

By Philip Loft

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# Aid to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan



## Summary

- 1 Aid dependency under Taliban rule
- 2 Delivering aid to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan
- 3 Afghan access to finances abroad
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## Summary

In August 2021, the Taliban captured Kabul as coalition troops withdrew from Afghanistan. It [announced the formation of a government](#) in early September.

Afghanistan is one of the [world's least developed countries](#), according to UN measurements. It is highly dependent on aid, with grants financing around 75% of public spending in 2019, according to the [World Bank's expenditure report](#). Although [aid has fallen](#) from around 100% of GDP in 2009 to 43% in 2020, it remains at a high level.

Afghanistan is also a cash-reliant society. In 2020, 85% of the adult population [did not have a bank account, according to the World Bank](#). In September 2021, the UN warned that Afghanistan may [face an economic collapse and resulting humanitarian crisis](#), partly because of its liquidity crisis but also due to a decline in foreign trade.

The UN has warned that [97% of Afghans could be below the poverty line by mid-2022](#) unless international trade and aid resume.

This briefing describes the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, and the country's economic and liquidity crisis. It also looks at how the UN and aid agencies are attempting to access people in Afghanistan, without Taliban interference; new aid pledges (including from the UK); and debates over how to best engage with the Taliban over aid now.

## Aid commitments to Afghanistan

Short-term aid is likely to focus on relieving the humanitarian situation, including supporting [internally displaced people and refugees](#).

January 2022 saw the UN [launch its largest humanitarian appeal for a single country on record](#), of US\$ 4.5 billion, to fund its work in Afghanistan during 2022. The resulting conference, held in March 2022 and which was co-hosted by the UK, [raised US \\$ 2.4 billion](#).

The UK, US and the EU are among those to have announced new or amended aid pledges for Afghanistan since August 2021. The UK has [pledged £286 million for 2021/22](#), and has [pledged the same for 2022/23](#).

UK funding will also help address urgent humanitarian needs such as [providing food and shelter](#), and protecting women and girls from gender-based violence.

## Delivering aid via the UN

The UK and its partners have said that aid (other than that to [address humanitarian needs](#)) should be partly [dependent on the actions](#) of the Taliban. This includes ensuring the [protection of girls, women, and ethnic minorities, such as the Hazaras](#).

The UN Security Council has [renewed the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan](#), which will help coordinate and deliver aid.

The UN has also received [written assurances from the Taliban](#) that it will not interfere with the delivery of aid and will protect aid workers. However, some NGOs have raised concerns for the [protection of their female staff](#).

## Freeze on Afghan assets abroad

Since the Taliban's capture of Kabul, Afghan assets overseas, such as those held by its central bank, have been frozen by the US.

Total assets held overseas are estimated to be in the region of [US\\$ 9-10 billion](#), according to an [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\) report on the bank's holdings](#) in April 2021. Both [China and Russia](#) have called for these [to be released](#).

In February 2022, the Biden Administration proposed that half of the US\$ 7 billion held by the Afghan central bank in the US be released for Afghanistan. However, [the US\\$ 7 billion is currently involved in litigation](#), with relatives of the victims of the September 11 attacks seeking to claim the assets. It remains uncertain if any funds will be released.

The [World Bank](#) and [IMF](#) have paused their aid programmes in the country, among other organisations. In December 2021, the World Bank said that US\$ 280 million of its funds would be released to Unicef and the World Food Programme to [address urgent humanitarian needs](#). A further US\$ 600 million [was released in March 2022](#).

However, in March 2022 the Bank [froze projects worth US\\$ 600 million in the country](#) after the Taliban banned girls from attending secondary school.

## Negotiating sanctions against the Taliban

Another challenge for delivering aid to Afghanistan is that the Taliban is [subject to sanctions](#). NGOs and aid organisations have argued this has [made the delivery of aid difficult](#), with many banks hesitant to allow money to be transferred into Afghanistan.

In December 2021, the UN Security Council voted to create a [humanitarian exemption from sanctions against some Taliban members](#), in order to ease the delivery of aid to the country. The [United Kingdom](#), [United States](#) and [European Union](#) have subsequently amended sanctions legislation to support the delivery of humanitarian aid.

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# 1 Aid dependency under Taliban rule

## 1.1 UN warnings of pressure on basic services

In March 2022 the UN warned that Afghanistan is facing a “downward humanitarian spiral” and the country is potentially facing a “non-reversible economic collapse” since the Taliban’s takeover. The country is also seeing shortages in basic supplies, such as food.<sup>1</sup>

### Health services

In January 2022, the International Rescue Committee warned that 90% of the country’s health services may shut in 2022, due to a loss in foreign aid.<sup>2</sup> The UN has now begun to transfer salaries directly to health workers to ensure continuity of care.<sup>3</sup>

### Vaccination campaigns

Weakened health services may also affect the rollout of coronavirus vaccinations, which the Taliban have allowed.<sup>4</sup>

Currently, however, a [lower proportion of women are being vaccinated against it](#), with men representing 53% of those fully vaccinated. This pattern was present before the Taliban’s capture of Kabul.<sup>5</sup>

In October 2021 the World Health Organization and Unicef also announced that house-to-house polio vaccinations were [due to resume across Afghanistan from November](#), following an agreement with the Taliban. It will be the first campaign to reach all children across Afghanistan in three years.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UN, [World can end “downward humanitarian spiral” of Afghanistan](#), 31 March 2022, accessed 1 April 2022

<sup>2</sup> International Rescue Committee, [Crisis in Afghanistan](#), 7 January 2022, accessed 1 April 2022

<sup>3</sup> UN Development Programme, [Lifeline support from UNDP and Global fund keeps Afghanistan’s health facilities open](#), 11 November 2021, accessed 10 December 2021

<sup>4</sup> WHO, [Situation report, issue 8](#), 14 November 2021, p2; Middle East Institute, [The Afghan Taliban and Covid-19: Leveraging the crisis or a change of heart?](#), 13 April 2021, accessed 10 December 2021

<sup>5</sup> The sex, gender and Covid-19 project, [The Covid-19 sex-disaggregated data tracker: Afghanistan](#), last updated 10 March 2022

<sup>6</sup> Unicef, [House-to-house polio vaccination set to recommence across Afghanistan in November](#), 18 October 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

## Disruption to education

Many Afghan teachers have not been paid since June.<sup>7</sup> Unicef is now paying teachers directly, to ensure funds are not directed through the Taliban.<sup>8</sup>

## A high proportion of the Afghan population are disabled

Limited access to services will have a particularly [significant impact on disabled people in Afghanistan](#). According to a 2019 Asia Foundation survey, 79% of Afghan adults have some degree of disability, and 17% of children. This high level is likely to reflect the long period of violence the country has experienced, together with malnutrition and birth-defects.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.2 Food shortages

Many Afghans now have [higher levels of food insecurity](#). This is partly due to a combination of a prolonged drought in many parts of the country, lower crop yields, and high numbers of people displaced.<sup>10</sup>

In March 2022, the UN said 95% of Afghans are not getting enough to eat, rising to nearly 100% in female-headed households.<sup>11</sup>

## 1.3 Expected reduction in GDP

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) estimates Afghanistan will see at least a [20% reduction in Gross Domestic Production](#) (GDP) in 2022.<sup>12</sup>

In November 2021, the Taliban banned the use of foreign currency in the country. Many border areas use such currency, and the use of US dollars is widespread. The decision is likely to produce further economic disruption.<sup>13</sup>

The Taliban has also placed restrictions on female employment, which had represented around 20% of the workforce. The UNDP estimated these

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<sup>7</sup> BBC News, [Afghanistan: Girls' despair as Taliban confirms secondary school ban](#), 8 December 2021, accessed 13 December 2021

<sup>8</sup> Al-Jazeera, [Unicef to pay stipend to Afghan teachers as "emergency support."](#) 21 February 2022, accessed 9 March 2022

<sup>9</sup> The Asia Foundation, [Disability survey of Afghanistan 2019](#), May 2020, preface and p53

<sup>10</sup> Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, [Report: Afghanistan, September 2021—March 2022](#), 25 October 2021, accessed 13 December 2021

<sup>11</sup> UN, [Afghanistan: Food insecurity and malnutrition threaten "an entire generation."](#) 15 March 2022, accessed 1 April 2022

<sup>12</sup> UNDP, [Afghanistan: Socio-economic outlook 2021-22](#), 1 December 2021, p1

<sup>13</sup> Al-Jazeera, [Taliban bans the use of foreign currency across Afghanistan](#), 2 November 2021, accessed 13 December 2021

restrictions may lead to a [reduction in Afghan GDP of between 3% and 5%](#), though noted it was uncertain which sectors would be worst affected by the decision.<sup>14</sup>

## 1.4 Refugees

Other analysts have raised concerns that the demobilisation of Afghan security forces, which had numbered around 300,000 in April 2021, the displacement of people, and potential for migration to grow will further destabilise the Afghan economy, making it more dependent on external aid.<sup>15</sup>

Around 14% of the Afghan population (5.7 million people) have been internally displaced or are registered refugees in neighbouring countries. As of 31 August 2021, there were [2.2 million Afghan refugees](#) in Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan registered with the UN Refugee Agency.<sup>16</sup>

700,000 Afghans were also [internally displaced](#) in 2021, bringing the total to 3.4 million by 31 December 2021.<sup>17</sup>

## 1.5 Humanitarian needs likely to worsen

In December 2021, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) published projections of humanitarian needs worldwide in 2022. Aside from [projecting a global rise](#)—from 235 million in need in 2021 to 274 million in 2022,<sup>18</sup> UNOCHA estimated that Afghanistan would see:

- A rise in people in need from 9.4 million in 2020 to 24.4 million in 2022 (59% of the population).
- 22.8 million (55% of the population) to be in crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity. This includes 9 million at the highest level of food insecurity.
- More than half of children to be acutely malnourished in 2022—a 21% increase since January 2021.

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<sup>14</sup> UNDP, [Afghanistan: Socio-economic outlook 2021-22](#), 1 December 2021, pp1, 17-18

<sup>15</sup> US Institute of Peace, [After Taliban take over, can Afghanistan's economy survive?](#), 7 September 2021; US Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, [Quarterly report to Congress, 30 July 2021](#), 30 July 2021, p63.

<sup>16</sup> UNHCR, [Operational data portal: Afghanistan](#), accessed 8 February 2022; UN Population, [Afghanistan 2019](#), accessed 14 October 2021

<sup>17</sup> UNHCR, [Afghanistan emergency](#), accessed 8 February 2022

<sup>18</sup> UNOCHA, [Global humanitarian overview 2022](#), accessed 10 December 2021

- UN funding requirements to rise from US\$ 733 million in 2020 to US\$ 4.4 billion in 2022.<sup>19</sup>

In September 2021, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) also warned that Afghanistan [could see “near universal poverty” by mid-2022](#) if its economy fragments and there is significant interruption to international trade with its partners. It estimates poverty will increase by between 7% and 25%, from a baseline of 72% in 2020, implying a potential 97% poverty rate.<sup>20</sup>

The conflict in Ukraine from February 2022 is also likely to impact on the world’s food supply. Together, Russia and Ukraine export around 30% of the world’s wheat. The WFP has said Afghanistan is particularly vulnerable to the conflict, because of its high dependency on wheat imports.<sup>21</sup>

## 1 Resources on Afghanistan’s humanitarian situation

- The New Humanitarian, [Afghanistan’s crisis, by the numbers](#), 15 February 2022. Sets out headline statistics on the humanitarian situation.
- UN, [Afghanistan humanitarian response plan 2022](#), 11 January 2022. Provides a summary of humanitarian need and UN plans to address it during 2022 through its US\$ 4.4 billion appeal
- UN Refugee Agency, [Afghanistan situation regional response plan, January-December 2022](#), 2021. The Agency’s plans to support displaced people in 2022, and details of its US\$ 623 million appeal for the year.
- UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs, [Inter-agency appeals: Afghanistan](#). Describes the humanitarian situation and priorities for aid agencies in 2022.

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<sup>19</sup> UNOCHA, [Global humanitarian overview 2022: Afghanistan](#), accessed 10 December 2021

<sup>20</sup> UNDP, [Economic instability and uncertainty in Afghanistan after August 15](#), 9 September 2021, p9, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>21</sup> WFP, [Ukraine war: More countries to “feel the burn” as food and energy rises fuel hunger, war](#), 11 March 2022, accessed 1 April 2022

## 2 Delivering aid to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan

### 2.1 Aid agencies pledges to remain

Following the Taliban's capture of Kabul, the UN [pledged to remain in Afghanistan](#) to deliver aid and services to those in need.<sup>22</sup> These include organisations such as the World Food Programme (WFP), Unicef, and the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>23</sup>

#### Assurances from the Taliban to the UN

In September 2021, the UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Martin Griffiths, said he had [received written assurances from the Taliban](#) that the UN and its partners would be allowed to access vulnerable people in the country, and they would protect humanitarian workers. The Taliban also undertook to remove barriers to UN work.<sup>24</sup>

Griffiths subsequently held further talks to ensure local Taliban forces also uphold the independence and safety of aid workers.<sup>25</sup>

In November 2021, Human Rights Watch released a report stating the UN had agreements for female aid staff to [work in only three of the country's 34 provinces](#).<sup>26</sup> In the same month, the UN reported that the Taliban [are allowing "broad humanitarian access,"](#) including for female workers.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> UN, [The UN intends to remain in Afghanistan](#), 18 August 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>23</sup> WFP, [Afghanistan: The time to act is now](#), 15 September 2021; Unicef, [Statement by Unicef executive director Henrietta Fore on children in Afghanistan](#), 22 August 2021; WHO, [Acute health needs in Afghanistan must be urgently addressed and health gains protected](#), 22 September 2021, all accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>24</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, [Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths' remarks \[...\]](#), 13 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>25</sup> Devex, [UN in talks with Taliban for more security assurances from aid workers](#), 23 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Afghanistan: Taliban blocking female aid workers](#), 4 November 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>27</sup> UNAMA, [SRSG Lyons briefing to the UN Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan](#), 17 November 2021, accessed 10 December 2021

## UN Security Council resolutions

In August 2021, the Security Council passed a resolution calling on the Taliban to [facilitate safe passage for Afghans seeking to leave](#) the country, to allow aid agencies to access the country, and to uphold human rights, including for women and children. Russia and China abstained on the measure, but the other 13 ambassadors supported the resolution.<sup>28</sup>

The following month, the Council unanimously passed a resolution calling for “[full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access](#)” for UN agencies and other humanitarian workers. The Council has also renewed the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to coordinate UN aid efforts in the country.<sup>29</sup>

## Work by other charities and NGOs

In addition to UN agencies, other aid organisations are seeking to continue their work in the country.

These include the UK-based mine-clearing charity, the Halo Trust, which said in September 2021 that it had come to an agreement with the Taliban to continue its work.<sup>30</sup> Doctors without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières also continues to operate, as is the Red Cross/Red Crescent, International Rescue Committee, and the Norwegian Refugee Council.<sup>31</sup>

The UK Government does not expect partners funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to remain in any areas [where they cannot operate safely](#) or without interference.<sup>32</sup>

## 2.2

## Placing conditions on aid

Aid is seen as a potential point of leverage over the Taliban to ensure its commitment to human rights, as the country’s dependence on aid is likely to continue.

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<sup>28</sup> UN, [Security Council urges Taliban to provide safe passage out of Afghanistan](#), 30 August 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>29</sup> UN, [Adopting UN Resolution 2626 \(2022\) Security Council extends UNAMA for one year](#), 17 March 2022, accessed 1 April 2022

<sup>30</sup> The Times, [As UK support dwindles, mine clearers in Afghanistan find help where they can](#), 13 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>31</sup> Doctors without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières, [Afghanistan](#); British Red Cross, [Afghanistan](#), and Norwegian Refugee Council, [Afghanistan](#); International Rescue Committee, [Almost all clients at IRC-run health clinics in Afghanistan are women with malnourished children](#), 9 November 2021, all accessed 10 December 2021

<sup>32</sup> FCDO, [The UK and Afghanistan: Government response](#), 12 March 2021, p16, accessed 13 December 2021

## Calls for aid to be unconditional

Both Qatar and Pakistan have called for humanitarian aid to Afghanistan to [be provided without conditions](#), including not requiring political progress.<sup>33</sup>

Observers consider the two countries to have the potential to [hold substantial influence in Afghanistan](#).<sup>34</sup> Qatar had hosted the Taliban-US negotiations in Doha, and Pakistan was previously only one of three countries to have formal ties with the Taliban in the late 1990s.<sup>35</sup>

## Could aid be conditional on education for women and girls?

In September 2021, a panel sponsored by the UN, which included the Executive Director of Unicef and Deputy-Secretary General, said there is a potential for aid to be made [conditional on education for girls and women](#).<sup>36</sup> Exclusion of girls from secondary education has been seen across Afghanistan.

Analysis for the NGO International Crisis Group, has argued that while countries may choose to place conditions on aid (such as respect for human rights), this should be [interpreted flexibly in the short-term](#) to help prevent the collapse of basic services.<sup>37</sup>

## UK, US and EU statements

G7 Leaders, including the UK, have called for the Taliban to adhere to human rights, including for women, girls and minority groups; allow unhindered humanitarian access; and to oppose terrorism.<sup>38</sup> US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, has said that a Taliban government that does not achieve this will [not see any sanctions lifted against them](#).<sup>39</sup>

On 21 September 2021, the Council of the EU published [five benchmarks](#) to be guiding principles for future engagement (these are similar to those adopted by the UN Security Council, see section 2.1, page 11). These are:

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<sup>33</sup> Reuters, [Pakistan, Qatar call for unconditional humanitarian aid to Afghanistan](#), 9 September 2021; UN, [On Afghanistan, Qatar calls for separating aid from political differences](#), 21 September 2021, both accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>34</sup> IISS, [Adapting to the new reality in Afghanistan](#), 20 August 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>35</sup> BBC News, [Afghanistan: Qatar and Turkey become Taliban's lifeline to the outside world](#), 2 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>36</sup> ABC News, [To protect Afghan girls, UN panel urges conditions on aid](#), 24 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>37</sup> Crisis Group, [Thinking through the dilemmas of aid to Afghanistan](#), 7 October 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>38</sup> Ten Downing Street, [G7 leaders statement on Afghanistan](#), 24 August 2021

<sup>39</sup> US State Department, [Secretary Antony Blinken with Jake Tapper of State of the Union on CNN](#), 15 August 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

1. The safe, secure, and orderly departure of those who wish to leave the country.
2. Promote and protect human rights, including for women, girls, and minorities.
3. Allow the implementation of humanitarian operations in a neutral form.
4. Prevent Afghanistan from serving as a base for financing, hosting, or exporting terrorism.
5. Establish an inclusive and representative government through negotiations.<sup>40</sup>

The EU Council has said these are not currently being met, but it will maintain limited engagement with the Taliban, in order to monitor the humanitarian situation and facilitate the delivery of aid.<sup>41</sup>

## UK humanitarian aid is unlikely to be conditional

In August 2021, the previous Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, said the UK, together with its partners, [was considering measures to hold the Taliban to account](#) and maintain development progress made since 2001 (for example, with regard to women's rights). These included potential sanctions and holding back aid. However, he said it was not likely that humanitarian relief would be conditional on what the Taliban does.<sup>42</sup>

When considering what would happen if the Taliban was brought into a power sharing agreement by President Ghani, in January 2021 the House of Lords Committee on International Relations and Defence argued that attaching conditions to aid [was unlikely to succeed](#), unless the UK threatened to withdraw aid entirely.

The Committee argued that the Taliban was unlikely to respond to such pressure, but aid should be conditional, as a minimum, on the recipients not supporting terrorist organisations.<sup>43</sup>

## 2.3

## NGO relief from sanctions against the Taliban

The UN Security Council has placed sanctions against the Taliban and many of its leaders.<sup>44</sup> Any aid organisations working in Afghanistan, and banks

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<sup>40</sup> Council of the European Union, [Council conclusions on Afghanistan](#), 15 September 2021, para 9, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>41</sup> Council of the European Union, [Council conclusions on Afghanistan](#), 15 September 2021, para 8; Reuters, [EU says provisional Taliban government falls short of promises](#), 8 September 2021

<sup>42</sup> Reuters, [UK indicates Afghanistan sanctions possible](#), 16 August 2021; [BBC Today Programme 17 August 2021](#), at 02:21:29; Yahoo News, [Afghanistan news live updates](#), 17 August 2021, at 10:55, accessed 17 August 2021

<sup>43</sup> House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations and Defence, [The UK and Afghanistan](#), HL 208, 13 January 2021, para 562.

<sup>44</sup> FCDO, [Financial sanctions, Afghanistan](#), updated 1 February 2021

involved in their financing, are [required to adhere to these](#). Sanctions can increase the costs of delivering aid, slow its delivery, or impede it altogether.<sup>45</sup>

## UN vote to amend sanctions to facilitate aid delivery

In December 2021, the UN Security Council voted to [amend UN sanctions against several Taliban members](#). The Council resolved to introduce an exemption for funds, financial assets and economic resources made available in order to address humanitarian need in Afghanistan. The measure was passed unanimously, with support from both the US (who drafted the resolution) and the UK.<sup>46</sup>

## US guidance on sanctions, 2021-2022

Prior to the UN vote, the US had already taken some steps to accommodate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the country.

In late September, the US Treasury Department [granted narrow relief from financial sanctions on the Taliban](#). It issued a licence allowing some organisations, such as UN Agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and the Islamic Development Bank to work with the Taliban without violating US sanctions.<sup>47</sup>

Following the UN vote in December, the US [issued further licences](#) to facilitate the flow of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the decision, both the UN and aid organisations continued to raise concerns that foreign banks [are hesitant to allow the transfer of funds](#) into the country.<sup>49</sup> In response, the US Treasury in February 2022 [issued guidance](#) setting how banks can transfer money for humanitarian purposes and the payment of teachers and health workers.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Atlantic Council, [They aren't listed, but make no mistake the UN has sanctions on the Taliban](#), 23 August 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>46</sup> Security Council Report, [Afghanistan: Vote on 1988 sanctions resolution](#), 21 December 2021, accessed 23 December 2021; FCDO, [This resolution will save lives \[...\]](#), 22 December 2021, both accessed 23 December 2021

<sup>47</sup> US Department of the Treasury, [Authorising humanitarian activities in Afghanistan](#), 24 September 2021; Bloomberg, [US gives sanctions relief to allow Afghan humanitarian aid](#), 24 September 2021, both accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>48</sup> US Department of State, [Issuance of additional general license and guidance in support of assistance to Afghanistan](#), 22 December 2021

<sup>49</sup> Devex, [Sanctions and banks make it a struggle to get money into Afghanistan](#), 17 January 2022, accessed 8 February 2022

<sup>50</sup> Reuters, [US advice to banks: OK to transfer aid money to Afghanistan](#), 2 February 2022, accessed 8 February 2022

## EU and UK adopt legislation to facilitate humanitarian aid, 2022

In November, the UK Office of Financial Sanctions (OSFI) published new guidance for the charity sector on sanctions, with the [intention of supporting delivery of humanitarian aid](#) to the country.<sup>51</sup>

In January 2022, the UK [amended its sanctions regime](#) to create a humanitarian exemption for aid to meet basic needs of people in Afghanistan.<sup>52</sup> The EU [did the same](#) the following month.<sup>53</sup>

## 2.4

### Arranging aid to bypass the Taliban

In January 2022, the Taliban proposed the establishment of a joint body of Taliban officials and international representatives [to coordinate aid](#) to the country.<sup>54</sup>

Most aid donors, including the UK and US, have sought for aid to be delivered to Afghans via neutral NGOs and UN agencies, rather than via the Taliban-controlled Government. This is due to concerns over the monitoring and accountability of aid spending; to ensure the Taliban is not being funded indirectly; and that aid is delivered to those in greatest need and in line with human rights obligations.

In September 2021, the UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Martin Griffiths, argued that while he was working on further assurances with the Taliban on the safety of aid workers and neutrality of aid, he said [humanitarian aid could bypass the group](#) and be delivered directly through NGOs. However, he saw this only as a “temporary solution.”<sup>55</sup>

In October 2021, the G20 President, the Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, said that while most humanitarian aid from G20 states would be channelled through UN Agencies, he believed some [assistance would go via the Taliban](#).<sup>56</sup> He said it was hard to see how to help Afghans without involving

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<sup>51</sup> OSFI, [OFSI updates charity sector guidance](#), 1 November 2021, accessed 10 December 2021

<sup>52</sup> [The Afghanistan \(Sanctions\) \(EU Exit\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2022](#)

<sup>53</sup> European Sanctions, [EU adopts humanitarian exemption to Afghan sanctions](#), accessed 8 February 2022

<sup>54</sup> Al-Jazeera, [Taliban seeks greater role in distribution of Afghan foreign aid](#), 13 January 2022, accessed 8 February 2022

<sup>55</sup> Devex, [UN in talks with Taliban for more security assurances for aid workers](#), 23 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>56</sup> Russia and China were not included at the meeting.

the Taliban, but that it did not mean the G20 recognised them as the legitimate government of the country.<sup>57</sup>

In 2022, the Taliban [began to pay some public sector workers in wheat](#). Aside from underlining the extent of the country's financial crisis, it suggests that humanitarian aid is not wholly bypassing Taliban channels.<sup>58</sup>

## 2 Further reading on sanctions and delivering aid

- Commons International Development Committee, [Afghanistan: UK support for aid workers and the Afghan people](#), 4 March 2022
- Devex, [Solving Afghan food crisis “not very complicated,” says Miliband](#), 15 February 2022. David Miliband, former Foreign Secretary and now head of the International Rescue Committee, sets out four proposals to help address hunger in Afghanistan.
- Crisis Group, [Toward a new mandate for the UN mission in Afghanistan](#), 28 January 2022. Discusses how the UN mission may change going forward, such as its capacity to monitor human rights or coordinate aid.
- Norwegian Refugee Council, [Afghanistan: Inability to transfer aid funding puts millions at risk](#), 27 January 2022. Argues sanctions are preventing aid agencies from transferring funds into Afghanistan.

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<sup>57</sup> Reuters, [G20 pledges help for Afghan humanitarian crisis at special summit](#), 13 October 2021; G20 Italy 2021, [G20 extraordinary meeting on Afghanistan: Chair's summary](#), 12 October 2021, both accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>58</sup> BBC News, [Afghanistan crisis: Taliban expands “food for work” programme](#), 12 January 2022, accessed 8 February 2022

## 3

## Afghan access to finances abroad

The Afghan Government of President Ghani held substantial assets abroad. Access to most of these has been frozen by the US and others since the Taliban's capture of Kabul. Shortage of foreign currency reserves and cash is threatening an economic crisis in the country, including likely delaying the payment of wages (including to aid workers).

In March 2022, the International Development Committee argued the UK Government had been “far too slow” to work with international partners [to unblock the banking system in Afghanistan](#) and to arrange the release of World Bank Funds previously allocated to Afghanistan.<sup>59</sup>

## 3.1

### Central bank reserves

The Afghan Central Bank has around US\$ [10 billion-worth of assets](#), most of which are held abroad. Those held in the US, which include US\$ 1.3 billion in gold reserves, have been frozen by the US Government.<sup>60</sup>

Russia has said the world should [unfreeze Afghanistan's reserves](#), or risk a spike in illegal narcotics and arms traffic.<sup>61</sup> The Chinese Government has also argued that [unilateral sanctions and restrictions on Afghanistan should also be lifted](#).<sup>62</sup>

In September 2021, the section of the Afghan Central Bank dealing with illicit funding flows stopped operating. Analysts suggest this may further damage the ability of Afghanistan to [access the international financial system](#).<sup>63</sup>

In February 2022, the Biden Administration issued an executive order to enable around US\$ 3.5 billion of Afghan Central Bank assets held in the US [to be released for humanitarian purposes in Afghanistan](#). This, together with an

<sup>59</sup> International Development Committee, [Afghanistan: UK support for aid workers and the Afghan people](#), 4 March 2022, accessed 9 March 2022, paras 71 and 100

<sup>60</sup> Reuters, [Analysis: Afghan central bank's \\$10 billion stash mostly out of Taliban's reach](#), 18 August 2021; Reuters, [US has no plans to release billions in Afghan assets, Treasury says](#), 3 September 2021, both accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>61</sup> Washington Post, [The world should unfreeze Afghanistan's reserves \[...\], Russia says](#), 30 August 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>62</sup> Reuters, [China senior diplomat says economic sanctions on Afghanistan must end](#), 23 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>63</sup> Reuters, [Anti-laundering unit goes off-grid, fraying Afghan ties to global finance](#), 15 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

additional US\$ 3.5 billion the Bank holds in the US, is currently subject to litigation by the relatives of victims who died in the September 11 attacks.<sup>64</sup>

Biden's decision [has been criticised](#), with the Bank arguing the funds belong to the people of Afghanistan. Litigation is ongoing, and it remains uncertain whether the funds will be released.<sup>65</sup>

## 3.2

## Remittances: Money earned abroad allowed in

**Personal remittances represent 4% of Afghanistan's GDP**

	Current US \$	% GDP
2015	\$348.6m	1.8%
2016	\$627.7m	3.5%
2017	\$822.7m	4.4%
2018	\$803.5m	4.4%
2019	\$828.5m	4.3%
2020	\$788.9m	4.0%

Source: World Bank, [Personal remittances received \(% of GDP\) and \(current US \\$\)- Afghanistan, low income](#), accessed 14 October 2021

Remittances are transfers of money from migrant workers abroad back to Afghanistan.

As Afghanistan is heavily cash-dependent, remittances are important to the functioning of its economy. In 2020, nearly 85% of Afghan adults did not have a bank account.<sup>66</sup> For those with accounts, many Afghan banks have placed limits on withdrawals.<sup>67</sup>

Transfers from abroad represent around 4% of Afghanistan's GDP, compared to around 2-3% in other low-income economies. Remittances totalled US\$ 788.9 million in 2020, up from US\$ 348.6 million in 2015.<sup>68</sup> In 2016/17, for around a tenth of Afghan households, remittances [were a source in income](#).<sup>69</sup>

Money transfer services from abroad were suspended in August 2021, after the Taliban captured Kabul. In September, US authorities allowed [personal remittances to Afghanistan](#) to resume via financial institutions.<sup>70</sup> The Western Union is among those who have resumed money transfer services to Afghanistan.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> White House, [Executive Order to preserve certain Afghan central bank assets for the people of Afghanistan](#), 11 February 2022, accessed 9 March 2022

<sup>65</sup> Atlantic Council, [On Afghanistan's \\$7B question, Biden gets it right](#), 15 February 2022, accessed 9 March 2022

<sup>66</sup> World Bank, [A pathway to financial inclusion in Afghanistan](#), 19 February 2020, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>67</sup> Al-Jazeera, [Afghans sell possessions amid cash crunch, looming crisis](#), 13 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>68</sup> World Bank, [Personal remittances received \(% of GDP\) and \(current US \\$\)- Afghanistan, low income](#), accessed 14 October 2021

<sup>69</sup> Migration data portal, [Remittances in Afghanistan are lifelines: They are needed more than ever in a time of crisis](#), 6 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>70</sup> Reuters, [US allows personal remittances to flow to Afghanistan](#), 2 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>71</sup> Al-Jazeera, [Western Union to resume money-transfer services to Afghanistan](#), 2 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

### 3.3

## IMF and World Bank suspend most funds

In late August 2021, both the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank announced they would [suspend payments to Afghanistan](#) and to their projects in the country.<sup>72</sup>

The UK has been among those who called for the World Bank to repurpose the existing US\$ 1.5 billion Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), to support health and basic services.<sup>73</sup> The ARTF has been in place since 2002 and is a multi-donor trust that coordinates international aid to Afghanistan.

In December, the World Bank said that an initial US \$280 million of ARTF funds [would be released to Unicef and the World Food Programme](#). This is to provide essential food aid and health services, including vaccination programmes. All 31 contributing countries to ARTF agreed to the decision.<sup>74</sup>

In March 2022, a further US\$ 600 million was released for education, health, agriculture, and employment projects. The Bank said there would be a focus on ensuring women and girls benefit from the support.<sup>75</sup>

In the same month, the Bank suspended four projects worth US\$ 600 million in the country after the Taliban banned girls from attending secondary school. The aims of the projects included ensuring women and girls benefited from the support. The projects will be restarted when the Bank is confident its goals can be met.<sup>76</sup>

The Guardian newspaper reported in January 2022 that Western countries are considering releasing further funds from the ARTF [to support Afghan teachers' salaries](#), on the condition girls are allowed to attend school.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> BBC News, [Afghanistan: World Bank halts aid after Taliban takeover](#), 25 August 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>73</sup> FCDO, [Allowing Afghans to starve serves no one's best interests](#), 17 November 2021; Reuters, [Norway urges World Bank's Afghanistan donors to channel funds to UN](#), 6 December 2021, accessed 9 November 2021

<sup>74</sup> World Bank, [Statement on the decision of ARTF donors to transfer out \\$280 million for the humanitarian response in Afghanistan](#), 10 December 2021, accessed 13 December 2021

<sup>75</sup> World Bank, [World Bank announces expanded approach to supporting the people of Afghanistan](#), 1 March 2022

<sup>76</sup> BBC News, [Afghanistan: World Bank freezes projects over girls' school ban](#), 30 March 2022, accessed 1 April 2022

<sup>77</sup> The Guardian, [West plans to tie Afghan teacher aid to girl's education pledge](#), 27 January 2022, accessed 8 February 2022

## 3.4

## UN calls for cash to be released

In September, the UN argued that the freezing of Afghan assets abroad [would cause an economic downturn in the country](#).<sup>78</sup>

The UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, said the decision on whether to unfreeze Afghan assets abroad should be taken regardless of any diplomatic decisions to recognise the Taliban Government. He also suggested one way to inject cash into the economy would be for UN agencies or the World Bank [to make cash payments direct to Afghan citizens](#).<sup>79</sup>

In October 2021, the UN announced a [trust fund to provide cash directly to Afghans](#). The fund will have a budget of US\$ 667 million for the next 12 months.<sup>80</sup>

### 3 Further reading on Afghanistan's liquidity crisis

- International Crisis Group, [Beyond emergency relief: Afghanistan's humanitarian catastrophe](#), 5 December 2021. Argues the US and others should urgently find ways to inject liquidity into Afghanistan's currency markets.
- Center for Global Development, [Aid alone will not solve the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan: Exploring "all options available."](#) 21 January 2022. Suggests ways that foreign reserves and cash could be released to the country.

<sup>78</sup> AP News, [UN envoy: World must prevent Afghanistan economic collapse](#), 10 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>79</sup> UN Secretary General, [Press remarks on Afghanistan](#), 11 October 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>80</sup> Al-Jazeera, [UN sets up trust fund for Afghanistan amid cash shortages](#), 21 October 2021; UNDP, [\\$667 million funding call to help Afghans through economic crisis](#), 21 October 2021, both accessed 9 December 2021

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## 4 Aid spending announcements

### 4.1 UN appeals

#### September 2021

In September 2021, the UN held a pledging conference for Afghanistan, which [sought to raise US\\$ 606 million for the country](#).<sup>81</sup> The UN said that [the target was met](#).<sup>82</sup>

The UN intended to use the funds to support up to 11 million Afghans in 2021. This included providing health services, food, education, and water.<sup>83</sup> In September 2021, the UN released US\$ 45 million in emergency funds to support Afghanistan's health system. The funds went to UN health and children's agencies.<sup>84</sup>

#### January-March 2022

In January 2022, the UN launched its [largest-ever humanitarian appeal for a single country](#), requesting a total of US\$ 5 billion for Afghanistan (including US\$ 623 million for the UN Refugee Agency).<sup>85</sup>

The UN has also announced a need for an [additional US\\$ 3.6 billion](#) to sustain essential services, basic infrastructure and the promotion of socio-economic development, targeted especially at women and girls.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> UN, [Note to correspondents: Flash appeal for Afghanistan](#), 7 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>82</sup> UNOCHA, [Afghanistan 2021](#), accessed 13 December 2021

<sup>83</sup> Humanitarian InSight, [Afghanistan flash appeal 2021](#), accessed 14 October 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>84</sup> Al-Jazeera, [UN releases funds to save Afghan health system from collapse](#), 22 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>85</sup> UN, [Afghanistan: UN launches largest single country appeal ever](#), 11 January 2022, accessed 8 February 2022

<sup>86</sup> UN, [UN Transitional engagement framework for Afghanistan](#), 26 January 2022

## Pledging conference, March 2022

The UK [co-hosted a humanitarian summit for Afghanistan](#) on 31 March 2022, with the aim of raising US\$ 4.4 billion for Afghanistan.<sup>87</sup> The conference fell short, raising US\$ 2.44 billion.<sup>88</sup>

## 4.2

## United Kingdom

### UK bilateral ODA to Afghanistan

	£, thousand	% ODA to Asia
2009	208,251	14.9%
	152,053	11.4%
	264,129	19.7%
	273,801	20.0%
	211,852	10.9%
	197,543	10.9%
2015	299,928	14.4%
	235,318	10.0%
	226,948	9.7%
	248,699	11.1%
	289,773	11.7%
2020	225,552	11.4%

Note: Spending is given in calendar years.

Source: FCDO, [Final aid spend 2020](#), September 2021, table A4B

### £286 million pledged for 2021/22

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

Addressing the Commons on 18 August 2021, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, said UK humanitarian and development assistance to Afghanistan would be [increased to £286 million in 2021/22](#). The Government would also seek international support to deliver humanitarian projects in the wider region.<sup>89</sup>

This was also an increase from the [initial pledge of £155 million](#) for the country, announced in November 2020.<sup>90</sup>

The Commons International Development Committee criticised the speed at which the sum was been spent—by 15 December only £91 million had been committed.<sup>91</sup>

The Government made several announcements on its spending plans:

- In September 2021, the Government announced that up to [£30 million of funding for 2021/22](#) would be available to Afghanistan's neighbours, to support regional stability and refugees. £10 million will be for the UN Refugee Agency and its partners to [provide urgent humanitarian](#)

<sup>87</sup> FCDO, [UK to co-host summit to address Afghanistan humanitarian crisis](#), 15 February 2022, accessed 9 March 2022

<sup>88</sup> UN, [World can end “downward humanitarian spiral” of Afghanistan](#), 31 March 2022, accessed 1 April 2022

<sup>89</sup> Number Ten, [The Prime Minister’s opening statement on Afghanistan](#), 18 August 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>90</sup> FCDO, [UK pledges £155 million aid to support peace and stability in Afghanistan](#), 24 November 2020, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>91</sup> International Development Committee, [Afghanistan: UK support for aid workers and the Afghan population](#), 4 March 2022, paras 52 and 58, accessed 9 March 2022

[assistance](#).<sup>92</sup> It will be additional to that already allocated to Afghanistan's neighbours.<sup>93</sup>

- On 31 October, the Government announced that [£50 million will also be spent](#) to address humanitarian needs such as providing food and shelter, and protecting women and girls from gender-based violence in the country.<sup>94</sup>
- In December, an additional [£75 million was announced](#) for food, health services, shelter and water for 1.8 million Afghans. The aid will be delivered via UN agencies and the International Rescue Committee.<sup>95</sup>
- The Government will also [match to £10 million of public donations](#) to the Disaster Emergency Committee's Afghanistan appeal. Funds will support the work of 13 UK charities and local partners.<sup>96</sup>
- In January 2022, the Government [announced that £97 million](#) would provide food, water and health services for 2.7 million Afghans, via UN agencies.<sup>97</sup>

## Focus on women and girls

In October 2021, G20 countries, including the UK, said humanitarian aid to Afghanistan [would focus on programmes in favour of women and girls](#) and “seek to achieve a durable peace and inclusive development.”<sup>98</sup>

## £286 million also pledged for 2022/23

The UK has pledged £286 million for 2022/23, the same as the previous year. This will provide emergency humanitarian aid, access to healthcare and aid to address the impact of drought. It will be directed through UN agencies and NGOs, and no money will go directly to the Taliban.<sup>99</sup>

The previous International Development Secretary, Andrew Mitchell, had called upon the UK Government to [meet 10% of the UN's appeal](#) from UK aid funding (around £335 million).<sup>100</sup>

## UK aid spending in Afghanistan, 2002-2021

From 2002 to 2021, the [UK provided £3.5 billion of ODA to Afghanistan](#).<sup>101</sup>

<sup>92</sup> FCDO, [UK to provide £30 million of life-saving supplies for Afghan refugees](#), 3 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>93</sup> PQ 45260 [[Afghanistan: Overseas aid](#)], 13 September 2021

<sup>94</sup> FCDO and Number Ten, [PM pledged £50 million to UN Afghanistan appeal](#), 31 October 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>101</sup> FCDO, [UK to provide £30 million of life-saving supplies for Afghan refugees](#), 3 September 2021

Information on the history of UK aid to Afghanistan and the progress made against UK development goals, such as increasing girls' attendance in schools, addressing corruption, and reducing poppy cultivation can be found in the Library briefing, [Afghanistan: Development, UK aid and the future](#).

## 4.3 The EU and its Member States

In the aftermath of the Taliban's capture of Kabul, the European Commission and [EU members states suspended their development work in Afghanistan](#).<sup>102</sup>

In October 2021, the EU pledged US\$ 1.15 billion to support Afghanistan. It will be aimed at the Afghan population and neighbouring countries only. Overall development funding remains frozen and will not resume until the EU's five benchmarks are met (see section 2.3, page 12).<sup>103</sup>

The EU has subsequently said that it plans to [retain a "minimal presence"](#) in Afghanistan to monitor the humanitarian situation and coordinate aid.<sup>104</sup>

A [draft EU Commission document](#), seen by the news site, Devex, in October 2021 suggests that limited EU development work may be allowed to resume under certain conditions, such as requiring any EU programmes to be implemented by NGOs or international organisations.<sup>105</sup>

In December 2021, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, said several EU countries were examining [how to open a joint diplomatic mission in Afghanistan to coordinate work](#), but its establishment would depend on the security situation.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>96</sup> FCDO, [UK Government to match £10 million public donations to Afghanistan appeal](#), 15 December 2021, accessed 15 December 2021

<sup>97</sup> FCDO, [Foreign Secretary pledges to support over 2.7 million Afghans with life-saving aid](#), 28 January 2022, accessed 8 February 2022

<sup>98</sup> G20 Italy 2021, [G20 Extraordinary leaders' meeting on Afghanistan: Chair's summary](#), 12 October 2021, p2

<sup>99</sup> FCDO, [UK pledges £286 million of lifesaving aid for Afghanistan](#), 30 March 2022, accessed 1 April 2022

<sup>100</sup> HC Deb, [9 February 2022](#), c944

<sup>101</sup> FCDO, [UK to provide £30 million of life-saving supplies for Afghan refugees](#), 3 September 2021

<sup>102</sup> CNBC, [EU pulls Afghanistan funding, will only work with Taliban if human rights respected](#), 18 August 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

<sup>103</sup> European Commission, [Afghanistan: Commission announces €1 billion Afghan support package](#), 12 October 2021; France 24, [EU pledges €1 billion Afghan aid package to "avert humanitarian collapse."](#) 12 October 2021

<sup>104</sup> EU Council, [Afghanistan: Council conclusions set out the EU's position and next steps](#), 21 September 2021

<sup>105</sup> Devex, [EU weighs restarting development work in Afghanistan, avoiding Taliban](#), 8 October 2021

<sup>106</sup> Politico, [Europeans considering joint diplomatic mission in Afghanistan, Macron says](#), 4 December 2021, accessed 13 December 2021

## 4.4

### United States

From 2001 to 2019, the US was Afghanistan's largest donor among those who report aid spending to the OECD. It provided 54% of the US\$ 65 billion delivered.<sup>107</sup>

Since October 2021, the US has pledged US\$ 782 million in aid for Afghanistan and Afghan refugees in the region.<sup>108</sup>

USAID said in September that it will retain regional "readiness" to support Afghanistan, but the nature of any support remains uncertain.

Like other states, the US is not linking the delivery of humanitarian aid to formal recognition of the Taliban Government.<sup>109</sup>

## 4.5

### Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

In March 2022, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which has 57 member states, announced the launch of a humanitarian trust fund for Afghanistan. The amount of aid to be provided was not published.<sup>110</sup>

The OIC has also said that the Islamic Development Bank would help unfreeze Afghan assets held abroad during 2022.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Commons Library, [Afghanistan: Development, UK aid and the future](#), section 2.1

<sup>108</sup> White House, [Statement by NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne on the US providing additional humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan](#), 11 January 2022, accessed 8 February 2022

<sup>109</sup> AP, [Taliban says US will provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan](#), 11 October 2021

<sup>110</sup> Voice of America, [Islamic bloc launches Afghanistan humanitarian trust fund](#), 21 March 2022, accessed 1 April 2022

<sup>111</sup> Al-Jazeera, [OIC nations fund to prevent Afghanistan economic collapse](#), 19 December 2021; Al-Jazeera, [Pakistan warns of consequences from Afghan "economic meltdown"](#), 19 December 2021, both accessed 23 December 2021

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