2021; CNBC, [EU pulls Afghanistan funding, will only work with Taliban if human rights respected](#), 18 August 2021; European Council, [Afghanistan: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union](#), 17 August 2021; Reuters, [EU increases humanitarian aid for Afghans to over 200 mln euros](#), 24 August 2021

<sup>49</sup> Politico, [Foreign Minister: Germany won't give aid to Afghanistan if Sharia Law is enforced](#), 12 August 2021

<sup>50</sup> Info Migrants, [Germany to support displaced Afghans with €100 million](#), 20 August 2021

## United States

In August, the US [allocated up to US \\$500 million](#) to help Afghan refugees.<sup>51</sup> The US Treasury Department has also issued licences authorising it and its partners to facilitate humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, despite US sanctions on the Taliban.<sup>52</sup>

## Suspension of funds by World Bank, US and IMF

In late August 2021, both the IMF and World Bank announced they would [suspend payments to Afghanistan](#) and to their projects in the country. Since 2002, the World Bank has committed around £3.9 billion to Afghan reconstruction.<sup>53</sup>

Suspended funds include the [US \\$370-\\$460 million in Special Drawing Rights](#) (a type of reserve currency that can be exchanged for national currencies) that Afghanistan was due to receive from the IMF in August.<sup>54</sup>

Funds held by the Afghan Central Bank in American financial institutions have also been frozen by the US.<sup>55</sup>

Russia has said the world should [unfreeze Afghanistan's reserves](#), or risk a spike in illegal narcotics and arms traffic.<sup>56</sup> A board member of the Afghanistan's central bank has said withholding the reserves risks increasing inflation and the US should instead [negotiate on releasing the reserves in tranches](#), in a process monitored by an independent auditor.<sup>57</sup>

## 3.3

## Requests for humanitarian access to continue

The UK Government does not expect partners funded by the FCDO to remain in any areas [where they cannot operate safely](#) or without interference.<sup>58</sup>

On 16 August 2021, the US Ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, called upon the Taliban to [permit humanitarian organisations to continue their work](#). She expressed concerns that aid was not reaching those in need,

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<sup>51</sup> White House, [Memorandum for the Secretary of State on unexpected urgent refugee and migration needs](#), 16 August 2021

<sup>52</sup> Reuters, [US Treasury issued new licence to ease flow of aid in Afghanistan](#), 1 September 2021

<sup>53</sup> BBC News, [Afghanistan: World Bank halts aid after Taliban takeover](#), 25 August 2021

<sup>54</sup> Brookings Institute, [Around the halls: The Taliban retakes Afghanistan](#), 16 August 2021; BBC News, [IMF suspends Afghanistan's access to funds](#), 19 August 2021

<sup>55</sup> Al-Jazeera, [What will happen to Afghanistan's economy under Taliban rule?](#), 19 August 2021

<sup>56</sup> Washington Post, [The world should unfreeze Afghanistan's reserves \[...\], Russia says](#), 30 August 2021

<sup>57</sup> Reuters, [Afghanistan central bank board member urges Biden, IMF to release funds](#), 1 September 2021

<sup>58</sup> FCDO, [The UK and Afghanistan: Government response](#), 12 March 2021, p16

citing World Food Program reports that 500 tonnes of aid are currently waiting at Taliban-controlled border crossings.<sup>59</sup>

On 16 August 2021, the UN Security Council [called for the continued delivery of humanitarian aid and access of humanitarian workers](#) to the country:

The members of the Security Council called for strengthened efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, and on all parties to allow immediate, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for United Nations humanitarian agencies and other humanitarian actors providing assistance, including across conflict lines, to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches all those in need.<sup>60</sup>

NATO states have similarly called for [unhindered access of humanitarian aid](#), as have [G7 Members](#).<sup>61</sup>

## 3.4 Will aid continue in a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan?

In mid-August 2021, several UN agencies [pledged to remain in Afghanistan](#) to deliver and coordinate aid. These included the UN World Food Programme, International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Unicef.<sup>62</sup> It was subsequently reported that [Taliban reprisals have begun against some UN staff](#) and some staff have been told to “hibernate” as the UN cannot guarantee their safety.<sup>63</sup>

The Norwegian Refugee Council, Médecins Sans Frontières and the Italian NGO, Emergency, are [continuing to run services](#) in parts of the country.<sup>64</sup>

The UK mine-clearing charity, the Halo Trust, [hopes to continue its work in the country](#), but all its international workers have now left.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> US Mission to the UN, [Remarks by Linda Thomas-Greenfield at a UN Security Council briefing on Afghanistan](#), 16 August 2021

<sup>60</sup> UN, [Security Council press statement on Afghanistan](#), 16 August 2021

<sup>61</sup> FCDO, [Foreign Secretary meets NATO allies to discuss Afghanistan](#), 20 August 2021 ; Number Ten, [G7 Leaders Statement on Afghanistan](#), 24 August 2021

<sup>62</sup> CBS News, [UN World Food Programme says it will “stay and deliver” in Afghanistan](#), 15 August 2021; International Organization for Migration, [IOM Director General’s statement on the situation in Afghanistan](#), 10 August 2021; Devex, [Afghanistan: Aid organizations face uncertain future under Taliban](#), 16 August 2021; VOA News, [UN agencies pledge to remain in Afghanistan despite challenges](#), 15 August 2021

<sup>63</sup> Politico, [UN Secretary General admits Taliban reprisals against staff have begun](#), 24 August 2021

<sup>64</sup> The New Humanitarian, [In Afghanistan, aid groups wrestle with the new reality of Taliban control](#), 16 August 2021; Devex, [Aid groups shift to emergency response as US leaves Afghanistan](#), 16 August 2021

<sup>65</sup> STV, [Scots charity staff flee Afghanistan as Taliban seize control](#), 16 August 2021

Section 5.6 discusses Taliban attitudes towards aid and humanitarian organisations in 2020-2021.

## 3.5 Delivery of aid under Taliban rule, 1996-2001

### Aid continued under Taliban rule in the 1990s, but was often disrupted

When the Taliban were in control of the majority of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, the UK did provide some aid. The majority was humanitarian in nature, and much was delivered via UN agencies.<sup>66</sup> In 1999, the UK Government emphasised that it could not fund NGOs where the lives of individuals would be put at risk.<sup>67</sup>

Humanitarian workers attempted to maintain their operations during the 1990s but did experience severe disruptions. From late 1994 the Taliban began to [ban female employment and school attendance](#). A female Unicef worker was not allowed to return to her job, and UN programmes for women and girls were suspended. However, the World Health Organization in the same year was allowed to open a nursing school for women in Kandahar.<sup>68</sup>

In November 1995, Unicef [suspended its education programmes](#) in areas where the Taliban had excluded girls from school.<sup>69</sup> Save the Children and other UN Agencies suspended similar operations. The agencies also found themselves deprived of their female staff due to Taliban-imposed limits on female work.<sup>70</sup>

Hospitals were disrupted when Taliban influence over the country grew. In 1996, it announced a [policy of hospital segregation between men and women](#), and initially banned female health staff from working. In Kabul, the number of hospitals women could access in non-emergencies was reduced.<sup>71</sup>

In 1996, the UN warned that Taliban discrimination against women, including UN aid agencies, [could have repercussions on international relief](#) and reconstruction programmes.<sup>72</sup>

In November and December 1996, UN Refugee Agency staff also had to [temporarily pause its work in Kabul](#) following the arrest of its staff by the Taliban.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> OECD Stat, [Aid \(ODA\) disbursements to countries and regions \[Dac2a\]](#), UK to Afghanistan, 1990-2002, accessed 16 August 2021; HC Deb, [Afghanistan](#), 18 May 1998, c248W

<sup>67</sup> HL Deb, [Afghanistan: Funding of NGOs](#), 25 February 1999, c1234

<sup>68</sup> US State Department, [Country report on Afghanistan Human Rights Practices 1996](#), 30 January 19967

<sup>69</sup> Relief Web, [Unicef: Unicef warns against Afghan female exclusion](#), 1 April 1997

<sup>70</sup> UN Refugee Agency, [Refugees magazine issue 106](#), 1 December 1996

<sup>71</sup> US State Department, [Country report on Afghanistan Human Rights Practices 1997](#), 30 January 1998

<sup>72</sup> UN, [Security Council denounces violations of human rights and humanitarian law in Afghanistan](#), 22 October 1996, para 11

<sup>73</sup> UN Refugee Agency, [Fully resumes operations in Kabul after staff freed by Taliban](#), 11 December 1996

In 1998, 38 international NGOs [were expelled from the country by the Taliban on suspicion they were involved in political activity](#).<sup>74</sup>

In 2000, the Taliban issued orders telling all NGOs to remove their female employees, though it was uncertain how strictly was to be enforced.<sup>75</sup>

In 2001, an OECD report argued that [attempts to use aid in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan as an incentive to influence reforms was ineffective](#). It said that the Taliban had other means of income, that aid flows were too modest, and aid donors lacked consistent coordinated action in support of reform. To be more effective, the OECD recommended that aid policy be deployed alongside trade, foreign and security policy.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> D. Mitchell, [NGO presence and activity in Afghanistan, 2000-2014](#), Stability Journal, 6, 2017

<sup>75</sup> Relief Web: Reuters, [Taliban ban women from working for aid groups](#), 11 July 2000

<sup>76</sup> OECD, [The limits and scope for use of effective development incentives and disincentives for influence conflict situations: Afghanistan](#), 2002, pp6, 7

## 4

## Progress since 2001

Aid, Afghan Government funding and efforts from civil society resulted in progress in several areas, including literacy and school attendance. A summary of progress is included in the charts below. Note many outcomes cannot be directly attributed to any specific intervention by UK aid.

In July 2021, the UK Government said it had [hoped to preserve these gains](#) after military forces are withdrawn.<sup>77</sup>

In August 2021, the US Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) argued the US reconstruction effort in the country “could be described as 20 one-year reconstruction efforts,” [where short-term goals were prioritised over building sustainable foundations](#) for the Afghan government, civil society and the economy.<sup>78</sup>

### Education and literacy

More girls and boys attended both primary and secondary school in 2018 compared to 2003. The [proportion of girls attending secondary school](#) increased from around 6.3 percent in 2003 to 40.0 percent in 2018. This is lower than that for boys, which [increased from 18.2 to 70.0 percent](#) over the same period. It is estimated that around 3.6 million girls attended school by early 2021.<sup>79</sup> The UK’s Girls’ Education Challenge Fund has supported 250,000 girls to attend school since 2013.<sup>80</sup>

Many girls still did not attend school. In 2018, UNICEF estimated [3.7 million children aged 7 to 17 were out of school](#), of whom 2.2 million were girls.<sup>81</sup> In 2016, the US SIGAR also [cited concerns](#) that education data may be manipulated by the recording of “ghost schools” that do not exist.<sup>82</sup>

There remains a substantial [gender divide in literacy](#) for the over-15s: in 2018 female adult literacy was 29 percent, compared to 55 percent for men.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>77</sup> HC Deb, [8 July 2021](#), c1104

<sup>78</sup> US SIGAR, [What we need to learn: Lessons from twenty years of Afghanistan reconstruction](#), August 2021

<sup>79</sup> World Bank, [School enrolment, secondary, female and male \(% gross\)- Afghanistan](#), accessed 21 July 2021; HC Deb, [8 July 2021](#), c1104

<sup>80</sup> PQ 27162 [[Afghanistan: Children](#)], 8 July 2021

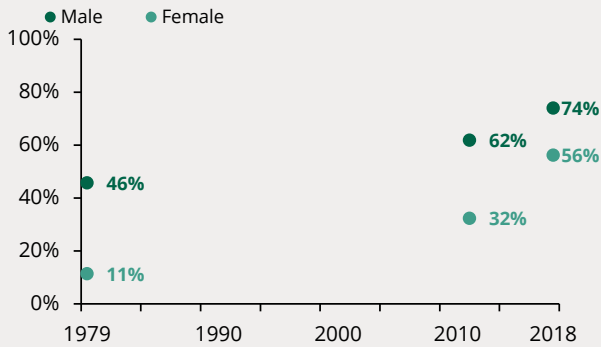
<sup>81</sup> UNICEF, [Global initiative on out-of-school children: Afghan country study](#), 2018, p35

<sup>82</sup> SIGAR, [Schools in Herat province](#), 2016, p4

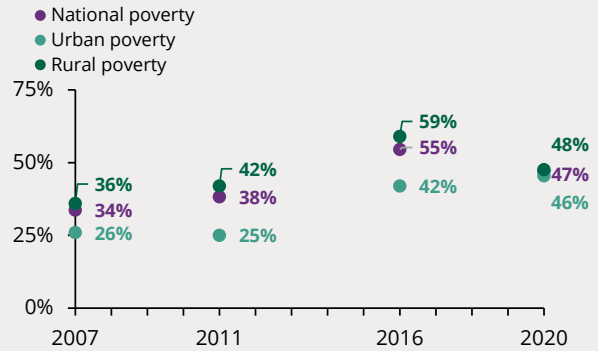
<sup>83</sup> World Bank, [Literacy rate, adult female/male \(% of female/male ages 15 and above\)- Afghanistan](#), accessed 8 July 2021

## Progress in Afghanistan? c.1980-2020

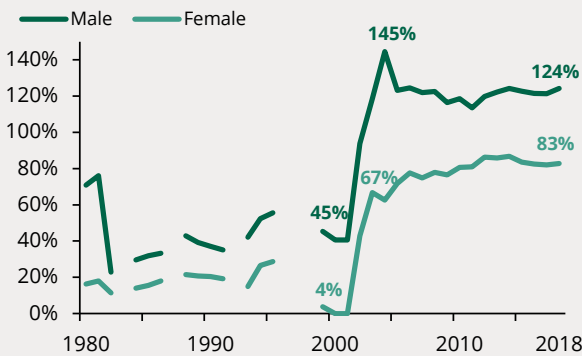
### Literacy rates have risen, though a gender gap remains Percentage literacy rate amongst 15-24 year age group



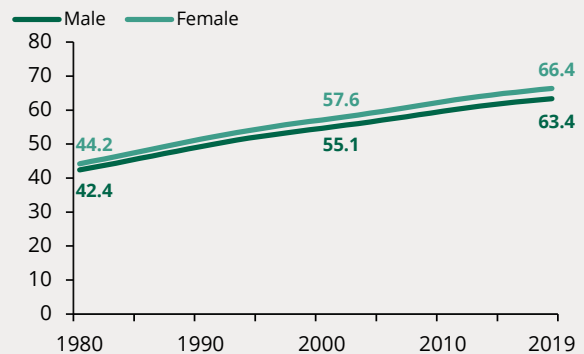
### Poverty remains high. It has not returned to 2007 levels



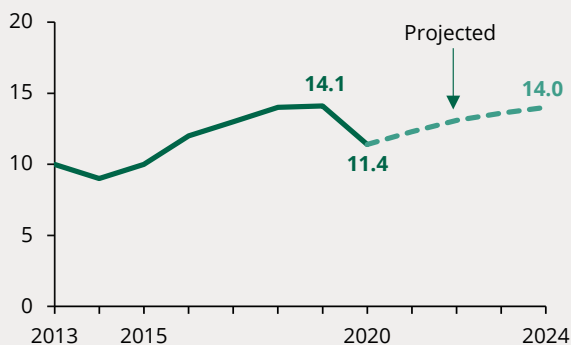
### Primary attendance has grown, through less for girls Graph shows percentage gross enrollment



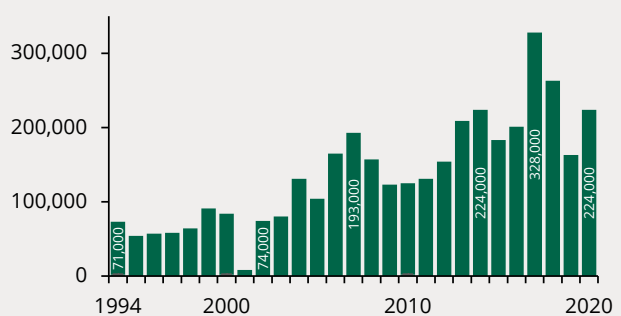
### Life expectancy at birth has risen steadily



### Revenue is higher than 2013, but is lower than its peak Percentage of GDP collected as tax



### Land for opium poppy cultivation remains high Hectares



Notes. Poverty rates based on national Afghan definitions of poverty-in 2018, [this was US \\$1 a day, or 70 Afghanis](#). Primary enrolment can exceed 100 percent due to the inclusion of over- or under- aged students, early or late school entrance, and grade repetition. Data on opium poppy cultivation is presented with a 95 percent confidence interval after 2009, due to the potential for random error in the sample. For example, in 2019 the true figure is likely to lie between 202,000 and 246,000 hectares.

Sources: World Bank, [Open data: Afghanistan](#), accessed 21 July 2021 (CC—BY 4.0); World Bank, [Afghan development update](#), April 2021, p9 and 18, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), [Afghanistan opium survey 2020](#), 2021, p7



## Poverty

The poverty rate in Afghanistan [remains high](#). In 2020, rates in rural and urban areas converged at around 47 percent of the population. This was because of a rise in urban poverty due to the economic impact of Covid-19. Rural poverty has fallen due to expanded agricultural output and previously high opium prices.<sup>84</sup>

## Governance, elections, and revenue

The Afghan Governments led by Ashraf Ghani and Hamid Karzai remained “aid dependent,” meaning aid constituted at least 10 percent of GDP. The World Bank estimated aid flows [have decreased](#) from around 100 percent of GDP in 2009 to 43 percent in 2020.<sup>85</sup> Analysts had expected aid levels to [halve by 2030](#).<sup>86</sup> The level of aid dependency is now uncertain, given the different shape the Government is likely to take in a Taliban-dominated state.

These Governments also struggled to generate sufficient tax revenue, falling to 11.4 percent of GDP in 2020 from a record high of 14.1 percent in 2021. The World Bank [did not expect revenue to recover to this level](#) until 2024, suggesting aid dependent would remain to at least the late 2020s.<sup>87</sup>

### Voter turnout has declined since 2004

	President	Parliament
2004	84%	
2005		49%
2009	39%	
2010		35%
2014	39%	
2018		45%
2019	19%	

Source: International Idea, [Afghanistan](#), accessed 22 July 2021

While elections were held in the country, and the UK Government and others [used aid to support them be free and fair](#), the US SIGAR judged that elections were “regularly” [subject to fraud and manipulation](#) through bribes and threats.<sup>88</sup> The Afghan Independent Election Commission said the Presidential Election in 2019 [saw fraud “reduced to a minimum level.”](#)<sup>89</sup>

While turnout for the first post-2002 election was high, at 84 percent in 2004, turnout subsequently declined. The 2019 Presidential Election [had the lowest turnout in a post-2004 Afghan election to date](#), at 19 percent.<sup>90</sup>

Corruption was identified as [a threat to Afghan state institutions](#), their legitimacy, a disincentive to private investment and a means to strengthen the Taliban and other opponents.<sup>91</sup> The UN Assistance Mission in the country has reported [anti-corruption initiatives slowed](#) in 2019 and argued such efforts had failed to “positively impact the lives of most Afghans.”<sup>92</sup>

<sup>84</sup> World Bank, [Afghanistan development update](#), April 2021, pp1, 8, 9

<sup>85</sup> World Bank, [Afghanistan development update](#), April 2021, p4

<sup>86</sup> Rachel Cooper, [Aid dependency and political settlements in Afghanistan](#), 2018, p3

<sup>87</sup> World Bank, [Afghanistan development update](#), April 2021, p18

<sup>88</sup> SIGAR, [Elections: Lessons from the US experience in Afghanistan](#), February 2021, pp165-6; FCDO, [The UK and Afghanistan: Government response](#), 12 March 2021, p6

<sup>89</sup> Ava Press, [IEC rejects SIGAR’s report on fraud, irregularities in Afghanistan elections](#), 5 February 2021

<sup>90</sup> Intermittent elections were held in some periods of Afghan history prior to 2004: Anna Larson, [Toward an Afghan democracy?](#), 2009, p8

<sup>91</sup> [Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction to US Secretary of State and Defence and US Agency for Integrational Development](#), 6 November 2020

<sup>92</sup> UNAMA, [Anti-corruption reforms must remain a priority in Afghanistan-report](#), 18 June 2020

## Opium and agriculture

Opium cultivation remains important to Afghanistan's economy. The total area under opium poppy cultivation [increased by 37 percent in 2020](#), reaching 224,000 hectares. Only 12 of the 34 provinces remained poppy-free.<sup>93</sup>

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In 2018, [84 percent of the world's opium supply was from Afghanistan](#)

In 2019, around 119,000 people were [employed in opium production](#) and the value of opiates exported was equivalent to around 7 to 11 percent of GDP. Much opium production and distribution remains illicit, depriving authorities of revenue.<sup>94</sup> The opium trade has been a significant source of income for insurgents—in 2019 in the south west [around 58 percent of opium taxes went to the Taliban](#).<sup>95</sup> Analysts have argued that previous attempts to suppress poppy production were [counter-productive](#), generating political capital for the Taliban and producing economic refugees<sup>96</sup>

## Rural development and agriculture

The UK has [funded development programmes to encourage rural Afghans to diversify agricultural production](#) away from poppies and opium. It has also sought to encourage private investment to enable allow Afghanistan to become less dependent on overseas aid.<sup>97</sup>

For example, UK contributions to the ARTF since 2014 have supported 2,500 rural roads being rehabilitated and maintained to 2019, seen 32,500 hectares of new orchards such as vineyards and pistachio groves established, and new horticultural packages adopted by farmers.<sup>98</sup> Several agricultural crops, such as [grapes, pulses and potatoes](#) have seen an increase in the amount of land set aside for their cultivation since 2002.<sup>99</sup>

In 2020, 44 percent of the total Afghan workforce (including 57 percent in rural areas) [continues to work in agriculture](#), a sector that contributes around 30 percent of Afghan GDP.<sup>100</sup> In 2018, the [World Bank estimated](#) the livestock sector generated around 40 percent of agricultural employment, but most work was unpaid. In 2015, wheat, the least profitable per land unit, employed the highest number of the agricultural workforce.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> UNODC, [Afghanistan opium survey 2020: Executive summary](#), 2021, p4, 5

<sup>94</sup> World Bank, [Afghanistan development update](#), April 2021, p10

<sup>95</sup> UNODC, [Afghanistan opium survey 2019: socio-economic survey report \[...\]](#), February 2021, p40

<sup>96</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, [Drugs, security and counter narcotics policies in Afghanistan](#), October 2020

<sup>97</sup> International Development Committee, [Afghanistan: Development progress and prospects after 2014](#), 2012; para 144; International Development Committee, [Afghanistan: Reconstructing Afghanistan](#), 2008, ch7

<sup>98</sup> FCDO DevTracker, [ARTF 2014-2021: annual review 6—March 2021](#), updated 5 April 2021

<sup>99</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization, [Crops and Livestock Products: Afghanistan, 2002-2019](#), accessed 27 July 2021

<sup>100</sup> World Bank, [Afghanistan development update](#), April 2021, pp4, 27, 34

<sup>101</sup> Laura Bolton, Institute of Development Studies, [Agriculture in Afghanistan \[...\]](#), 10 May 2019, pp2, 5

In 2020 the Government said violence and instability had [hindered attempts to provide alternatives to poppy production](#).<sup>102</sup>

## Gender

Afghanistan is a “focus country” under the [UK’s national action plan on women, peace and security](#), being a country where it seeks to have a substantial impact on the situation of women and girls.<sup>103</sup> However, while the advancement of women’s rights was [cited as an early priority for post-Taliban Afghanistan, evaluations of DFID’s strategy](#) up to 2009 argued the Department’s lack of focus on civil society had limited its work on female empowerment.<sup>104</sup>

The UK has focused on promoting women’s participation in peace and political processes, as well as education. Since 2005, around 27 percent of seats in the Afghan Parliament [were held by women](#).<sup>105</sup>

In 2021, the FCDO said gender-based violence remained a “major concern,” [being exacerbated by the pandemic and existing societal attitudes](#).<sup>106</sup> In 2019, an [International Men and Gender Equality Survey](#) of 2,000 Afghan men and women found 80 percent of women reported experiencing physical violence and 20 percent sexual violence from an intimate partner.<sup>107</sup>

The potential impact of the Taliban on women’s rights is described in section 5.5

## Refugees

Since the 2001 invasion, the UN Refugee Agency has [facilitated the return of 5.3 million Afghan refugees](#), who were mainly in Iran and Pakistan. However, 86 percent of returns (4.5 million) occurred before 2010, and only 9 percent after 2015 (0.5 million).<sup>108</sup>

More information on refugees and internally displaced Afghans can be found in the Library briefing, [Afghanistan: Refugees and displaced people in 2021](#).

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<sup>102</sup> [Oral evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations and Defence](#), 17 November 2020, Q118

<sup>103</sup> UK Government, [UK national action plan on women, peace and security 2018-2022](#), 2018, p5

<sup>104</sup> HC Deb, [13 December 2001](#), c 1130; DFID, [Evaluation report: Country evaluation programme Afghanistan](#), 2009, p39, Action Aid, [A just peace? The legacy of war for the women of Afghanistan](#), 2011, p3

<sup>105</sup> World Bank, [Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments \(%\)-Afghanistan](#), accessed 8 July 2021

<sup>106</sup> FCDO, [Human Rights Report 2020](#), July 2021, p34

<sup>107</sup> CISION, [Women and men call for peace and gender equality \[...\]](#), 29 January 2019

<sup>108</sup> UNHCR, [Afghanistan Voluntary repatriation update](#), January 2021, p4

## Land mines

Mine clearance in Afghanistan has been ongoing since 1989. The UN Mine Action Service (MAS) reports more than [40,372 Afghan civilians have been killed or injured by land mines and explosive remnants of war](#) (ERW) since then. In 2020, 72 percent of ERW casualties were children. <sup>109</sup>

Since 1989, NGOs and others have cleared around 18.8 million ERW. Around 80 percent of known minefield and battle areas have been cleared. <sup>110</sup>

Afghanistan is party to the Mine Ban Treaty, and [had aimed to meet the requirement to identify and clear mined areas by 2013](#). <sup>111</sup> However, this was extended to 2023, and the Afghan Government was expected to request a further extension to 2028. The NGO Mine Action state continued insecurity and lack of funding have hampered clearances. <sup>112</sup>

## Violence against civilians

[High levels of violence remain](#). From 2014 to 2019, more than 10,000 Afghan civilians were killed or injured each year, falling slightly to 8,820 in 2020. <sup>113</sup> In February 2021, the UN warned of a “disturbing spike” in casualties despite the peace talks, and a [rise in targeted killings deliberately against civilians](#). <sup>114</sup>

From January to June 2021, [5,183 civilians have been killed or injured](#), an increase of 47 percent compared to the same period in 2020. Anti-government groups, such as the Taliban and IS-Khorasan, were responsible for 64 percent of casualties. 32 percent of casualties were children. <sup>115</sup>

Since the publication of the UN statistics in July, Unicef has warned of a “rapid escalation of violations against children.” On 9 August, it reported that 27 children had been killed and 136 injured in the previous 72 hours. More than [1,000 people were killed or injured due to “indiscriminate” attacks](#) against civilians in Helmand, Kandahar, and Herat between 9 July and 9 August. <sup>116</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> UN MAS, [Where we work: Afghanistan](#), accessed 22 July 2021

<sup>110</sup> UN MAS, [Where we work: Afghanistan](#), accessed 22 July 2021

<sup>111</sup> UN Treaty Collection, [Convention on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production, and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction](#), 1997

<sup>112</sup> Mine Action Review, [Clearing the mines 2020](#), October 2020, p28

<sup>113</sup> UN, [Afghanistan: Protection of civilians in armed conflict: Annual report 2020](#), p12

<sup>114</sup> UN, [“Disturbing spike” in Afghan civilian casualties after peace talks began](#), 23 February 2021

<sup>115</sup> UNAMA, [Civilian casualties to hit unprecedented highs in 2021 unless urgent action to stem violence](#), 26 July 2021

<sup>116</sup> UN, [“Shocking” escalation of grave violations against children in Afghanistan: Unicef](#), 9 August 2021

## 5

## Future needs, future threats

The future of Afghanistan is highly uncertain. The nature of any new government that will be formed, and whether it is sustainable, is unknown. Insecurity, continuing violence, questions over the delivery of aid, and a dominant role for the Taliban, offer significant challenges to maintaining progress made on development goals such as improving the rights of women and girls.

Sections 5.4-5.6 suggest women, minority groups and NGOs are likely to experience increased threats and insecurity in many parts of the country.

## 5.1

### What might the impact of greater Taliban influence be?

When in power prior to 2001, the Taliban conducted a [repressive rule](#), with common human rights violations. These included political and extrajudicial killings and disappearances, and restrictions on girls and women attending school or working outside the home.<sup>117</sup>

UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, previously said that [any political settlement was likely to include the Taliban](#). The UK Government had hoped that the Doha Peace Talks would continue, and any agreement reached protected the [rights of women](#) and the ability to [deliver aid and assistance](#).<sup>118</sup>

During the Doha Talks, Taliban negotiators had made general statements suggesting a [willingness to compromise over some aspects of Afghan life](#), such as education and the role of NGOs.<sup>119</sup> Following its capture of Kabul in August, [Taliban spokespeople](#) have said it would provide “women with environment to work and study, and the presence of women in different (government) structures according to Islamic law and [...] our cultural values.”<sup>120</sup>

It is unclear the position the Taliban will take once diplomatic and political incentives are removed and foreign troops are completely withdrawn. Neither is the Taliban of one view, with [divisions among its ranks](#) on the approach to take.<sup>121</sup> Its ability to act will also be limited by the [extent of its control and the](#)

<sup>117</sup> US State Department, [Country report on human rights practices—Afghanistan](#), March 2002

<sup>118</sup> HC Deb, [8 July 2021](#), cc 1109, 1117

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Ruttig, [Have the Taliban changed?](#), Combatting Terrorism Centre Sentinel, March 2021

<sup>120</sup> AP Press, [Taliban vows to honour women’s rights but within Islamic law](#), 17 August 2021

<sup>121</sup> BBC News, [Afghanistan: “We have won the war. America has lost.”](#) say Taliban, 15 April 2021

[capacity of communities to resist](#).<sup>122</sup> Population [approval for gender equality in education](#), for example, is high, at around 80-90 percent in surveys conducted from 2006 to 2019.<sup>123</sup>

There have been instances where ad-hoc or local agreements have allowed the continuation of education and delivery of aid in areas under Taliban rule prior to the withdrawal of coalition troops. In December 2020, the Taliban agreed to UNICEF [running up to 4,000 community-based classes](#) in its areas of influence.<sup>124</sup> Halo, the mine-clearing charity, has [agreements with the Taliban](#) to continue its work.<sup>125</sup> In its response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Taliban has [allowed some local ceasefires and supported local quarantines](#).<sup>126</sup>

It seems likely that there will be pressure from the Taliban to reduce the rights of women more generally. Human Rights Watch (HRW) note this would be [in line with existing social norms in parts of the country](#).<sup>127</sup> Surveys suggest around 35-45 percent of Afghans believe political leadership [should be reserved mostly for men](#).<sup>128</sup> Nick Reynolds, writing for the Royal United Services Institute, suggests that “a victorious Taliban regime would be similar in outlook and in its approach to governance as it was before in 2001: [a conservative theocracy uninterested in either development or human rights](#).”<sup>129</sup>

On 24 August 2021, the UN said there were “credible reports” of [violations against civilians in areas under Taliban control](#). These [included summary executions of civilians and Afghan soldiers](#), recruitment of child soldiers, and blocking girls from attending school.<sup>130</sup> The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has urged the UN Human Rights Council to [establish a dedicated mechanism to monitor the situation](#) in Afghanistan.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Brookings Institute, [The fate of women’s rights in Afghanistan](#), September 2020; Overseas Development Institute (ODI), [Taliban attitudes and policies towards education](#), February 2021; HRW, [Education, social restrictions and justice in Taliban-held Afghanistan](#), 2020; Washington Post, [Why the Taliban agreed to let more girls in Afghanistan go to school](#), 6 January 2021

<sup>123</sup> The Asia Foundation, [A survey of the Afghan people: Afghanistan in 2019](#), 2020, p219

<sup>124</sup> UNICEF, [Community-based education will reach up to 140,000 \[...\]](#), 22 December 2020

<sup>125</sup> The Times, [Halo Trust: Minefield charity in Afghanistan threatened by Isis and NATO’s pull out](#), 29 June 2021

<sup>126</sup> Middle East institute, [The Afghan Taliban and Covid-19: Leveraging the crisis or change of heart?](#), 13 April 2021

<sup>127</sup> HRW, [Education, social restrictions and justice in Taliban-held Afghanistan](#), 2020

<sup>128</sup> The Asia Foundation, [A survey of the Afghan people: Afghanistan in 2019](#), 2020, p212

<sup>129</sup> Nick Reynolds, [The Americans may leave Afghanistan, but the Forever War will grind on](#), RUSI Commentary, 16 April 2021

<sup>130</sup> DW, [Afghanistan: UN receives reports of Taliban summary executions](#), 24 August 2021; UN, [Afghanistan women’s rights are a “red line” UN rights chief tells States](#), 24 August 2021

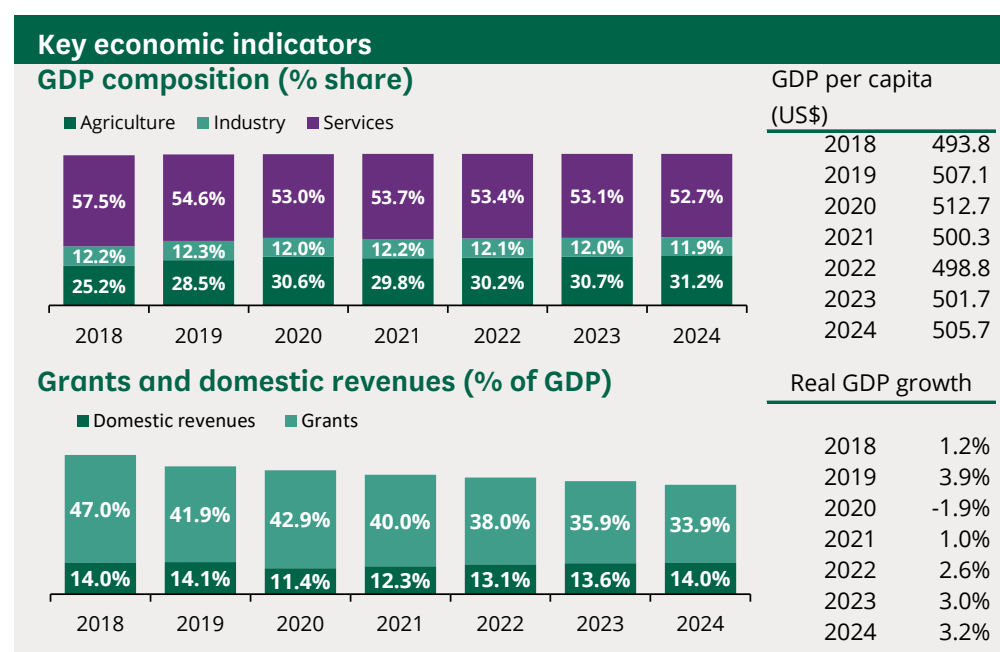
<sup>131</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, [High Commissioner urges special of the Human Rights Council on Afghanistan to establish a dedicated mechanism \[...\]](#), 24 August 2021

## 5.2

## Continued dependence on aid

Even before the fall of the Government of Ashraf Ghani, the Afghan economy displayed a high level of fragility. The Government also displayed a high level of aid dependence. [World Bank projections from April 2021](#) suggested that Afghan Government revenue would remain low, and real GDP growth would average 1.9 percent from 2018 to 2024.

The below charts are based on World Bank projections for Afghanistan, published before the Taliban's capture of Kabul. "Grants" refers to foreign funding.



Note: Figures post-2020 are World Bank projections

Source: World Bank, [Afghanistan development update April 2021](#), 2021, p34

Much aid spending was related to the high security expenditure of the Afghan Governments led by Ghani and his predecessor, Hamid Karzai. Security expenditures in 2019 were equivalent to 28 percent of GDP, compared to the average in low-income countries of 3 percent.<sup>132</sup> It was therefore likely that Afghanistan [would have remained dependent on aid](#) for its basic government functions: the World Bank estimated that only 64 percent of recurrent expenditure will be financed by domestic revenues in 2021, rising to 71 percent in 2024.<sup>133</sup>

The Afghan economy remains dependent on agriculture, with 60 percent of households deriving at least some income from it. In 2019, for opium poppy

<sup>132</sup> World Bank Group, [Afghanistan development update: April 2021](#), 2021, pp7, 18, 24

<sup>133</sup> World Bank Group, [Afghanistan development update: April 2021](#), 2021, p22



farmers, sales of opium and poppy derivatives (e.g. poppy seeds) [constituted around 46 percent of their overall income](#).<sup>134</sup>

## 5.3 International displacement and migration

As of 31 December 2020, there were [3.5 million internationally displaced people \(IDPs\) in Afghanistan](#), due to conflict, disasters and violence. This compared to an estimated population of 39 million in 2020.<sup>135</sup>

The number of IDPs was 18 percent higher than 2019, and the highest figure since 2010. In 2020, 400,000 were displaced due to conflict and violence.<sup>136</sup>

The UN Refugee Agency has called for a “renewed commitment” to Afghan IDPs. It is concerned that further violence will lead to “exponential” displacement and put pressure on Iran and Pakistan, where many seek refuge. At May 2021, its funding appeal for Iran in 2021 was [8 percent funded](#).<sup>137</sup> Amnesty International has said [current aid efforts](#) are “inadequate.”<sup>138</sup>

In July 2021, the UN agency warned Afghanistan is [“on the brink” of humanitarian crisis](#), estimating that increased violence has led to 270,000 Afghans being displaced since January.<sup>139</sup>

The Library briefing, [Afghanistan: Refugees and displaced people in 2021](#), provides further information on IDPs and refugees in the country.

In March 2021, the UK Government said the situation in Afghanistan was is not currently conducive to large-scale refugee returns to the country.<sup>140</sup>

## 5.4 Protection of women’s rights

Since 2001, there has been considerable improvement in the participation of women in Afghan society, politics and economy, though primarily in urban areas and many discriminatory acts and attitudes remain. The increase in the number of girls in education is often [cited as success of UK engagement](#).<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> UNODC, [Afghanistan opium survey 2019](#), 2021, p22

<sup>135</sup> UN Population Division, [Total Population by sex \(thousands\): Afghanistan](#), 2019

<sup>136</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, [Afghanistan](#), accessed 8 July 2021

<sup>137</sup> UNHCR, [Renewed commitment needed to support displaced Afghans and their hosts](#), 31 May 2021

<sup>138</sup> Amnesty International, [Afghanistan: Country’s four million internally displaced need urgent support amid pandemic](#), 30 March 2021

<sup>139</sup> UNHCR, [UNHCR warns of imminent humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan](#), 13 July 2021

<sup>140</sup> FCDO, [The UK and Afghanistan: Government response](#), 12 March 2021, p17

<sup>141</sup> House of Lords Select Committee on International Affairs and Defence, [The UK and Afghanistan](#), HL 208, 13 January 2021, p33



As stated in section 5.1, the Taliban has come to some local agreements to allow education in some areas under its influence.<sup>142</sup> However, HRW has reported [a return to restrictions in some Taliban-controlled districts of Helmand](#), where there are no primary or secondary schools for girls.<sup>143</sup>

Girls attending school are also at risk of violence. In May 2021, [85 were killed in bomb attack](#) on a girls' school in Kabul. Most were from the minority Hazara group (see section 5.6). The Taliban denied involvement.<sup>144</sup>

Threats to girls' education have also [come from the former Afghan Government](#). In 2015, it was forced to abandon a plan to require girls to wear body- and face- covering dresses and, in 2021, to ban girls over 12 singing in school choirs.<sup>145</sup>

HRW has also [raised concerns on access to healthcare](#), where there is already unmet need in areas of reproductive health, post-natal care and cancer treatment. Aside from funding pressures, the NGO reported health workers have been [subject to Taliban threats](#) and that women have been subject to movement restrictions, ending their healthcare access.<sup>146</sup>

In August 2021, Unicef said, based on talks with local Taliban leaders, that it was "quite optimistic" that the Taliban may [support the continuation of its work on girls' education](#).<sup>147</sup> In the city of Herat, for example, girls were [allowed to return to school](#) following the Taliban's capture.<sup>148</sup>

However, female bank employees in several cities have found themselves [forced to leave their jobs](#) by the Taliban,<sup>149</sup> and a female TV presenter said the Taliban refused to allow her to [attend work](#) in mid-August.<sup>150</sup> On 24 August, the Taliban announced working women were required to stay at home as a "temporary procedure."<sup>151</sup> There have been some protests over the right to work in response.<sup>152</sup>

## 5.5 Protection of minorities

Religious and ethnic minorities continue to face discrimination. Due to Taliban rule and ISIS attacks, the population of Hindus and Sikhs in the country has

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<sup>142</sup> ODI, [Taliban attitudes and policies towards education](#), February 2021, p6

<sup>143</sup> HRW, [Education, social restrictions and justice in Taliban-held Afghanistan](#), 2020

<sup>144</sup> CNN, [Death toll rises to 85 \[...\]](#), 10 May 2021

<sup>145</sup> Independent, [Ban on Afghan girls singing at schools overturned by social media stir](#), 21 June 2021

<sup>146</sup> HRW, [Women's access to health care in Afghanistan](#), 6 May 2021

<sup>147</sup> Reuters, [Unicef's "quite optimistic" after Taliban comments on girls's education \[...\]](#), 17 August 2021

<sup>148</sup> France 24, [Afghan girls return to school in Herat after Taliban takeover](#), 18 August 2021

<sup>149</sup> Al-Jazeera, [As the Taliban seized cities, they sent women home](#), 16 August 2021

<sup>150</sup> Alarabiya News, ["My life is in danger:" Afghan female presenter says Taliban refused to let her work](#), 19 August 2021

<sup>151</sup> BBC News, [Afghanistan: Taliban tell working women to stay at home](#), 24 August 2021

<sup>152</sup> Al-Jazeera, [Herat women protest against Taliban over right to work](#), 2 September 2021

dropped from around 220,000 in the 1980s to 1,350 in 2016.<sup>153</sup> The Christian community remains small, and there are [no public churches](#).<sup>154</sup>

Hazaras, constituting around 10-15 percent of the population, have long faced discrimination and persecution. The majority are Shia Muslim while the Taliban are mainly Pashtun Sunnis.<sup>155</sup> Around 85-90 percent of the Afghan population is Sunni Muslim.<sup>156</sup> The Afghan-based Human Rights and Eradication of Violence organisation estimate that since 2015, at least 1,200 Hazaras have been killed and 2,300 injured. In June 2021, 18 were killed in bomb attacks.<sup>157</sup>

In August 2021, Amnesty International said the Taliban was responsible for the [killing of nine Hazara men](#) in July.<sup>158</sup>

In 2019, the Government of Ashraf Ghani [accepted a recommendation from the UK](#) to establish an independent mechanism to assess how religious and ethnic minorities can be better protected against violence.<sup>159</sup> The UK Government and Embassy in Kabul had raised concerns directly with the Ashraf Ghani Government and engaged with representatives of minority communities.<sup>160</sup>

## 5.6 Safety of aid workers

According to Aid Worker Security, from 1997 to 25 August 2021, a total of [1,314 aid workers have been killed, wounded or kidnapped](#)—mostly by armed opposition forces such as the Taliban.<sup>161</sup>

The [areas in which aid agencies are active has contracted greatly](#) due to greater security concerns, corruption and Taliban demands to tax aid coming into areas that it controls.

In 2018, for example, Taliban [banned door-to-door polio vaccinations](#), alleging aid workers were spies. The ban remains in place, though other polio

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<sup>153</sup> Home Office, [Country policy and information note: Afghanistan: Hindus and Sikhs](#), March 2021, p14

<sup>154</sup> US State Department, [Report on international religious freedom: Afghanistan](#), 12 May 2021

<sup>155</sup> Minority Groups International, [Hazaras](#), accessed 23 July 2021; Home Office, [Country policy and information note: Afghanistan: Hazaras](#), 2018, p13

<sup>156</sup> Pew Research Centre, [Many Sunnis and Shias worry about religious conflict](#), 2013, p2

<sup>157</sup> AP, [Afghan Hazaras being killed at school, play, even birth](#), 11 June 2021

<sup>158</sup> Amnesty International, [Afghanistan: Taliban responsible for brutal massacre of Hazara men—investigation](#), 19 August 2021

<sup>159</sup> UN Human Rights Council, [Report of the working group on the universal periodic review: Afghanistan](#), 3 April 2019, para 135.252; UN Human Rights Council Report, [Views on conclusions and/or recommendations \[...\]](#), 18 June 2019

<sup>160</sup> FCDO, [The UK and Afghanistan: Government response](#), 12 March 2021, p13

<sup>161</sup> Aid Worker Security, [Database-Afghanistan](#), accessed 22 July 2021

vaccinations have continued.<sup>162</sup> In March 2021, the Taliban was also accused of [killing three health workers](#) administering vaccines.<sup>163</sup>

Negotiated access tends to exist at the individual and local level.<sup>164</sup>

In June 2021, the Halo Trust, a mine-clearing charity, said [11 staff were killed and 15 wounded](#) by Islamic State's Afghan affiliate, IS-Khorasan. Halo has traditionally operated in areas with the consent of communities, including the Taliban.<sup>165</sup> The Trust said the Taliban came to the workers' aid.<sup>166</sup>

It is believed the workers were targeted because they were Hazaras, who suffer frequent discrimination (see section 5.5).

In 2021, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (ANAMA) said [attacks on health and education remained at high levels](#), recording 21 attacks on healthcare settings and 13 on schools in the first three months of the year.<sup>167</sup>

During 2020, it recorded [90 attacks on healthcare delivery](#), leading to the deaths of eight health workers. It attributed 73 of the incidents to anti-Government elements, including the Taliban. It also recorded [62 incidents involving children's access to education](#), causing the deaths of three workers and 30 students.<sup>168</sup> In June 2020, Médecins Sans Frontières said it would close their maternity ward in Kabul following a gun attack on mothers, babies and health staff.<sup>169</sup>

On 16 August, the UN Security Council, whose members include the US and UK, [urged the Taliban to allow humanitarian aid access and the work of NGOs](#) to continue.<sup>170</sup>

## 5.7

# Protections for journalists and human rights workers

Targeted violence by terrorist groups against journalists, activists and human rights defenders increased in 2020—the UN reports [23 human rights defenders and media workers were killed](#).<sup>171</sup> Human rights defenders include

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<sup>162</sup> The Telegraph, [Third of Afghan children go without polio drops thanks to Taliban's door-to-door vaccination ban](#), 3 June 2021; Devex, [WHO regional polio director expects Taliban to support polio program](#), 19 August 2021

<sup>163</sup> Al Jazeera, [Female polio workers shot dead in Afghanistan: report](#), 30 March 2021

<sup>164</sup> CORE for USAID, [Humanitarian access SCORE report: Afghanistan](#), 2020, pp3-4, 7

<sup>165</sup> The Times, [Halo Trust: Minefield charity in Afghanistan threatened by Isis and NATO's pull-out](#), 29 June 2021

<sup>166</sup> BBC News, [Halo Trust: Afghanistan mine clearance workers shot dead "in cold blood."](#) 9 June 2021

<sup>167</sup> UNAMA, [Afghanistan: Protection of civilians in armed conflict, first quarter update](#), April 2021, p5

<sup>168</sup> UNAMA, [Afghanistan: Protection of civilians in armed conflict: 2020](#), 2021, pp34, 38

<sup>169</sup> BBC News, [MSF Afghan maternity ward to close after deadly gun attack](#), 16 June 2020

<sup>170</sup> UN, [Security Council press statement on Afghanistan](#), 16 August 2021

<sup>171</sup> FCDO, [Human Rights Report 2020](#), July 2021, p34; UN, [Special Report: Killing of human rights defenders, journalists and media workers in Afghanistan](#), February 2021, p8

groups such as activists, NGOs, and lawyers. Reporters without Borders estimate that since 2001 at least 100 journalists, including 15 international journalists, [have been killed in connection with their work](#) in the country and 60 media outlets have been destroyed or attacked.<sup>172</sup>

In 2021, at least thirty journalists and media staff have been [killed, wounded or abducted](#) (to August).<sup>173</sup> Both the Taliban and IS-Khorasan have been implicated in the deaths of journalists and media staff.

In early August 2021, the Director of Afghanistan's media and information centre, Dawa Khan Menapal, was [attacked and killed by the Taliban in Kabul](#).<sup>174</sup> Journalist Toofan Omar (Paktia Ghag Radio) was also killed in early August, and another journalist, Nematullah Hemat (from local press freedom group NAI), was kidnapped.<sup>175</sup> The Taliban was suspected. In July, Afghan comedian, Khasa Zwan, was also [kidnapped and shot by the Taliban](#).<sup>176</sup> The Islamic State has also claimed responsibility for attacks on journalists.<sup>177</sup>

Both the Taliban and the Government led by Ashraf Ghani had arrested journalists in early August 2021.<sup>178</sup> Several female Afghan journalists have also reported receiving death threats from the Taliban since they captured Kabul.<sup>179</sup>

The Times reports that the Taliban is [forcing some outlets to close or censor themselves](#) in areas where they have gained control.<sup>180</sup> Radio stations in some areas have reportedly been banned from playing music.<sup>181</sup> Over 90 media outlets were reportedly closed because of fighting (as of 12 August), including 12 radio and four TV stations in southern Helmand.<sup>182</sup>

The Committee to Protect Journalists has called on the US and others to [secure the safety of Afghan journalists](#) by facilitating safe passage from the country.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Reporters without Borders, [RSF asks international criminal court to investigate murders of journalists in Afghanistan](#), 2 June 2021

<sup>173</sup> Reuters, [Taliban kill Afghan radio station manager, kidnap journalist—officials](#), 9 August 2021

<sup>174</sup> BBC News, [Afghanistan: Dawa Khan Menapal assassinated in Kabul](#), 6 August 2021

<sup>175</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, [Suspected Taliban militants kill one Afghan journalist, kidnap another](#), 9 August 2021

<sup>176</sup> HRW, [Afghanistan: Mounting Taliban revenge killings](#), 30 July 2021

<sup>177</sup> AP News, [New killings deepen Afghan journalists' assassination fears](#), 3 March 2021

<sup>178</sup> Voice of America, [As Taliban advances and fighting intensifies, Afghan media outlets close](#), 12 August 2021

<sup>179</sup> The Guardian, ["We see silence filled with fear:" Female Afghan journalists plead for help](#), 16 August 2021

<sup>180</sup> The Times, [Taliban campaign of terror forces journalists to flee in Afghanistan](#), 21 July 2021

<sup>181</sup> AP News, [Afghan fear a return to brutal rules despite Taliban vows](#), 16 August 2021

<sup>182</sup> Voice of America, [As Taliban advances and fighting intensifies, Afghan media outlets close](#), 12 August 2021

<sup>183</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, [US must protect Afghan journalists as Taliban takes power](#), 16 August 2021; Reuters, [Actions or words? Afghan journalists question Taliban's free press pledge](#), 19 August 2021

In 2020, the Afghan Government had [joined the UK's media freedom coalition](#) which requires commitments to improve media freedom.<sup>184</sup>

## 5.8 Coronavirus pandemic

Like many other states, Afghanistan has experienced high numbers of Covid-19 cases, pressure on health and social services, and significant secondary impacts of the pandemic on areas such as education and its economy.

The country has recorded around [152,000 cases and 7,000 deaths](#). However, these figures are likely to be underestimates, given the [lack of testing capacity](#) in the country.<sup>185</sup>

The numbers of women testing positive and to have died from Covid-19 remains far below the numbers reported for men. In Afghanistan, [men account for 60 percent of cases and 68 percent of deaths](#), compared to an [average of 54 and 59 percent](#) respectively, worldwide (note many countries do not report disaggregated data).<sup>186</sup>

In June, there were [reports of oxygen shortages](#) and [hospitals being at capacity](#) in the capital Kabul and other areas.<sup>187</sup>

The pandemic has exacerbated the development needs of Afghanistan and complicated its path to stability. For example, around a [million Afghans returned from Iran and Pakistan](#) in 2020 due to a slowing those economies as a result of the pandemic.<sup>188</sup> In 2020, [Polio vaccinations were also paused](#) for part of the year due to the crisis.<sup>189</sup>

In August, the WHO expressed concern that the seizure of power by the Taliban has slowed vaccinations and the delivery of medical supplies.<sup>190</sup>

## 5.9 Monitoring aid spending

### Risks of fraud and waste in aid spending

The US SIGAR, John Sopko, has found significant levels of waste and fraud in US aid and assistance to Afghanistan. In 2017, his office surveyed nearly \$53

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<sup>184</sup> FCDO, [Human Rights Report 2020](#), July 2021, p6

<sup>185</sup> OCHA Afghanistan and World Health Organization, [Strategic situation report: Covid-19](#), 15 July 2021

<sup>186</sup> The Sex, Gender and Covid-19 Project, [The Covid-19 sex-disaggregated data tracker: Afghanistan and Explore by variable: Confirmed cases and deaths](#), updated 21 June

<sup>187</sup> AP, [Afghanistan running out of oxygen as Covid surge worsens](#), 19 June 2021; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent, [Covid-19 at crisis point as hospitals overflow](#), 17 June 2021

<sup>188</sup> International Organization for Migration, [Record-cross border migrant returns](#), 19 March 2021

<sup>189</sup> UNICEF, [Polio vaccination campaigns resume in Afghanistan and Pakistan](#), 11 August 2020

<sup>190</sup> Reuters, [WHO concerned about Covid-19 in Afghanistan as jobs slow](#), 17 August 2021

billion of the \$126 billion the US appropriated for Afghan reconstruction from 2008 to December 2017, and found \$15.5 billion (29 percent of the \$53 billion surveyed) [was wasted, lost to fraud, abused or spent on failed projects](#).<sup>191</sup>

Prior to the fall of the Ghani Government, the SIGAR raised concerns that the ability to monitor, influence and account for aid spending is [likely to decline after US troops withdraw](#), particularly if the Taliban was incorporated into the Afghan Government.<sup>192</sup>

Aid committed by the UK is likely to have the same challenges. Much is already directed through the shared agencies of ARTF and UN AHF. From 2016 to 2020, the UK's Independent Commission on Aid Impact (ICAI) reported that DFID classified [less than 0.1 percent of its expenditure as lost to fraud](#), but noted it was likely to be higher.<sup>193</sup>

Following an ICAI report in 2012 that found DFID's Afghan programme lacked sufficiently robust financial and risk management, the UK Government emphasised the report found [no evidence of leakage in DFID programmes](#) and said it would employ additional staff to manage costs and was [planning a programme-wide monitoring strategy](#).<sup>194</sup>

## Future accountability and anti-corruption reforms

In January 2021, the House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee said the Government [should consider allocating ODA directly to NGOs and other recipients](#), rather than to the Afghan Government via ARTF.<sup>195</sup>

It expressed concern that money provided to the Afghan Government via the ARTF could potentially mean funding the Taliban if it was brought into Government. The Committee was also unconvinced that the UK would be able to enforce any conditions on its funding, such as respect for human rights.<sup>196</sup>

The FCDO argued that controls by the World Bank over the ARTF provides strong oversight to protect UK funding. It said it “remains alive” to the potential challenges that lie ahead and will seek to apply flexible models to ensure aid will reach those in need.<sup>197</sup>

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It is currently uncertain how aid spending can be monitored from 2021

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<sup>191</sup> SIGAR to US House of Representatives, 17 July 2018

<sup>192</sup> SIGAR, [High-risk US reconstruction programme in Afghanistan \[...\]](#), 16 March 2021, p34

<sup>193</sup> ICAI, [Tackling fraud in UK aid](#), April 2021, p19

<sup>194</sup> ICAI, [DFID: Programme controls and assurance in Afghanistan](#), 2012, p3; DFID, [DFID management response to ICAI](#), 2012 and DFID, [DFID management response to ICAI](#), 2014.

<sup>195</sup> House of Lords Select Committee on International Affairs and Defence, [The UK and Afghanistan](#), HL 208, 13 January 2021, para 224

<sup>196</sup> House of Lords Select Committee on International Affairs and Defence, [The UK and Afghanistan](#), HL 208, 13 January 2021, para 562

<sup>197</sup> FCDO, [The UK and Afghanistan: Government response](#), 12 March 2021, pp21, 39

The FCDO and National Crime Agency also initiated the Tackling Illicit Finance and Corruption in Afghanistan programme, which will involve UK mentoring in key Afghan institutions [to address high-level corruption](#).<sup>198</sup>

The APF, agreed between the Afghan Government and international partners, including the UK, in 2020, had required the [Afghan state to make efforts to reduce corruption in order to receive international assistance](#).<sup>199</sup>

The ICAI will publish an Afghanistan portfolio review by Summer 2022.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> FCDO, [The UK and Afghanistan: Government response](#), 12 March 2021, p7

<sup>199</sup> 2020 Afghanistan Conference Geneva, [APE](#), November 2020, p4, 8-9

<sup>200</sup> ICAI, [Future work plan](#), accessed 22 July 2021

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