

GOVERNANCE, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CONTENTS

International Assistance to Afghanistan	88
Taliban Leaders Seek Legitimacy	93
‘Tsunami of Hunger’: Risk of Widespread Famine this Winter	96
Afghanistan’s Economic Outlook	98
Civil Aviation Update	107
Education	108
Taliban Review of Islamic Republic Curriculum	112
Remaining Women’s Advancement Program Paused	114
Public Health	116
Refugees and Internal Displacement	121
Human Rights	122
Counternarcotics	123
Governance, Economic and Social Development Endnotes	126

GOVERNANCE, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

KEY ISSUES & EVENTS

The United Nations Development Programme and the International Monetary Fund estimated the Afghan economy as measured by GDP contracted by 20–30% in 2021.

As of December 2021, the UN World Food Programme estimated that 22.8 million Afghans face acute malnutrition, 8.7 million of whom are nearing famine. The World Health Organization estimated one million Afghan children are at risk of dying from starvation this winter.

On December 22, the Treasury Department broadened the types of activities authorized under U.S. licenses, and the UN Security Council established a UN sanctions exemption to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian and other forms of aid to Afghanistan.

On January 11, the White House announced an additional \$308 million in U.S. humanitarian aid for Afghanistan. On January 26, the UN announced its Transitional Engagement Framework calling for \$8 billion in assistance for Afghanistan.

U.S. Support for Governance, Economic and Social Development

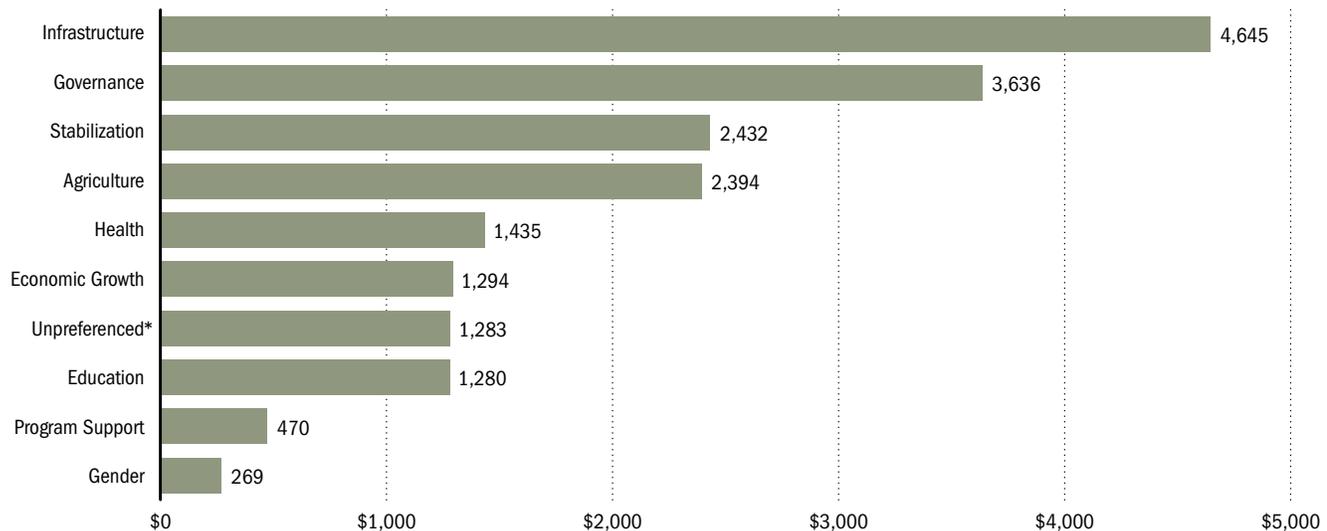
As of December 31, 2021, the United States had provided more than \$36.1 billion to support governance, economic and social development in Afghanistan. Most of this funding, nearly \$21.2 billion, was appropriated to the Economic Support Fund (ESF) administered by the State Department (State) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).¹

Last quarter, State and USAID told SIGAR that they had suspended all contact with the Afghan government, and terminated, suspended, or paused all on-budget assistance (that is, funds provided directly to Afghan authorities and controlled by them). This quarter, USAID informed SIGAR that they have resumed some off-budget (U.S.-managed) activities in Afghanistan and have instructed implementing partners for some paused or suspended programs to maintain staff and operational capacity, and to incur only reasonable, allocable, and allowable recurrent costs, while refraining from carrying out any agreement-specified activities. USAID continued to disburse funds to those partners who needed to maintain staff and sustain operational capacity.² Figure G.1 shows USAID cumulative assistance by sector.

GOVERNANCE, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

FIGURE G.1

USAID DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE, CUMULATIVE DISBURSEMENTS, AS OF JANUARY 10, 2022 (\$ MILLIONS)



*Unpreferenced funds are U.S. contributions to the ARTF that can be used for any ARTF-supported initiatives.

Note: USAID Mission-managed funds. Numbers are rounded. USAID gender programs managed by the agency's Office of Gender are presented as a separate category. Agriculture programs include Alternative Development. Infrastructure programs include power, roads, extractives, and programs that build health and education facilities. OFM activities (e.g. audits and pre-award assessments) included under Program Support funds.

Source: SIGAR analysis of USAID, response to SIGAR data call, 1/15/2022; SIGAR analysis of World Bank, ARTF, Administrator's Report on Financial Status as of November 21, 2021, 1/19/2022.

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN

Evolving sanctions policies towards Afghanistan

Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, donors have limited non-humanitarian assistance to the country. According to the World Bank, under the Ghani government, around 75% of the public expenditures and the equivalent of 40% of Afghanistan's GDP were funded by foreign donors.³ The United States and its partners had warned the Taliban that this level of aid would not continue if it chose a military path to power rather than a negotiated settlement.⁴ Afghanistan's economy is estimated to have contracted by 20–30% year-on-year.⁵

The United States remains the single largest humanitarian aid donor to Afghanistan.⁶ On October 28, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the United States provided an additional \$144 million in new humanitarian assistance, bringing the total U.S. humanitarian contribution for Afghanistan and for Afghans in the region to nearly \$474 million in FY 2021.⁷ On January 11, the White House announced that USAID would deliver a further \$308 million in humanitarian aid to "directly flow through independent humanitarian organizations and help provide lifesaving protection and

shelter, essential health care, winterization assistance, emergency food aid, water, sanitation, and hygiene services.”⁸

The State Department told SIGAR on December 15 that all aid is “directed to local and international partners on the ground, including United Nations and international NGO actors, that go through stringent risk-mitigation analysis and have experience operating in complex environments such as Afghanistan.”⁹ In his October 28 announcement, Secretary of State Blinken said “to be clear, this humanitarian assistance will benefit the people of Afghanistan and not the Taliban, whom we will continue to hold accountable for the commitments they have made.”¹⁰

For most of this quarter, the World Bank reviewed the remaining \$1.5 billion available in **Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF)** to develop a plan to transfer some funds to UN humanitarian agencies. The World Bank-administered ARTF stopped making payments in August 2021, and any decision to redirect funds requires approval from all ARTF donors.¹¹ On December 11, the Bank announced an agreement to transfer \$100 million to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and a further \$180 million to the World Food Programme (WFP) to provide aid directly to Afghans in need. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund continued to block the Taliban’s access to funds they administer.¹²

As of January 27, 2022, the United States holds most of the nearly \$9.5 billion in foreign reserves belonging to the former Afghan government. These assets, however, are the subject of litigation by victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.¹³ Except as authorized by Treasury Department licenses, including six general licenses issued as of December 22, U.S. sanctions continue to require the freezing of assets belonging to the Taliban subject to U.S. jurisdiction, and imposes civil and potential criminal liability on any U.S. persons who engage in transactions with them. Likewise, non-U.S. entities and foreign financial institutions that knowingly conduct or facilitate significant transactions with the Taliban face sanctions risk.¹⁴ The United States has designated the Taliban and Haqqani Network as Specially Designated Global Terrorists, along with approximately 35 members of their respective leaderships. The Haqqani Network is also a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization.¹⁵

On November 17, Taliban foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi sent an open letter to the U.S. Congress, urging the United States to release the frozen reserves and remove what he characterized as financial sanctions. The current situation, Muttaqi wrote, could cause a mass refugee exodus from Afghanistan and exacerbate humanitarian and economic problems.¹⁶ U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West responded to Muttaqi’s statement on November 19, reiterating that the international community had long cautioned that non-humanitarian aid would all but cease if the Taliban claimed power by force, rather than by a negotiated settlement.¹⁷ According to State, sanctions policies are designed to maintain

Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF): A World Bank-administered multidonor trust fund that coordinated international assistance to support the former Afghan government’s operating and development costs, which financed up to 30% of its civilian budget in recent years. Out of 34 total donors since 2002, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union were the three leading contributors.

Source: ARTF, “Who We Are,” 2021; World Bank, ARTF: Administrator’s Report on Financial Status as of November 21, 2021 (end of 11th month of FY 1400) at www.artf.af, accessed 1/11/2022.

pressure on the Taliban and their leaders, while still facilitating the provision of humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.¹⁸

However, UN officials, representatives from high-profile NGOs, and members of Congress expressed concerns that by cutting off Afghanistan from the international financial system, the international community has contributed to an economic crisis that is exacerbating the suffering of millions of Afghans.¹⁹ On November 17, UN Special Representative for Afghanistan Deborah Lyons briefed the UN Security Council on the deteriorating situation, stating that “the financial sanctions applied to Afghanistan have paralyzed the banking system, affecting every aspect of the economy. ... An entire complex social and economic system is shutting down in part due to the asset freeze, the suspension of non-humanitarian aid flows and sanctions.”²⁰

As a result of the economic collapse, a year-long drought, and rising food prices, an estimated 22.8 million Afghans face acute **food insecurity** or starvation this winter.²¹ The World Food Programme’s head of emergencies, Margot van der Velden, said international sanctions have impeded the ability of international agencies to respond to this humanitarian crisis by preventing them from working with the de facto government.²² Dominik Stillhart, the director of operations for the International Committee of the Red Cross, further stated that the continued sanctions on banking services and freezes in international aid were sending the economy “into free-fall” and cutting off “millions of people across Afghanistan from the basics they need to survive.”²³ Richard Trenchard, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) representative in Afghanistan, also points to financial liquidity problems, paralysis of the banking system, and diminished trade as key drivers of both the crisis and impediments to the humanitarian response.²⁴

Food Security: all people within a society at all times having “physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet daily basic needs for a productive and healthy life,” without being forced to deplete household assets in order to meet minimum needs.

Source: United Nations, “World Food Summit Concludes in Rome,” press release, 11/19/1996.

Donors Ease Certain Aid Restrictions

Toward the end of this quarter, the United States and other donors revised several policies related to the sanctions restrictions and the provision of international assistance. On December 22, 2021, the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued three new “general licenses” that broadened the types of activities now authorized, that would otherwise trigger sanctions, to help improve the flow of humanitarian aid and other critical support to Afghanistan.²⁵ These licenses allow for transactions and activities involving the Taliban and members of the Haqqani Network so long as the transactions are for the official business of the U.S. government or certain international organizations, or for NGOs working on certain humanitarian projects and other projects that provide critical support to the Afghan people, including projects related to civil society development or environmental and natural resource protection. These general licenses do not authorize financial transfers to any blocked person other than for the purpose of paying taxes, fees, or import duties, or the

TABLE G.1

USAID ON-BUDGET PROGRAMS					
Project/Trust Fund Title	Afghan Government On-Budget Partner	Start Date	End Date	Total Estimated Cost	Cumulative Disbursements, as of 1/10/2022
Multilateral Trust Funds					
Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) (current award)*/**	Multiple	9/29/2020	12/31/2025	\$700,000,000	\$55,686,333
Afghanistan Infrastructure Trust Fund (AITF)*	Multiple	3/7/2013	3/6/2023	153,670,184	153,670,184

* USAID told SIGAR that it had suspended all USAID-funded assistance activities, including any contact with the Afghan government. USAID requested their implementing partners not to carry out any agreement-specified activities, but to maintain staff and operational capacity, and to incur only reasonable, allocable, and allowable recurrent costs. USAID continued to disburse funds to those partners who needed to maintain staff and sustain operational capacity.
 ** USAID had previous awards to the ARTF that concluded in March 2012 and totaled \$1,371,991,195 in disbursements and in September 2020 and totaled \$2,555,686,333 in disbursements. Cumulative disbursements from all ARTF awards is currently \$4,127,677,528.

Source: USAID, response to SIGAR data call, 1/15/2022.

purchase or receipt of permits, licenses, or public utility services.²⁶ Table G.2 on the following page lists the specific authorizations.

Treasury’s announcement came on the same day the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted resolution UNSCR 2615 (2021), which similarly authorizes a humanitarian exception to the UN sanctions regime in Afghanistan for one year.²⁷ This allows international organizations to implement humanitarian programs that may require engagement with the Taliban and gives legal assurances to the financial institutions and commercial actors they rely upon for support.²⁸ None of these new authorizations permit direct support or non-humanitarian aid to the Taliban.²⁹

On January 11, the United Nations unveiled its 2022 Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan, which calls for international donors to raise more than \$4.4 billion to address the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan, and an additional \$623 million to support Afghan refugees in neighboring countries.³⁰

The \$4.4 billion plan allocates over \$2.6 billion for food security and agriculture programming. This includes over \$2.2 billion for the provision of timely food assistance to directly address the ongoing hunger crisis. It also provides \$413 million for emergency “livelihoods intervention” development activities that include providing unconditional cash payments to vulnerable households, assorted crop seeds, feed for livestock, deworming kits, tools for households with access to land, and support for improvements in small-scale infrastructure, such as water catchments, irrigation, livestock watering points, and *karez* (underground canal systems).³¹

The UN plan also allocates \$378 million for life-saving health services; \$374 million for emergency shelter and non-food household necessities; \$332 million to promote access to safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, and hygiene materials; \$287 million for additional nutrition programming, \$162 million to support children’s education; and \$137 million to support general protection services for vulnerable populations and land mine clearance.³²

On January 26, the UN launched its Transitional Engagement Framework, which called for an additional \$3.6 billion in immediate funding to sustain social services such as health and education; support community systems through maintenance of basic infrastructure; and maintain critical capacities for service delivery and promotion of livelihoods and social cohesion, with specific emphasis on socio-economic needs of women and girls.

Note: UNAMA, United Nations Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF) for Afghanistan, 1/26/2022, pp. 8–9.

TABLE G.2

TREASURY OFAC GENERAL LICENSES FOR TRANSACTIONS WITH THE TALIBAN OR HAQQANI NETWORK		
General License 19 (issued on 12/22/2021)	NGOs	Authorizes all transactions and activities involving the Taliban or the Haqqani Network, that are ordinarily incident and necessary to the following activities by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), subject to certain conditions: humanitarian projects to meet basic human needs; activities to support rule of law, citizen participation, government accountability and transparency, human rights and fundamental freedoms, access to information, and civil society development projects; education; non-commercial development projects directly benefitting the Afghan people; and environmental and natural resource protection
General License 18 (issued on 12/22/2021)	International organizations	Authorizes all transactions and activities involving the Taliban or the Haqqani Network that are for the conduct of the official business of certain international organizations and other international entities by employees, grantees, or contractors thereof, subject to certain conditions
General License 17 (issued on 12/22/2021)	U.S. government business	Authorizes all transactions and activities involving the Taliban or the Haqqani Network that are for the conduct of the official business of the United States government by employees, grantees, or contractors thereof, subject to certain conditions
General License 16 (issued on 9/23/2021)	Personal remittances	Authorizes all transactions involving the Taliban or the Haqqani Network, or any entity in which the Taliban or the Haqqani Network owns, directly or indirectly, individually or in the aggregate, a 50% or greater interest, prohibited by the GTSR, the FTOSR, or E.O. 13224, as amended, that are ordinarily incident and necessary to the transfer of noncommercial, personal remittances to Afghanistan, including through Afghan depository institutions, subject to certain conditions. As noted in OFAC FAQ 949, transactions that are ordinarily incident and necessary to give effect to the activities authorized in GL 16, including clearing, settlement, and transfers through, to, or otherwise involving privately owned and state-owned Afghan depository institutions, are also authorized pursuant to GL 16.
General License 15 (issued on 9/23/2021)	Agricultural commodities, medicine, and medical devices	Authorizes all transactions involving the Taliban or the Haqqani Network, or any entity in which the Taliban or the Haqqani Network owns, directly or indirectly, individually or in the aggregate, a 50% or greater interest, prohibited by the GTSR, the FTOSR, or E.O. 13224, as amended, that are ordinarily incident and necessary to the exportation or re-exportation of agricultural commodities, medicine, medical devices, replacement parts and components for medical devices, or software updates for medical devices to Afghanistan, or to persons in third countries purchasing specifically for resale to Afghanistan, subject to certain conditions.
General License 14 (issued on 9/23/2021)	Humanitarian activities in Afghanistan	Authorizes all transactions involving the Taliban or the Haqqani Network, or any entity in which the Taliban or the Haqqani Network owns, directly or indirectly, individually or in the aggregate, a 50% or greater interest, prohibited by the GTSR, the FTOSR, or E.O. 13224, as amended, that are ordinarily incident and necessary to the provision of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan or other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan by the following entities and their employees, grantees, contractors, or other persons acting on their behalf, subject to certain conditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The United States government · Nongovernmental organizations · The United Nations, including its Programmes, Funds, and Other Entities and Bodies, as well as its Specialized Agencies and Related Organizations · The International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) · The African Development Bank Group, the Asian Development Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the Inter-American Development Bank Group (IDB Group), including any fund entity administered or established by any of the foregoing · The International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies · The Islamic Development Bank

Source: Office of Foreign Assets Control, "Fact Sheet: Provision of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan and Support for the Afghan People," 12/22/2021; Department of Treasury, "Treasury Issues Additional General Licenses and Guidance in Support of Humanitarian Assistance and Other Support to Afghanistan," 12/22/2021.

TALIBAN LEADERS SEEK LEGITIMACY

No country has officially recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan since it seized power in August 2021.³³ Despite Taliban pressure and dwindling funds, many Afghan embassies around the world reportedly still operate under the flag of the Islamic Republic.³⁴ Further, only 12 countries still have embassies open in Kabul: China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the United Arab Emirates, and Uzbekistan.³⁵ The Taliban have asked the United States and other countries to reopen their embassies in Kabul, promising security for their diplomats and staff. These requests to date have been unsuccessful.³⁶

On December 1, the UN's Credentials Committee decided to defer its decision on the Taliban's request to replace the ambassador appointed by the Ghani administration. The deferral indicates that the Taliban regime may not be granted recognition before the UN General Assembly meeting in September 2022, a decision a Taliban spokesperson called "unfair."³⁷

On November 11, the Pakistani government hosted a meeting of the Troika Plus (comprising the Pakistan, U.S., Chinese, and Russian governments) to discuss the evolving situation in Afghanistan. A senior Taliban delegation was present in Islamabad and met with leaders from each country.³⁸ In a joint statement after the meeting, the four participating nations called on the Taliban to "take steps to form an inclusive and representative government that respects the rights of all Afghans and provides for the equal rights of women and girls to participate in all aspects of Afghan society" and to "ensure unhindered humanitarian access, including by women aid workers, for the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan to respond to the developing crisis."³⁹ The statement also emphasized an agreement to continue practical engagement with the Taliban to encourage the implementation of moderate and prudent policies, called on the Taliban to cut ties with all international terrorist groups, and reaffirmed their expectation that the Taliban would not allow terrorists to launch attacks from Afghan territory.⁴⁰

On November 12, Secretary of State Blinken announced that Qatar would represent U.S. interests in Afghanistan. Blinken said, "Qatar will establish a U.S. interest section within its embassy in Afghanistan to provide certain consular services and monitor the condition and security of U.S. diplomatic facilities in Afghanistan."⁴¹

On November 29 and 30, U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West led an interagency delegation, including representatives from the Departments of State and Treasury, USAID, and the intelligence community, to meet with senior Taliban officials in Doha, Qatar. The U.S. delegation acknowledged the Taliban's improvements in allowing humanitarian workers safe and unimpeded access to conduct their relief work.



Delegates attend Troika Plus meeting in Islamabad, Pakistan. (Foreign minister of Pakistan, Shah Mahmood Qureshi's Twitter account)



Taliban deputy prime minister Abdul Salam Hanafi meets with David Beasley, Executive Director of the World Food Programme on November 7, 2021. (Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid Twitter account, @Zabehulah_M33)

The Taliban reiterated that they would not allow terrorists to operate within Afghan territory, but U.S. officials pointed to the continuing presence of al-Qaeda and Islamic State-Khorasan in Afghanistan. U.S. officials also voiced deep concerns over allegations of human-rights abuses and urged the Taliban to “protect the rights of all Afghans, uphold and enforce its policy of general amnesty, and take additional steps to form an inclusive and representative government.”⁴²

The Taliban foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, told the Associated Press on December 13 that the Taliban want good relations with all countries and have no issue with the United States. He said the Taliban had changed since they last ruled Afghanistan 20 years ago. “We have made progress in administration and in politics ... in interaction with the nation and the world. With each passing day, we will gain more experience and make more progress.” Muttaqi also said the Taliban are “committed in principle to women participation” because they allow girls to attend school up to the 12th grade in 10 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces and permit women to continue working in the health sector. He denied allegations by Human Rights Watch and other organizations that the Taliban are assassinating former government officials, and pushed back against the statement to the Associated Press by the commander of U.S. Central Command, General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., that al-Qaeda has grown in strength since the Taliban takeover.⁴³

U.S. Special Representative West emphasized that the Taliban needed to deliver on their promises on human rights and women’s rights, and that statements alone would be insufficient.⁴⁴ West said, “Legitimacy and support must be earned by actions to address terrorism, establish an inclusive government, and respect the rights of minorities, women and girls—including equal access to education and employment.”⁴⁵ The formation of an inclusive and representative government was, he said, “a point I think is especially shared by many regional powers as well.”⁴⁶

National and Subnational Governance

The Taliban announced the formation of what it called a “caretaker government” of 33 men on September 7, 2021.⁴⁷ According to the UN, the leaders named by the Taliban were a disappointment for any who hoped or advocated for inclusivity. There were “no non-Taliban members, no figures from the past government, nor leaders of minority groups,” the UN said. Further, many of the new leaders had been members of leadership during the Taliban’s time in power from 1996 to 2001. The new Taliban regime’s prime minister, two deputy prime ministers, and the foreign minister are among those on the UN sanctions list for their association with the Taliban.⁴⁸ For more details about key members of the Taliban regime, see SIGAR’s October 2021 *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*.⁴⁹

Nearly all of the 33 leaders named to cabinet positions are Pashtun Sunnis, with only two deputy ministers representing the Shiite community that makes up one-fifth of Afghanistan’s population. Even in Shiite-dominant Bamyan Province, the highest-ranking Shiite official holds the relatively minor post of provincial director of intelligence.⁵⁰

On November 7, the Taliban announced a large-scale round of provincial appointments, including 44 individuals to provincial governorships and positions as police chiefs, to shore up governance throughout the country in the wake of worsening economic collapse and escalating terror attacks by the Islamic State-Khorasan, the Reuters news service reported. The new appointments continued to exclude women, minorities, and other political groups.⁵¹

Further, on December 26, the Taliban dissolved certain institutions central to elected forms of government, including the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission.⁵² The Taliban have made it known that they oppose democracy, telling Reuters in August that “there will be no democratic system at all because it does not have any base in our country.”⁵³

The Taliban also dissolved the ministries for peace and parliamentary affairs. They had previously abolished the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and replaced it with the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.⁵⁴ Further information on Taliban governance and the Taliban regime’s financial crisis can be found in the Classified Supplement to this report.

USAID suspended all democracy and governance programs after the Taliban takeover. To date, two programs have been authorized to restart in-scope activities that do not support or assist the Taliban: Conflict Mitigation Assistance for Civilians and Supporting Transformation for Afghanistan’s Recovery.⁵⁵ USAID’s remaining democracy and governance programs are shown in Table G.3.

TABLE G.3

USAID REMAINING DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE PROGRAMS				
Project Title	Start Date	End Date	Total Estimated Cost	Cumulative Disbursements, as of 1/10/2022
United Nations Electoral Support Project (UNESP)	5/20/2015	12/31/2021	\$78,995,000	\$59,955,399
Assistance for Development of Afghan Legal Access and Transparency (ADALAT)	4/18/2016	4/17/2022	68,163,468	50,919,887
Conflict Mitigation Assistance for Civilians (COMAC)	3/12/2018	3/11/2023	49,999,873	30,157,735
Afghanistan’s Measure for Accountability and Transparency (AMANAT)	8/23/2017	8/22/2022	31,986,588	18,037,539
Supporting Transformation for Afghanistan’s Recovery (STAR)	2/18/2021	2/17/2023	19,997,965	4,031,104
Strengthening Civic Engagement in Elections in Afghanistan Activity (SCEEA)	8/9/2018	12/31/2021	18,253,000	16,500,308
Promoting Conflict Resolution, Peace Building, and Enhanced Governance	7/1/2015	3/31/2022	16,047,117	13,750,562
Survey of the Afghan People	10/11/2012	4/29/2022	7,694,206	5,464,016
Total			\$291,137,217	\$198,816,549

Source: USAID, response to SIGAR data call, 1/15/2022.

‘TSUNAMI OF HUNGER’: RISK OF WIDESPREAD FAMINE THIS WINTER

Projections

Over half of Afghanistan’s population faces a “tsunami of hunger,” according to the UN World Food Programme (WFP).⁵⁶ The most recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) study found that nearly 19 million Afghans experienced acute food insecurity in September and October 2021, and require “urgent action to save their lives, reduce food gaps, and protect their livelihoods.”⁵⁷ The IPC report further estimates that 22.8 million Afghans will be at potentially life-threatening levels of hunger this winter, 8.7 million of whom will face near-famine conditions.⁵⁸ The World Health Organization (WHO) and WFP estimate that 3.2 million Afghan children under the age of five will suffer from acute malnutrition this winter, with one million at risk of dying.⁵⁹

Causes

According to the IPC study, the humanitarian emergency is the result of a confluence of factors, including record drought, rising food prices, internal displacement, and the severe economic downturn and collapse of public services following the Taliban’s return to power in August.⁶⁰

The FAO points to drought conditions beginning in late 2020 as the origin of this crisis.⁶¹ Some humanitarian officials believe this to be the worst drought in a generation, with below-average precipitation expected to continue through early 2022.⁶² Of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, 25 suffered from drought in 2021, contributing to a 20% decrease in cereal harvest from the previous year. Likewise, 64% of livestock owners in Afghanistan reported difficulty in raising animals this year, citing lack of water and pasture as their greatest concerns.⁶³ An estimated 40% of all crops were lost in 2021.⁶⁴ With 80% of Afghan livelihoods dependent on agriculture and livestock, the drought not only lowered crop yields and

“Afghanistan is facing an avalanche of hunger and destitution the likes of which I have never seen in my 20-plus years with the World Food Programme.”

—*Mary-Ellen McGroarty, WFP country director in Afghanistan*

Source: WFP, “15 million Afghans receive WFP food assistance so far in 2021; massive uplift needed as economy disintegrates,” 12/14/2021.

food output nationwide, but also diminished household incomes for millions of Afghans.⁶⁵

The drought-driven crisis was transformed “by the economic implosion and suspension of international development assistance” following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, according to FAO.⁶⁶ The IPC report described how the fall of the Islamic Republic “resulted in significant disruptions to public finances, services, and international assistance and had enormous impacts on employment, particularly for women.” Members of the collapsed Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) were now without work, while thousands of civil servants were no longer being paid. The 664,200 persons internally displaced in 2021 worsened the strain on Afghanistan’s labor markets and food supplies in urban centers. The IPC report also states that 95% of Afghans reported reduced or significantly reduced incomes in 2021.⁶⁷

The drop in household income coincided with massive and sudden increases in food costs. The price of wheat flour increased by 28% between June and September 2021, while the price of cooking oil increased 55% compared to the previous year.⁶⁸ The price of fertilizer likewise increased from 25–30% from the prior year.

“Afghanistan is now among the world’s worst humanitarian crises—if not the worst—and food security has all but collapsed. This winter, millions of Afghans will be forced to choose between migration and starvation unless we can step up our life-saving assistance, and unless the economy can be resuscitated. We are on a countdown to catastrophe and if we don’t act now, we will have a total disaster on our hands.”

—David Beasley, WFP Executive Director

Source: WFP, “Half of Afghanistan’s population face acute hunger as humanitarian needs grow to record levels,” 10/25/2021.

These price spikes are the consequence of both supply-side shocks and the collapse of Afghanistan’s national currency, the afghani. Between August and November 2021, the afghani devaluated 12.5% versus the U.S. dollar, which has exacerbated the increasing prices for all food items, especially imports.⁶⁹ Households have been hit with not only lost or reduced income streams, but also reduced purchasing power. In the wake of the country’s liquidity crisis, Taliban banking restrictions have limited the amount of cash that can be withdrawn to \$400 per household per week, worsening the situation across household income groups.⁷⁰ The increased food prices and decreased household incomes have created a perfect storm for hunger and malnutrition.

Impact

In November 2021, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said severe and moderate **acute malnutrition** was up by 31% in Kandahar Province compared to the previous year, with other regions in Afghanistan facing similar increases. ICRC cited an example of pediatric cases of malnutrition, pneumonia, and dehydration

doubling in one Kandahar regional hospital from mid-August to September.⁷¹ Similarly, Médecins Sans Frontières reported that its in-patient therapeutic feeding center (ITFC) at Herat Regional Hospital saw a 40% increase in patients between May and September 2021. The situation continued to deteriorate, and by November 2021, the number of patients at the Herat ITFC reached double its capacity.⁷² UNICEF also doubled the number of its nutrition program staff in Afghanistan last October to mitigate child malnutrition. During October alone, UNICEF provided life-saving treatment to 30,000 children under five suffering from severe acute malnutrition.⁷³

However, the IPC report issued in October predicted that 3.9 million Afghans would “need acute malnutrition treatment services in 2021, including one million children under five with severe acute malnutrition, 2.2 million children under five with moderate acute malnutrition, and 700,000 pregnant and lactating women with acute malnutrition.”⁷⁴ In November, the WHO further warned that at least one million children were at risk of dying from severe malnutrition if they did not receive immediate treatment by the end of 2021.⁷⁵

Desperation and hunger have led some Afghan families to resort to selling their children to get enough money to feed their remaining family members. UN officials are concerned that these cases are occurring throughout the country, with young girls in particular being exploited for early marriage and child labor.⁷⁶

Acute malnutrition: The insufficient intake of essential nutrients resulting from sudden reductions in food intake or diet quality; also known as “wasting.” Acute malnutrition has serious physiological consequences and increases the risk of death.

Source: Lenters L., Wazny K., Bhutta Z.A. “Management of Severe and Moderate Acute Malnutrition in Children,” in Black RE, Laxminarayan R, Temmerman M, et al., editors. Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health: Disease Control Priorities, Third Edition, vol. 2, 4/5/2016, chapter 11.

AFGHANISTAN'S ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

A Pessimistic Economic Forecast

Afghanistan's economy suffered severe contraction in 2021, with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and IMF estimating up to a 20–30% drop in GDP.⁷⁷ In a November 30 report, UNDP modeling estimated Afghanistan's nominal GDP could fall from \$20 billion in 2020 to \$16 billion in the months following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, and warned of further contractions of between 3% and 5% if urgent corrective action was not taken, especially with respect to the employment of women.⁷⁸

Annual per capita income is estimated to have fallen from \$650 in 2012 to \$500 in 2020, and is expected to drop to \$350 by 2022.⁷⁹ According to UNDP, male unemployment in Afghanistan may nearly double from 15.2% in 2019 to 29% by 2022.⁸⁰ In the worst-case scenario modeled by the Asian Development Bank, unemployment could increase by more than 40% in the short run and household consumption could contract by 44%.⁸¹

The devaluation of the afghani has also impacted the Afghan economy and further diminished Afghan households' ability to purchase food and other necessary items, because much foreign trade was settled in U.S. dollars.⁸² Since August 2021, the afghani has depreciated against the U.S. dollar, from approximately 77 afghani to the dollar to around 105 as of January 2, 2022.⁸³ Adding to the pressure on the country's limited cash reserves, Afghanistan lacks the technical capabilities to print its own currency. In January 2020, the Ghani administration contracted a Polish company, Polish



A staff member of a WFP partner conducting food distribution at a site on the outskirts of Herat. The ration consists of wheat flour, peas, oil and salt for each family. (World Food Programme photo by Marco Di Lauro)

Security Printing Works, to print 10 billion afghanis worth of new bills.⁸⁴ According to State, the Taliban have not secured or developed a domestic printing source for afghani banknotes.⁸⁵

UNDP reported in September that up to 97% of Afghanistan’s population was at risk of slipping below the poverty line by mid-2022 as a result of the worsening political and economic crises.⁸⁶ UNDP’s economic models estimated that it would take \$2 billion in foreign aid just to lift the incomes of all Afghans in extreme poverty up to the poverty line. Their estimates also show it would take a total of up to \$8 billion in annual international aid to fund basic services and restart economic growth. USAID’s remaining economic-growth programs are shown in Table G.4 below.⁸⁷

Taliban Regime Begins Drafting Its First National Budget

On December 17, the Taliban finance ministry announced it was preparing a draft national budget, the first in 20 years funded without on-budget foreign aid. They did not announce the size of the budget, which would run through December 2022, but indicated that they “are trying to finance it from domestic revenues” and believed that they could.⁸⁸ Prior to the collapse of the Islamic Republic, international aid contributed to around 40% of Afghanistan’s GDP and 75% of public expenditures.⁸⁹

Nearly all public-sector employees stopped receiving pay when donors stopped funding the government after the Taliban took power in August. However, on November 20, the Taliban promised to resume salaries and provide three months’ back pay to affected government workers. They also

TABLE G.4

USAID REMAINING ECONOMIC-GROWTH PROGRAMS				
Project Title	Start Date	End Date	Total Estimated Cost	Cumulative Disbursements, as of 1/10/2022
Afghanistan Competitiveness of Export-Oriented Businesses Activity (ACEBA)	1/28/2020	1/27/2025	\$105,722,822	\$17,095,985
Air Export Program (AEP)	5/1/2021	4/30/2026	85,526,068	0
Multi-Dimensional Economic Legal Reform Assistance (MELRA)	2/7/2018	9/30/2024	29,990,258	10,683,413
Extractive Technical Assistance by USGS	1/1/2018	12/31/2022	18,226,206	11,863,258
Afghanistan Investment Climate Reform Program (AICR)	3/27/2015	3/31/2022	13,300,000	7,681,896
Carpet and Jewelry Value Chains	1/31/2019	4/30/2023	9,941,606	5,754,983
The Goldozi Project	4/5/2018	4/4/2022	9,718,763	6,638,562
Livelihood Advancement for Marginalized Population (LAMP)	8/1/2018	7/31/2022	9,491,153	6,299,422
Recycling Plant Value Chain in Northern Afghanistan	6/5/2019	6/4/2023	7,250,000	1,374,653
Development Credit Authority (DCA) with Ghazanfar Bank	9/1/2018	8/30/2025	2,163,000	40,015
Afghanistan Loan Portfolio Guarantee	-	-	-	732
Total			\$291,329,876	\$67,432,920

Source: USAID, response to SIGAR data call, 1/15/2022.

said that payments of pensions to retired workers would soon resume. The Taliban finance ministry claimed to be generating \$3 million in daily revenue, with \$288 million collected during the past three months.⁹⁰ The Ministry of Finance identified customs revenue as a primary source of revenue collected since August.⁹¹ According to Reuters, many public-sector workers were not being paid in the last months of the previous government, when the fiscal outlook was far less dire than it is now.⁹²

Despite billions of dollars in foreign aid, the previous government's 2021 national budget projected a budget shortfall of 37.6 billion afghanis (\$488 million), according to the Afghanistan Analysts Network. To address that shortfall, the budget called for 20 billion afghanis (\$260 million) to come from government reserves, and 17.4 billion (\$226 million) from the IMF's Extended Credit Facility, leaving an estimated deficit of 200 million afghanis (\$2.6 million).⁹³

The vast majority of foreign support has since ceased and Afghanistan's economic contraction has led to significantly less revenue for the new regime.⁹⁴ Based on trends leading up to its November 30 report, UNDP estimated that the budget deficit could double as a percentage of national GDP, reaching \$660 million.⁹⁵ According to a November 11 report from the Afghanistan Analysts Network, the Taliban entered power with no coherent plan for running the economy without foreign aid, and have since focused much of their diminished revenues to paying their fighters. The network's research further suggests that some teachers and civil servants have also started receiving pay, while others have been laid off.⁹⁶

Financial Sector in Peril

Afghanistan's largely cash-based economy continued to struggle with an acute cash shortage this quarter, which has limited day-to-day economic activities. Banks are at the center of a liquidity crisis, with lost access to international financing and depositors attempting to recover their funds. According to a UNDP report, Afghanistan's banking system is in "existential crisis." Total deposits had fallen to the equivalent of \$2 billion as of September 2021 from \$2.8 billion the month prior, and nonperforming loans had nearly doubled to 60% compared to a year earlier.⁹⁷

Kanni Wignaraji, UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP director for Asia and the Pacific, said, "We need the formal banking system to be fully operational, to continue and scale support to the people in need. Lifesaving and livelihood saving projects are running but for a local economy to kick into gear, it needs a functioning financial system that goes beyond the delivery of aid, to enabling local economic activity."⁹⁸

UNDP further warns that the downward economic spiral will accelerate due to debt-servicing problems once the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative expires at the end of 2021. This could lead to a default on Afghanistan's sovereign debt, making it more difficult for the Afghan

government to access international financial institutions and banking services. According to UNDP's *Afghanistan: Socio-Economic Outlook 2021–2022* report:⁹⁹

Although public debt is low (at 7.5 percent of GDP at end-2020), the IMF and World Bank have classified Afghanistan as a country at high risk of distress. In addition, conditions in the banking system are deteriorating sharply due to liquidity pressures and balance-sheet deterioration. Banks are now experiencing a run on deposits, and deposit withdrawals limits (initially set at US\$200 per week and now increased to US\$400 per week) have been introduced, though this ceiling might only be relevant for large depositors in a country where the per capita income is barely US\$500 per year.

UNDP also estimates that supporting Afghan households through modest cash transfers at an annual cost of \$300 million could mitigate these problems and have a significant impact on poverty.¹⁰⁰

As the Afghan economy has struggled to find areas of sustainable economic growth in recent years, the country has increasingly relied on remittances from Afghans working abroad, especially in neighboring Iran. By 2019, remittances accounted for the equivalent of 4.3% of Afghanistan's annual GDP, an increase from 1.2% in 2014, according to World Bank data.¹⁰¹ However, officials from the UN's International Organization for Migration estimate this figure could have been as high as 15–20%, given that many remittances are sent through the informal **hawala** money-transfer system.¹⁰² In 2020, remittances to Afghanistan dropped by 10%, according to the World Bank.¹⁰³

According to officials at Médecins Sans Frontières, with the absence of a functioning banking sector, many NGOs have also been forced to rely on hawalas to pay expenses within Afghanistan.¹⁰⁴

In November 2021, the Taliban announced a complete ban on the use of foreign currency in Afghanistan, interfering with remittance activities and worsening the country's liquidity crisis.¹⁰⁵ However, according to State, indicators suggest that the currency ban is not being actively enforced against the U.S. dollar, which continues to be widely used in Afghan markets.¹⁰⁶

Female Employment

UNDP found that restrictions on women's employment could immediately cost the Afghan economy \$1 billion, resulting in the country's GDP dropping by a further 5%.¹⁰⁷ Women made up over 20% of Afghanistan's workforce before the Taliban takeover, including thousands employed as teachers, health professionals, journalists, media presenters, civil-society representatives, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and entrepreneurs. Of the country's 400,000 civil servants, over 100,000 were women.¹⁰⁸

Shortly after seizing control in August, the Taliban stated, "We assure the international community that there will be no discrimination against women,

Hawala: informal money transmission networks that arrange for the transfer and receipt of funds or equivalent value, and settle their accounts through trade and cash.

Source: Treasury, "Hawala: The Hawala Alternative Remittance System and its Role in Money Laundering," 2003, p. 5.

but, of course, within the frameworks we have.”¹⁰⁹ According to UNDP, however, the Taliban have since “effectively barred women from the public sphere.” In addition to being expected to be accompanied by a close male relative when traveling more than 45 miles away from home, women are banned from participating in most forms of entertainment and sports, and restricted from employment in most fields apart from health and education.¹¹⁰

On October 21, the Taliban told Kabul’s female city government employees not to return to work until officials developed a new plan for their presence in government offices. The order did not apply to women working in health care and education.¹¹¹ As of January 27, no further announcements have been made that would allow women to return to work.

On November 21, 2021, the Taliban ordered television channels in Afghanistan to stop airing entertainment programs featuring women, and reaffirmed that female journalists must wear hijabs.¹¹² The decree was issued by the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, which replaced the Ministry of Women’s Affairs that the Taliban abolished in September.¹¹³ Female journalists and radio broadcasters throughout Afghanistan also report being subjected to Taliban pressure to stop working, despite no official guidance outlawing women in these fields.¹¹⁴

In contrast, on November 24, the head of the Afghanistan Cricket Board assured female cricket players they could continue playing. The International Cricket Council (ICC), the world governing body for the sport, requires female cricket development. Afghanistan belongs to the ICC and cricket is very popular in the country.¹¹⁵

International Trade

Afghanistan’s poor infrastructure and lack of connectivity with its neighbors hindered trade activity this quarter.¹¹⁶ UNDP estimates that imports from Pakistan fell by 40% between August and November 2021.¹¹⁷ Total imports may have fallen by almost half (\$3.2 billion) by the end of 2021, further exacerbating food and energy shortages. The total value of Afghanistan’s exports is estimated to be one-fifth of the imports total, comprising mostly agricultural goods.¹¹⁸

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Spin Boldak border crossing with Pakistan was reopened for civilian and commercial truck transit on November 2. State also reports that the Milak border crossing with Iran was reopened this quarter and that the Taliban are holding meetings with the Iranian government to improve trade and economic relations.¹¹⁹

On November 28, the Economic Cooperation Organization, which comprises Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, met to discuss removing trade barriers and developing transport corridors throughout the region. At the conference, the Presidents of Pakistan and Turkmenistan



Workers loading bags of wheat flour onto a truck at a World Food Programme warehouse in Herat. (WFP photo by Marco Di Lauro)

expressed their desire for a stable Afghanistan to allow for long-stalled regional projects, including a gas pipeline, railways, and power grids, to be implemented.¹²⁰

On December 25, a Kazakh delegation visited Kabul to discuss trade, transit routes, and other forms of economic cooperation. They also discussed the resumption of direct flights between the two countries, but made no announcements.¹²¹

In late August, the Taliban also said they hope to maintain Afghanistan's trade relationship with India and to keep the air corridor open between the two countries; Indian foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said India is taking a "wait-and-watch" approach to engagement with a Taliban-controlled government.¹²² However, the costs of shipping goods through the air corridor connecting India and Afghanistan were heavily subsidized by the Ghani administration. According to the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce, government subsidies covered around 83% of shipment costs for flights to New Delhi and 80% of shipment costs for flights to Mumbai.¹²³

Under the Islamic Republic, Afghanistan's economy was highly dependent on imports, generating a severe trade deficit that was almost entirely financed through external aid. Afghanistan's main imports include petroleum, machinery and equipment, food items, and base metals and related articles.¹²⁴ In 2019, Afghanistan imported goods totaling \$7.33 billion while exporting only \$975 million worth, according to World Trade Organization data; this produced a negative merchandise trade balance of \$6.36 billion, equivalent to 30.1% of GDP.¹²⁵ In 2020, amid declining imports and exports

(exports fell by 2% and imports by 5%), the negative trade balance narrowed to \$5.1 billion, equivalent to 26.7% of GDP.¹²⁶ The trade deficit was caused, in part, by Afghanistan’s low manufacturing capacity and poor domestic infrastructure, which results in a narrow export base—largely agricultural products and carpets—to limited destination markets.¹²⁷

Infrastructure

A lack of critical infrastructure, particularly in rural Afghanistan, continues to constrain domestic connectivity, economic growth, and humanitarian assistance efforts. Snowfall during the winter season will likely cause road blockages and inaccessibility to food markets in many parts of the country, including Daykundi, Bamyan, Ghor, Badakhshan, and Nuristan Provinces, according to UNDP.¹²⁸ Without plans for snow clearance, a critical service previously undertaken by the Islamic Republic, roads to these communities will close. Large populations will be without access to basic services and humanitarian aid as temperatures plummet.¹²⁹

USAID suspended all infrastructure and construction activities in Afghanistan last quarter.¹³⁰ Cumulatively, USAID had disbursed approximately \$2.09 billion since 2002 to build power plants, substations, and transmission lines, and to provide technical assistance in the power sector. USAID had disbursed an additional \$248 million since 2002 to support water and sanitation projects.¹³¹ USAID’s remaining energy projects are shown in Table G.5.

TABLE G.5

USAID REMAINING ENERGY PROJECTS				
Project Title	Start Date	End Date	Total Estimated Cost	Cumulative Disbursements, as of 1/10/2022
Power Transmission Expansion and Connectivity (PTEC)	1/1/2013	12/31/2023	\$332,767,161	\$272,477,914
Design and Construct of SEPS Completion and NEPS-SEPS Connector Substations	7/3/2019	7/30/2023	175,527,284	123,609,994
Contribution to AITF (Afghanistan Infrastructure Trust Fund)	3/7/2013	3/6/2023	153,670,184	153,670,184
Engineering Support Program	7/23/2016	1/22/2022	125,000,000	107,683,436
Bifacial Solar Photovoltaic Power Plant	4/1/2021	3/31/2022	24,150,000	0
25 MW Wind Farm in Herat Province	10/22/2019	11/27/2022	22,994,029	0
Design and Acquisition of SEPS Completion and NEPS-SEPS Connector	3/7/2018	6/27/2022	20,151,240	10,786,014
IT Support for DABS Existing Data, Disaster Recovery and Load Centers	8/31/2021	6/30/2022	2,786,146	0
Energy Loss Management Visualization Platform Activity	1/25/2020	1/24/2022	1,579,973	1,579,973
USAID-CTP Promoting Excellence in Private Sector Engagement-PEPSE	-	-	114,252	114,252
Total			\$858,740,269	\$669,921,767

- No data
Source: USAID, response to SIGAR data call, 1/15/2022.

Energy Shortfalls Persist Through Winter

Due to shortfalls in domestic power production, the Afghan energy sector remains highly dependent on neighboring countries to provide electric power and petroleum products. Afghanistan imports over 80% of its electricity at an annual cost of \$220 million. This has made Afghans' access to reliable electricity vulnerable to changes (seasonal domestic demands, energy output levels, etc.) in other countries.¹³²

Domestic hydroelectric generation in Afghanistan is further constrained by the current drought, seasonal rainfall levels, and the absence of water-sharing agreements with regional countries who use common rivers.¹³³

By late 2020, according to data provided by Afghanistan Inter-Ministerial Commission for Energy, Afghanistan's total installed capacity for domestic power production was approximately 699 MW, versus the 2000 MW the Afghan Ministry of Water and Energy estimates the country needs. Domestic electric generating capacity consists of 280.5 MW of hydroelectric power, 353.5 MW of thermal/oil plants, and 65 MW from renewable energy.¹³⁴ This limited access to reliable, grid-based power has been an obstacle to economic growth.

Moreover, the expansion of Afghanistan's domestic energy production was tied to power-purchase agreements between independent power producers (IPP) and Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS), Afghanistan's national power utility, which obligated DABS to purchase all IPP-produced electricity.¹³⁵ Given the Islamic Republic's heavy reliance on international donor assistance, DABS' financial viability was tied to either continued donor support or the government's ability to generate far greater levels of domestic revenue. IPPs have warned that unpaid invoices from DABS for generated electricity in the past have contributed to cash-flow problems that put continued power plant operations at risk.¹³⁶

Not only do the Taliban face potential technical and personnel difficulties in managing the country's power infrastructure, particularly as trained personnel leave the country, but they now face severe revenue shortages that inhibit the ability to provide both domestically and externally generated electricity to the power grid. DABS' operations will be further impacted by the rising levels of poverty that limit households' ability to pay their electric bills.¹³⁷

Press reports early this quarter indicated that the Taliban had not paid for electricity imports from neighboring countries or resumed bill collections from electricity consumers. As of December 23, Afghanistan owed its neighbors an estimated \$100 million in energy payments. UNDP previously reported that Central Asian countries can suspend their electricity exports under existing contracts due to nonpayment.¹³⁸

Despite these concerns, DABS was able to sign further supply contracts for 2022 with the National Electric Grid of Uzbekistan (NEGU) and Tajikistan's Barki Tojik power company. Under the \$69 million contract with

Barki Tojik signed on December 27, Tajikistan will provide Afghanistan with 1.5 billion KWH of energy. Under NEGU's \$100 million contract, Uzbekistan agreed to provide Afghanistan with 2 billion KWH of electricity.¹³⁹

According to UNDP, an interruption of electricity imports could leave over 10 million Afghans without power.¹⁴⁰ Electrical power grids supply 40% of the Afghan population, primarily urban residents.¹⁴¹ One such outage occurred on January 12, when electricity imports from Uzbekistan were reduced by 60% without notice, due to a technical problem at Marjan power station.¹⁴²

USAID suspended all engagement with DABS on September 12 and is no longer monitoring its performance.¹⁴³

Taliban View Extractives as Key Revenue Source

U.S. Embassy Kabul, currently operating out of Doha, Qatar, reported that the Taliban appointed experienced diplomat Maulvi Shahabuddin Delawar to lead their effort to attract foreign investment in Afghanistan's mining sector. However, State told SIGAR that they were not yet aware of any current cooperation, beyond fact-finding missions from China and Russia, between international businesses or foreign governments and the Taliban on the development of mining operations.¹⁴⁴

Afghanistan's lithium deposits could be among the largest in the world, rivaling those of the Bolivia, according to media reports.¹⁴⁵ According to the *Financial Times* and State reporting this quarter, Chinese mining companies have been scouting opportunities to access Afghanistan's lithium and copper deposits. Chinese mining industry representatives met with Taliban officials in Kabul, Nangarhar, and Laghman Provinces to discuss mining rights and research access to such minerals. However, these talks remained in the early stages, with no guarantees yet made. Two of the Chinese companies reported to have been part of these talks have denied involvement, according to the *Financial Times*.¹⁴⁶

Long-Standing Obstacles and Uncertainties

Although Afghanistan has vast mineral resources, most projects in extractive activities require a five- to 10-year lead time, and will require significant improvements in security and a more investor-friendly regulatory environment.¹⁴⁷ China's state-media outlet, the *Global Times*, recently claimed that uncertainties regarding security, poor infrastructure, and mining policies were acting as a bottleneck for the mining industry.¹⁴⁸ The *Financial Times* said the Chinese are also concerned about how the Taliban will react to the state-sponsored persecution of the Uyghur population and other Muslim minorities in the Chinese province of Xinjiang.¹⁴⁹

Before the Taliban takeover, illegal mining and the lack of enabling infrastructure limited the former Afghan government's ability to benefit from extractives. Afghanistan's formal extractives sector was limited by

low processing capacity, lack of reliable energy sources, poor transportation infrastructure, and insecurity which raised mining costs compared to regional markets. The potential for profitable mining operations, even in the formal economy, was further weakened by widespread corruption, which acted as an additional deterrent to investors in capital-intensive mining operations.¹⁵⁰ The multiple obstacles to formal development have left a large percentage of mining activity in Afghanistan to informal or illegal small-scale operations that smuggle their products out of the country.¹⁵¹ According to accounting data from the Ghani administration, mining revenues accounted for only around 1% of Afghanistan's sustainable domestic revenues in recent years, despite the fact that all Afghan mineral resources are legally property of the state.¹⁵²

U.S. Embassy Kabul reports that output and revenue from Afghanistan's mining sector has declined since the Taliban took power, due to the group's lack of technical expertise, as well as the current financial liquidity crisis. Mining company leaders assess that mineral exports from Afghanistan declined 45% year-on-year.¹⁵³ However, State could not provide an independent estimate on the Taliban's income from mining revenues due to a lack of data.¹⁵⁴

Reports indicate that while the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum (MOMP) staff have remained at work despite frustration over months of missed salary payments, they worry that the Taliban will give postings to loyalists without technical or subject-matter expertise. Some domestic mining companies had to lay off staff or suspend operations entirely due to the liquidity crisis, increased shipping costs, and high royalty payments.¹⁵⁵

Desperate to collect domestic revenue, the Taliban instituted high royalties—four times the amount imposed by the Ghani administration—to be paid in advance for the export of raw materials. MOMP and the Ministry of Finance approved a plan to boost royalties on marble from 550 afghani per ton (\$5.50) to 2,000 afghani per ton (\$22.55). Experts agreed that the hike in royalties would boost government revenue in the short term, but domestic mining companies worried that they would have to raise prices to pay for them, making their firms less competitive with foreign companies, thus reducing demand and market share.¹⁵⁶

However, State says the costs associated with providing security at mining sites and paying bribes to government officials have diminished.¹⁵⁷

CIVIL AVIATION UPDATE

Turkey and Qatar near agreement to run Afghan airports

The completion of the U.S. evacuation on August 30 left the Taliban without the technical expertise to run Kabul International Airport (formerly known as Hamid Karzai International Airport). Voice of America reported that the

airport was also damaged during the evacuation.¹⁵⁸ Functioning airports, along with safe and secure civil aviation, are necessary for maintaining any diplomatic presence in Kabul and, more importantly in the near term, vital for facilitating the delivery and distribution of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people.

While a technical team from Qatar was able to restore limited daytime airport operations in Kabul in September, and facilitate domestic flights to Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, and Kandahar, Qatari engineers acknowledged that “there were some technical issues that we cannot fix.”¹⁵⁹ According to State, Qatar’s support has been related primarily to ensuring the continuity of humanitarian air operations into and out of Kabul.¹⁶⁰

State also told SIGAR this quarter that commercial airlines have been operating unscheduled relief and charter flights amid great financial and operational risk under daytime **Visual Flight Rules (VFR)**. Kabul airport’s ability to operate with reduced visibility in the winter months remains in question, as many runway lights are damaged and nonfunctional, and navigational aids to facilitate operations at night and in marginal weather conditions remain out of service. State expressed these concerns to the Taliban and emphasized the urgent need to finalize arrangements with international partners to improve safety for VFR flights and to allow for flights in adverse weather conditions and at night.¹⁶¹ On December 17, Uzbekistan announced it sent technicians to help repair and operate the airport at Mazar-e Sharif. They estimated work would be completed in early 2022.¹⁶²

On December 24, Taliban officials announced they were in talks with a Qatar/Turkey joint venture to manage Kabul International Airport, as well as at least three other airports in Afghanistan. A joint team of Turkish and Qatari companies had signed a memorandum of understanding to operate Afghan airports “on the basis of equal partnership” and continue to engage the Taliban to finalize the arrangement.¹⁶³

Kabul International Airport is currently the main entry point for delivering humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.¹⁶⁴ This airport will need to remain operational throughout the winter if international efforts to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis are to continue.

Visual Flight Rules (VFR): Under VFR, aircraft operate in visual meteorological conditions (that is, clear weather). Clouds, heavy precipitation, low visibility, and otherwise adverse weather conditions should be avoided under VFR. Most general aviation flying and flight training occurs in visual meteorological conditions.

Source: ATP Flight School website, “VFR vs IFR,” accessed 12/30/2021.

EDUCATION

USAID had four active education development programs in Afghanistan when Kabul fell, three of which have since been suspended or terminated. The agency has sought to ensure that implementers of USAID-funded education activities provide no material support to the de facto authorities. No USAID education activities have provided funding for teachers since August 15, 2021.¹⁶⁵

The Capacity Building Activity program at the Ministry of Education was ordered to stop technical work on September 11, 2021, and received

a termination notice on October 8. Technical work had already been halted on August 15, with activities focused only on the safety and security of staff and winding down operations.¹⁶⁶

The Advancing Higher Education for Afghanistan Development program also received an order on September 11, 2021, to “suspend all USAID-funded assistance activities, including any contact with the Afghan government.” Between August 15 and September 11, the program was unable to carry out any activities due to the political and security situation on the ground. Given the absence of external donor assistance, the Taliban have not been paying public university faculty since they took power.¹⁶⁷

According to UN Under Secretary General for Human Rights Martin Griffiths, 70% of all teachers in Afghanistan have not been paid since August.¹⁶⁸

USAID’s Strengthening Education in Afghanistan (SEA II) program has not disbursed any funds this quarter, but continues to collect the results of examinations for students who were in its Promote scholarship activity. SEA II had previously focused on increasing the number of affordable private schools, and improving girls’ access to them. Many of these schools have closed since the Taliban took power and overall attendance has dropped.¹⁶⁹

The technical capacity-building program for the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) continued its activities via online instruction for participants within and outside Afghanistan. AUAF is a private university receiving U.S. government support, and local and American faculty continue to be paid.¹⁷⁰ AUAF relocated its main campus to Qatar in mid-October.¹⁷¹

USAID-funded education programs aimed to increase access to, and improve the quality of, both basic and higher education, while also building the management capacity of the Ministry of Education (MOE) to develop a self-sustaining national education system in the long term. The premise of USAID’s strategy was that gains in social development, including a strong education system, would help to bolster Afghan confidence in the government, improve the overall stability and inclusivity of the country, expand civic participation, and “create the conditions necessary for peace.”¹⁷²

With one of the youngest populations in the world—more than 40% of the Afghan population is 14 or younger—developing a quality education system serves as a long-term investment in human capital for the Afghan economy as well as in individual self-reliance. Even with donor assistance before the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan struggled to improve its education outcomes in the face of the MOE’s capacity issues and persistent insecurity.¹⁷³

Since 2002, USAID disbursed approximately \$1.28 billion for education programs, as of January 10, 2022.¹⁷⁴ The agency’s remaining education programs are shown in Table G.6 on the following page.

SIGAR/USAID INVESTIGATION ABOUT AUAF

Following a joint USAID Office of Inspector General (USAID OIG) and SIGAR referral to USAID’s Suspension and Debarment office, USAID and American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) negotiated an administrative agreement whereby the university agreed to measures which sought to provide oversight; increase fiscal management, transparency, and responsibility; create an ethics and compliance office; and other steps.

Although many allegations were brought to the attention of investigators, all have been investigated and resolved without any finding of violations of U.S. criminal statutes. Following the concurrence of the Department of Justice, the joint investigation was closed by USAID OIG and SIGAR in November 2021.

TABLE G.6

USAID REMAINING EDUCATION PROGRAMS				
Project Title	Start Date	End Date	Total Estimated Cost	Cumulative Disbursements, as of 1/10/2022
Advancing Higher Education for Afghanistan Development (AHEAD)	8/5/2020	8/4/2025	\$49,999,917	\$5,617,833
Strengthening Education in Afghanistan (SEA II)	5/19/2014	12/31/2023	49,828,942	45,352,806
Textbook Printing and Distribution II	9/15/2017	12/31/2021	35,000,000	4,333,950
Let Girls Learn Initiative and Girls' Education Challenge Programme (GEC)	6/29/2016	3/31/2022	25,000,000	25,000,000
Capacity Building Activity at the Ministry of Education	2/1/2017	1/10/2022	23,042,634	21,610,171
Technical Capacity Building for AUAF	2/1/2021	1/31/2022	18,947,149	6,124,539
Financial and Operational Capacity Building for an Afghan Higher Education Institution	4/9/2021	12/31/2021	1,502,821	279,189
Total			\$203,321,463	\$108,318,490

Source: USAID, response to SIGAR data call, 1/15/2022.

The future of girls' education remains uncertain

When the Taliban reopened schools throughout Afghanistan in September, only male students and teachers for grades 7–12 were instructed to return.¹⁷⁵ According to USAID, secondary schools for girls in the majority of provinces, including Kabul, remained closed this quarter.¹⁷⁶ In a December 8 interview with the BBC, the Taliban-appointed deputy education minister, Abdul Hakim Hemat, confirmed that girls are prohibited from attending high school, but said they would be allowed to return when a new education policy is approved in 2022.¹⁷⁷

However, media reports indicate that some girls' secondary schools have already reopened after negotiations with local Taliban officials, including in cities such as Mazar-e Sharif and Kunduz.¹⁷⁸ As of December 1, Voice of America reported that girls' high schools reopened in all districts in Herat Province, the only province where this is the case. While Taliban officials never formally approved the resumption of girls' secondary education in Herat, they did not move to stop it. In contrast to the deputy education minister's later statement, Taliban education director for Herat Province Shehabeddin Saqeb told Voice of America, "We openly tell everyone that they should come to school. The schools are open without any problem. We never issued any official order saying high-school-aged girls should not go to school."¹⁷⁹

Yet in the 12 provinces where girls have access to secondary school, Taliban restrictions have severely and adversely impacted the numbers of students attending schools and the quality of instruction. Taliban decrees



Girls attend a UNHCR-built school in Mahale Ghori village near Herat. (UNHCR Afghanistan Twitter account, @UNHCRAfg)

that classes and teachers be segregated by gender are exacerbating a teacher shortage, eliminating classroom opportunities for girls. Many families also feel pressured to keep their daughters at home out of concern for their safety.¹⁸⁰ International human-rights organizations such as Amnesty International have criticized the Taliban for not reopening girls' schools throughout the country, and have accused them of using threats and intimidation to keep attendance rates low at all girls' schools.¹⁸¹

In an interview with the Associated Press, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said they were making preparations for reopening all girls' schools by the end of March 2022. He stated that education for women and girls "is a question of capacity," and that girls and boys must be completely segregated in schools.¹⁸² However, it is unclear if the Taliban have sufficient resources or female teachers to be able to operate segregated schools for female students.¹⁸³ Before the collapse of the Afghan government, the MOE reported that Afghan schools suffered from a lack of educational resources and needed at least 50,000 more teachers.¹⁸⁴ Many teachers are not working due to a lack of pay. USAID reported "there is a lot of anecdotal evidence that female teachers, wherever possible, are also choosing to leave the country."¹⁸⁵ USAID reports that female students are allowed to continue studying at private universities, so long as there is at least a curtain separating men and women within classrooms.¹⁸⁶ However, even though female students are allowed to attend some higher education institutions, their inability to attend secondary schools would effectively bar them from advancing to the university level.¹⁸⁷

TALIBAN REVIEW OF ISLAMIC REPUBLIC CURRICULUM

Taliban Criticisms of the Islamic Republic's Education Curriculum

The Taliban have said they are developing a new education curriculum for 2022, with changes to some subjects to begin with the new school year starting on March 22.¹⁸⁸ While State told SIGAR they have no evidence that such a Taliban curriculum has yet been operational, a December 2020 report from the Taliban's education commission criticizing the school curriculum of the fallen Islamic Republic can shed some light on the type of educational changes they may implement.¹⁸⁹ The Taliban "review committee on the modern school curriculum" said it had thoroughly examined all of the Islamic Republic's textbooks from the first through sixth grade, and offered core principles and guidelines for changing the entire lower and higher education curriculum.¹⁹⁰

The report outlines 12 recurring aspects of lessons under the Islamic Republic that the Taliban believe were inconsistent with the values it believes children should be taught. According to the Taliban:¹⁹¹

1. Lessons taught were not consistent with Islam and Sharia.
2. Lessons taught had moral problems.
3. Lessons taught were at odds with Afghan traditions.
4. Lessons reflected foreign cultures.
5. Lessons praised influential figures from the West and East, rather than from Afghanistan.
6. Lessons promoted non-Islamic traditions and actions (such as music, television, democracy).
7. Lessons were in conflict with the freedom and independence of Afghanistan.
8. Afghan national heroes were disregarded, ignored, or humiliated.
9. Pro-Western and "puppet" figures in Afghan history were presented as heroes.
10. Democracy and its core principles were considered important values.
11. Afghanistan and the geography of the Islamic world were disregarded.
12. Historical facts were renounced (e.g., the Taliban were presented negatively).¹⁹²

Taliban: Curriculum was Inconsistent with "Islamic Values"

A central theme of the report is the desire to remove "foreign influence" from the school curriculum. The Taliban seek to redefine concepts such as "freedom," "human rights," "peace," and "equality" within its interpretation of Islamic

tradition, and to teach that the framework of Sharia is the only path to attaining these values.¹⁹³ The report said that texts and images in violation of such values, including music and images of musical instruments, should be removed from lessons.¹⁹⁴

The report also advocates teaching “war” and “holy Jihad” as distinct concepts, creating new lessons about the “American savage occupation,” and instilling patriotic values in students. Teachers “should promote and encourage the spirit of jihad and freedom in the minds and hearts of the students.”¹⁹⁵

Many of the changes called for in this report relate to how textbooks depict women and girls. The report expresses outrage over depictions of women in Western clothing, pictures of young girls not wearing the hijab, and “nakedness” in sports. It states that women’s rights should be taught within the context of Islamic rights, and that Western views are transgressive, but provides no further details. The report likewise mentions that the current curriculum improperly grants women “an absolute right of education [without] limitations or conditions.” It does not describe the Taliban view of proper education for women.¹⁹⁶ Girls have been allowed to attend primary schools and women continue to study at private universities, but they have been barred from most secondary schools and face restrictions at public universities.¹⁹⁷

The report cites a number of specific problems in individual textbooks used in the Islamic Republic’s curriculum, reflecting the 12 main concerns described. The Taliban review committee found no issues in the subjects of computer science, physics, math, chemistry, or biology, but expressed several concerns with the subject of history. For example, it contends that the lesson on the creation of the United Nations should emphasize that it is not a “free and independent organization,” but rather “an infidel net and control tool which has controlled and prevented Muslims from unification.”¹⁹⁸

Finally, the report concludes by recommending that the subjects of fine arts, civic studies, and culture be removed from the education curriculum. Civic studies were taught from the seventh through 12th grades in the Islamic Republic’s curriculum; the Taliban report takes issue with all related textbooks. The Taliban report states their “introduction of organizations, democracy, constitution, human rights, elections” and other topics are harmful and destructive. Fine arts and culture are described as unnecessary or “disadvantageous” to teach. The report recommends that both should be replaced with a new lesson plan on agriculture.¹⁹⁹

USAID told SIGAR that the Taliban are developing protocols for female students attending public universities, but have yet to present anything concrete. They note that female students have been allowed to continue studying at private universities, albeit at a reduced attendance rate. Reports also indicate that the Taliban are not interfering in the curricula of private universities, but plans to revise the curricula of public universities.²⁰⁰ Afghan teachers for primary and secondary education have also been told to continue teaching the current curriculum until the Taliban complete their own version.²⁰¹

REMAINING WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM PAUSED

The USAID Office of Gender's one remaining active program: The Women's Scholarship Endowment (WSE), which provides financial support to female students at Afghan universities, has been paused. WSE had a total of 232 scholars in three cohorts; five have graduated, 31 have departed Afghanistan, and 29 have either paused their studies, dropped out, or are on probation. That leaves 167 still active this quarter. The establishment of Taliban control and restrictions on women's access to higher education resulted in the suspension of recruitment for the fourth WSE cohort. Outside of pending student stipend payments and specific activities related to the close-out of last semester, such as final exams, WSE has suspended its programming. WSE is working on a revised work plan in light of current programming uncertainties and is exploring the extent to which they engage the private universities within the OFAC parameters. They are also considering sending students to regional universities.²⁰²

USAID's other remaining Promote program, Musharikat, closed on December 1, 2021, after a three-month no-cost extension to facilitate its closeout. Musharikat (Women's Rights Groups and Coalitions) was focused on advancing women's participation in the peace process, political participation, and addressing gender-based violence (GBV). Table G.7 show the remaining Promote and women's-focused programs.²⁰³

TABLE G.7

USAID REMAINING GENDER PROGRAMS				
Project Title	Start Date	End Date	Total Estimated Cost	Cumulative Disbursements, as of 1/10/2022
Promote Scholarship Endowment Activity	9/27/2018	9/26/2023	\$50,000,000	\$50,000,000
Promote - Musharikat	9/2/2015	12/1/2021	34,534,401	31,902,005
Total			\$84,543,401	\$81,902,005

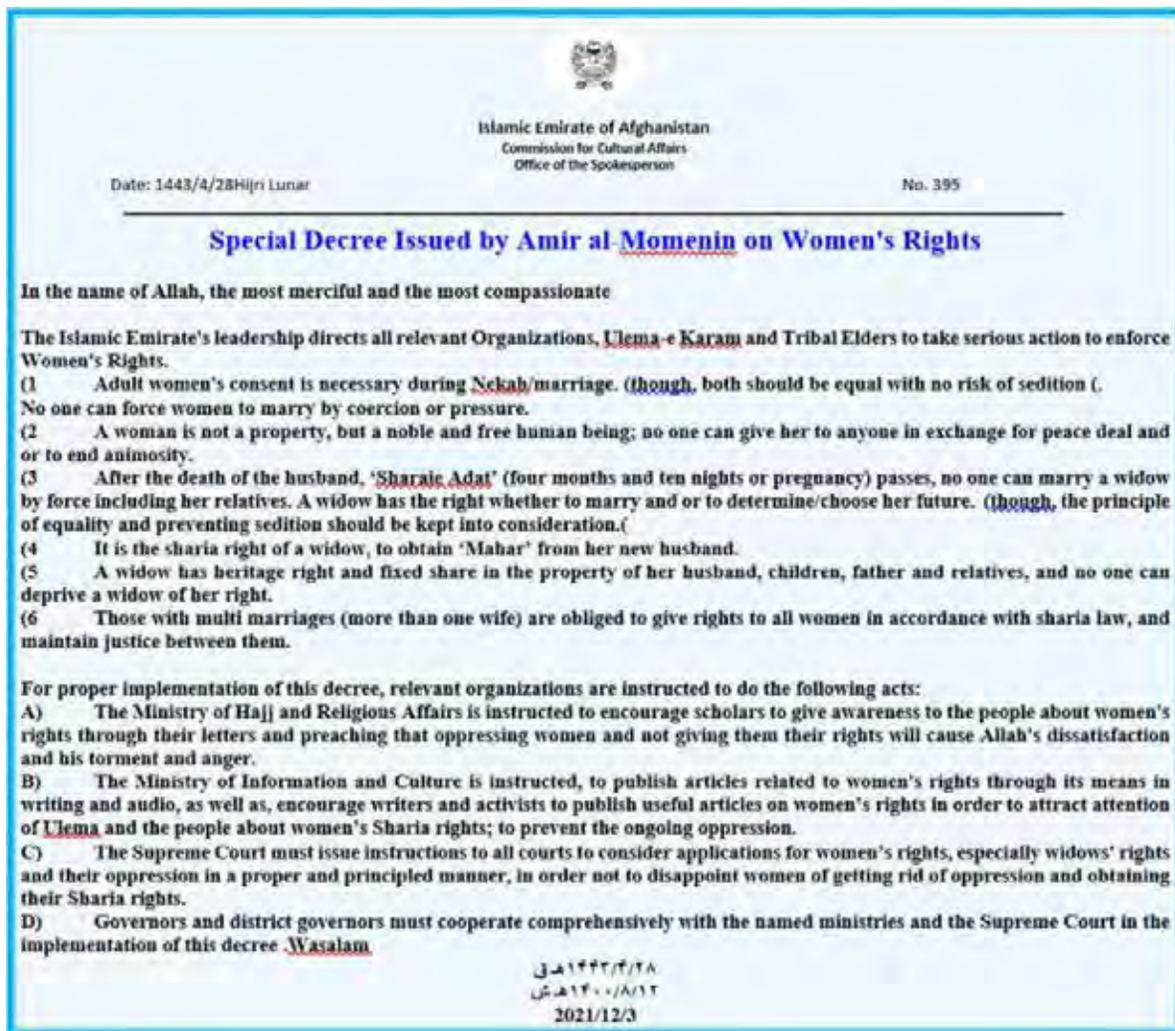
Source: USAID, response to SIGAR data call, 1/15/2022.

Taliban issue special decree banning forced marriages

On December 3, the Taliban announced they were banning forced marriages in Afghanistan, declaring that women must give consent to be married. Per the decree, "a women is not a property, but a noble and free human being; no one can give her to anyone in exchange for peace ... or to end animosity."²⁰⁴ It also establishes that widows have a right to inherit their late husband's property, outlines guidance for polygamous marriages, and orders courts to cooperate with these rules.²⁰⁵

The declaration comes amid numerous reports of Afghan parents selling their daughters to feed the rest of their families as starvation grips the country this winter.²⁰⁶

Mahbouba Seraj, executive director for the Afghan Women's Skills Development Center in Kabul, called this a "huge" and unprecedented milestone for the Taliban. "Now what we have to do as the women of this country is ... make sure this actually takes place and gets implemented."²⁰⁷ Seraj and other advocates also called on the Taliban to announce further guidance to clarify women's rights in public spaces. "What I am really waiting to hear next ... is for [the Taliban] to send the decree regarding the education and right of work for the women of Afghanistan. That would be absolutely phenomenal."²⁰⁸



Source: Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid (@Zabehulah_M33), "Special Decree Issued by Amir al-Momenin on Women's Rights," 12/3/2021, https://twitter.com/zabehulah_m33/status/1466663907750256642.

Taliban issue restrictions on the right of women to travel and use communal bathhouses

On December 26, the Taliban sparked international outrage when they outlawed women from traveling more than 45 miles (72 km) without being accompanied by “a close male family member.” “This new order essentially moves further in the direction of making women prisoners,” said Heather Barr, Human Rights Watch’s director of women’s rights. It “shuts off opportunities for them to be able to move freely, to travel to another city, to do business, (or) to be able to flee if they are facing violence in the home.”²⁰⁹

On December 28, women in Kabul organized a protest against the new restrictions. Taliban militants fired their weapons in the air, causing a stampede that injured a number of women.²¹⁰

On January 3, Taliban officials in Balkh and Herat Provinces banned women from using *hammams*, communal bathhouses traditionally used for cleaning and purification rituals. Under Islamic law, women are required to cleanse after menstruation, giving birth, and sexual intercourse. Hammams are also the only place where many Afghans can access warm water during the winter. Women were also barred from using hammams during the Taliban’s 1996–2001 reign.²¹¹

PUBLIC HEALTH

After the closure of the U.S. embassy in Kabul in August 2021, USAID paused its health programming to evaluate next steps. USAID’s bilateral projects (Assistance for Families and Indigent Afghans to Thrive, AFIAT, and the Urban Health Initiative, UHI) continued to support the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations under OFAC’s September 23 license (GL15). SHOPS-Plus (Sustaining Health Outcomes through the Private Sector Plus) continued sales of socially-marketed health products to third-party distributors and retail outlets. Additionally, the Disease Early Warning System (DEWS) initiative, working through the World Health Organization, continued to provide support for disease surveillance for both polio and COVID-19.²¹²

In mid-November, UHI resumed programming focused on expanding access to and quality of health services in NGO-supported and private facilities, continuing to strengthen COVID-19 prevention and response, strengthening community-based service delivery, and establishment of “eMentoring” for health care providers. At this time, AFIAT also resumed programming focused on providing life-saving pharmaceuticals and commodities, creating a female health worker corps, strengthening of community-based services, advocating for strengthened nutrition counseling for mothers and children, and continuing to strengthen COVID-19 prevention and response.²¹³



WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (center) talks with hospital staff at the Wazir Mohammad Akbar Khan National Hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan. (World Health Organization photo by Lindsay Mackenzie)

USAID reports that the Taliban takeover has had a negative impact on a several aspects of their health programs. The financial liquidity crisis has led to delayed salary payments to partner staff as well as limited ability to pay vendors and purchase needed supplies and resources in a timely fashion. Over 400 COVID-19 vaccinators, hired through short-term contracts under UHI, are among those for whom salary payments were severely delayed.²¹⁴ The liquidity crisis, combined with security challenges and land/air import restrictions, has also resulted in a shortage of essential medicines and health supplies. SHOPS-Plus, for example, provides condoms and oral contraceptives (through their social marketing initiative) for more than 22% of women using modern contraceptives in Afghanistan. As of December 17, their local stock of socially marketed oral contraceptives and condoms has been completely depleted and they have been unable to resupply.²¹⁵

USAID also reports numerous security incidents, including: (1) Taliban occupation of project guest houses (resulting in property damage); (2) Taliban removal of an AFIAT project vehicle from their central office; (3) challenges and delays related to navigating Taliban-installed checkpoints (particularly for SHOPS-Plus during transport of commodities); (4) unscheduled visits by Taliban members to the homes of project staff; and (5) theft and muggings of project staff. However, USAID said so far most of these incidents have not resulted in significant harm to individuals or property.²¹⁶

Despite statements from national Taliban leadership that female health-care workers would be allowed to return to work in the health sector, USAID said subnational policies are not consistent among provinces. In most cases, USAID implementing partners have advised female staff members to work from home until it is clear that they can return to the office safely. A more recent assessment of the security situation has prompted some female staff to return to the office, health facilities, and field visits.²¹⁷

Many international and some locally employed staff were also evacuated from Afghanistan this summer, resulting in limited project vacancies.²¹⁸

U.S. on- and off-budget assistance to Afghanistan’s health sector totaled more than \$1.4 billion as of January 10, 2022.²¹⁹ USAID continues to manage off-budget active health programs are shown in Table G.8.

TABLE G.8

USAID REMAINING HEALTH PROGRAMS				
Project Title	Start Date	End Date	Total Estimated Cost	Cumulative Disbursements, as of 1/10/2022
Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey (ADHS) Follow-On	10/9/2018	9/9/2023	\$10,500,000	\$5,548,814
Sustaining Technical and Analytic Resources (STAR)	5/1/2018	9/30/2023	2,186,357	1,231,504
TB Data, Impact Assessment and Communications Hub (TB DIAH)	9/24/2018	9/24/2023	600,000	600,000
Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control	4/15/2019	4/14/2024	970,000	270,000
Assistance for Families and Indigent Afghans to Thrive (AFIAT)	7/10/2020	7/9/2025	117,000,000	14,562,819
Urban Health Initiative (UHI) Program	10/14/2020	10/13/2025	104,000,000	14,062,920
Modeling American Healthcare, Standards & Values in Afghanistan	10/1/2020	9/30/2022	1,092,601	0
DEWS Plus	7/1/2014	6/30/2022	54,288,615	37,210,137
Central Contraceptive Procurement (CCP)	4/20/2015	11/28/2023	3,599,998	3,122,674
Total			\$294,237,571	\$76,608,867

Source: USAID, response to SIGAR data call, 1/15/2022.

Health-care System in Crisis

NGOs and international organizations have warned that Afghanistan’s health-care system remains in crisis this quarter. Given the loss of most government funding and international support after the Taliban took power, hospitals nationwide have little to no money for salaries, equipment, medicines, or supplies.²²⁰

The pause of the World Bank-administered Sehatmandi project had a particularly severe impact on Afghanistan’s health sector leading up to the current situation. Under Sehatmandi, over 60% of Afghanistan’s 3,758 public-health facilities (across 31 of 34 provinces) contracted directly with local NGOs to offer basic health services and essential hospital services. Funded through a multilateral donor trust, Sehatmandi has been supported by USAID and over 30 international donor partners. The World Bank paused Sehatmandi in the wake of the Taliban’s takeover, constraining Afghan health facilities from offering the full package of basic health services. This, combined with a national liquidity crisis, household food insecurity, and concerns about personal safety, has jeopardized the health gains of the past

20 years.²²¹ According to WHO, only 17% of the Afghanistan's Sehatmandi clinics and health facilities were fully functioning in September 2021.²²²

Starting in October and November, USAID and other international donors provided bridge funding to sustain Sehatmandi in the short term, averting a complete collapse of the public health system. USAID told SIGAR that longer-term solutions are being discussed and will be key for maintaining the health sector achievements of the past 20 years.²²³

The health-system crisis comes amid a record crisis of food insecurity, with nearly four million Afghans estimated to “need acute malnutrition treatment services in 2021, including one million children under five with severe acute malnutrition, 2.2 million children under five with moderate acute malnutrition, and 700,000 pregnant and lactating women with acute malnutrition.”²²⁴ A November WHO estimate foresaw at least one million children at risk of dying from severe malnutrition if they do not receive immediate treatment.²²⁵

COVID-19 continues to ravage Afghanistan, although shortages in testing limit visibility on the number of cases.²²⁶ The Afghan-Japan Communicable Disease Hospital, Kabul's only dedicated COVID-19 facility, reported a lack of oxygen supplies critical to patient care, as well as shortages in fuel for generators, food, and essential drugs for patients, and basic supplies like examination gloves. Supplies of some 36 essential medications had already run out by December 16. Hospital workers have been working for five months without pay as patient rooms fill to capacity with cases of malnutrition, COVID-19, and other diseases. Doctors at another Kabul hospital are sometimes forced to give patients smaller doses of drugs than recommended to avoid running out entirely. These reports all came before the rise of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in Afghanistan. Dr. Shereen Agha, the head of the COVID-19 hospital's intensive care unit, said, “We are not ready for Omicron. A disaster will be here.”²²⁷

Health-care services for women reportedly have been restricted due to Taliban orders requiring women to be seen only by female staff. The Taliban have allegedly beaten male doctors who have treated female patients. Taliban orders that women must be accompanied by a male family member could further restrict women's ability to access health-care facilities.²²⁸

In addition, USAID reports that insecurity and the pause of Sehatmandi funding immediately following the Taliban takeover resulted in women and children losing access to quality services.²²⁹ Data collected from Kandahar and Helmand provinces indicate that, between June and August 2021, the uptake of maternal health services dropped by 36–47%, with the largest decline in institutional deliveries (47%). This same data set shows a 73% drop in children being referred to health facilities for tuberculosis treatment and a 40% drop in children receiving Vitamin A, which is important for vision, growth, cell division, reproduction, and immunity.²³⁰ Additional data collected from health facilities across 17 provinces showed that up to 25% fewer children received critical vaccinations in August compared to June.

From August to September 2021 (compared to August–September 2020), the use of antenatal care declined by 21%, institutional deliveries by 29%, cesarean sections by 46%, use of child care by 15% and major surgeries by 31%, according to UNICEF and WHO.²³¹

Afghanistan has long had a shortage of trained health-care professionals. In 2018, the country had a nationwide average of only 4.6 medical doctors, nurses, and midwives per 10,000 people, far below the WHO threshold of 23 per 10,000 people for a critical shortage. In rural regions, this shortage was more pronounced. In Kunar Province, for instance, the number of doctors per 10,000 people drops to only 0.5.²³² Since the collapse of the government, this figure is most likely even lower given the Taliban's inability to pay health-care workers' salaries, many individuals' reluctance to work given uncertainty over the security conditions in the country, and the number of health-care workers who had fled the country.²³³

Vaccination Programs

COVID-19

Afghanistan's COVID-19 vaccination program has continued under the Taliban. AFIAT and UHI worked with other donors and partners (including the WHO and other UN entities) to roll out COVID vaccines through fixed, mobile, and health facility sites. However, the daily number of vaccinations dropped severely leading up to and following the Taliban takeover on August 15, 2021.²³⁴

According to data reviewed by USAID, performance peaked during week 23 of the vaccination campaign (July 26–31, 2021) at 283,953 doses administered. As the country grew more politically unstable, it fell by 73%. Based on anecdotal reports from AFIAT and UHI, the Taliban have generally been supportive of COVID-19 vaccination campaigns in the provinces, where staff members have encountered little resistance. In the cities of Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Mazar-e Sharif, and Kabul, the Taliban endorsed the implementation of mosque-to-mosque vaccination efforts to increase uptake.²³⁵ On October 16, UNICEF and WHO launched a national COVID-19 vaccination campaign to increase uptake and avoid expiration of approximately 1.9 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The campaign, which lasted approximately six weeks, succeeded in administering 1.4 million of the doses in stock.²³⁶ UNICEF estimated that 5,852,810 doses had been administered in Afghanistan as of October 31, bringing the total number of fully vaccinated people to 2,755,517.²³⁷

On December 22, Secretary of State Blinken announced the United States would provide an additional one million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine through COVAX, a WHO-supported initiative to provide access to vaccines for lower-income nations, bringing the total amount provided to 4.3 million doses.²³⁸

Polio

Afghanistan and Pakistan remain the last countries in the world where polio is still endemic. Afghanistan currently has its lowest transmission level of wild-polio virus, but millions of children remain unvaccinated or under-vaccinated, and the risk of undetected virus transmission remains.²³⁹

Over the past two decades, Afghanistan's polio program has faced many challenges. These include the Taliban's ban on all polio activities for several years in Taliban-controlled areas; weak essential immunization services; lack of trust in vaccination and polio eradication campaigns; poor water, sanitation and hygiene; high birth rates; and a high prevalence of malnutrition. Following the Taliban takeover, the national polio-surveillance system has been functional, but fewer cases have been investigated than in the past and there have been delays in transporting specimens to the laboratory in Islamabad that serves both countries. Disruptions to routine immunizations have also been more common.²⁴⁰

The Taliban-run Ministry of Public Health also implemented a November 8–17 polio vaccination campaign in all provinces. House-to-house campaigns were conducted in all but 19 provinces, where mosque-to-mosque campaigns were done. According to USAID, anecdotal correspondence indicates coverage was around 30% in the mosque-to-mosque areas (with little advance engagement with local leaders and communities, indicating that participation could be improved with more planning and full community engagement). Female participation was low. No security incidents were reported in the international press.²⁴¹



Child receives polio vaccine during Afghanistan's 2022 national vaccination campaign. (World Health Organization photo)

REFUGEES AND INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

The situation facing Afghan **refugees** and the internally displaced continues to be of serious concern, State said. On December 8, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi warned of a surge of Afghan refugees amid fears of economic collapse in Afghanistan.²⁴²

UNHCR has highlighted the escalating risks faced by Afghans seeking to flee into neighboring countries as the situation within Afghanistan continues to deteriorate. Afghanistan's land borders with Pakistan and Iran are open almost solely to those with the required passports and visas, though a small number of medical cases are permitted to enter Pakistan without documents. The land borders of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan remain closed to Afghans.²⁴³

Afghan Refugees

As of November 30, UNHCR reported that 1,314 refugees voluntarily returned to Afghanistan in 2021. Most of the refugees returned from Iran (835) and Pakistan (421).²⁴⁴ UNHCR estimated that approximately 2.6 million Afghans were refugees outside Afghanistan in 2021.²⁴⁵

Refugees: persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection. According to the UNHCR, refugees have the right to safe asylum and should receive at least the same rights and basic help as any other foreigner who is a legal resident.

Source: United Nations, "Refugees and Migrants: Definitions," 2019; UNHCR, "Protecting Refugees: questions and answers," 2/2002.

Migrants: persons who change their country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status. According to the UN, there is no formal legal definition of an international migrant.

Source: United Nations, "Refugees and Migrants: Definitions," 2019; UNHCR, "Protecting Refugees: questions and answers," 2/2002.

Undocumented Afghan Migrant Returnees

As of November 28, the International Organization of Migration (IOM) reported that 1,150,004 undocumented Afghan migrants (spontaneous returnees and deportees) returned from Iran and 20,490 undocumented from Pakistan in 2021.²⁴⁶ Deportations have increased from Iran and Pakistan since summer 2021, despite UNHCR's August 16 non-return advisory that called for a bar on forced returns of Afghan nationals, including asylum seekers whose claims were rejected.²⁴⁷

Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement

As of November 28, 2021, conflicts had induced 667,900 Afghans to flee their homes in 2021, according to the UN OCHA.²⁴⁸ UNHCR estimates 170,000 of that total have returned to their places of origin since September, since the security situation across the country has stabilized.²⁴⁹

HUMAN RIGHTS

Human Rights Watch Issues Report on Taliban Targeted Killing Campaign

On November 30, 2021, Human Rights Watch released its report "*No Forgiveness for People Like You*" *Executions and Enforced Disappearances under the Taliban in Afghanistan*.²⁵⁰ The report describes the Taliban conducting a campaign of targeted killings against former Afghan government officials, despite their promises for a general amnesty. Between August 15 and October 31, 2021, Human Rights Watch identified more than 100 former security-force members who were summarily executed or forcibly disappeared in Ghazni, Helmand, Kunduz, and Kandahar Provinces alone.²⁵¹

The report accuses Taliban leadership at the district and provincial level of ordering and carrying out these killings and disappearances. Taliban forces identified targets for arrest and execution in part through their access to employment records kept by the Ghani administration.²⁵² The report also describes how Taliban leadership directed members of surrendering Afghan security forces to register with them to obtain a letter guaranteeing their safety. However, Taliban forces would use these screenings "to detain and summarily execute or forcibly disappear individuals within days of their registration, leaving their bodies for their relatives or communities to find."²⁵³

The Taliban have issued statements reiterating their policy of amnesty and have disavowed any role that its leadership has played in alleged killings. In response to a letter from Human Rights Watch outlining their findings, the Taliban claimed to have established a "Cleansing Commission" to purge human rights abusers from its ranks and to have already removed or arrested 755 of its members.²⁵⁴

Patricia Gossman, associate director for Human Rights Watch Asia, voiced skepticism of these assurances, since no corroborating evidence was provided. “The Taliban’s unsupported claims that they will act to prevent abuses and hold abusers to account appears, so far, to be nothing more than a public relations stunt,” Gossman said. “The lack of accountability makes clear the need for continued UN scrutiny of Afghanistan’s human rights situation, including robust monitoring, investigations, and public reporting.”²⁵⁵

On December 14, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a report to the UN Human Rights Council reiterating the rise of extrajudicial killings in Afghanistan, alongside other abuses such as the recruitment of children as militants. According to Nada Al-Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, “while the Taliban takeover has brought an uneasy end to fighting against governmental forces in the country, the current situation leaves the population with little protection in terms of human rights.”²⁵⁶

The *Wall Street Journal* reports that the new Afghan regime is deepening their crackdown on dissenters, with Taliban intelligence officers monitoring social media feeds for content critical of their regime, and detaining any critics they can identify.²⁵⁷

On January 8, the Taliban arrested Faizullah Jalal, a Kabul University law professor who publicly criticized the Taliban during an interview with Afghanistan’s TOLONews network. Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid cited Jalal’s anti-Taliban posts on social media as the reason for his arrest.²⁵⁸ After international criticism, Jalal was released two days later.²⁵⁹

At least one person has been killed for posting a critical message on social media, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. In November, Naveed Khan, a 31-year-old man in Lashkar Gah, was abducted, tortured, and killed by Taliban members after publishing a Facebook post criticizing the Taliban for not paying teachers’ salaries. Other individuals arrested for critical social media posts reported being threatened and fearing for their lives.²⁶⁰ More information on Taliban reprisals can be found in the Classified Supplement to this report.



Taliban foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi meets with Antonio Vitorino, Director General of the UN’s International Organization for Migration on November 4, 2021. (Taliban spokesperson Abdul Qahar Balkhi Twitter account, @QaharBalkhi)

COUNTERNARCOTICS

Opiate Production Nears Record High in 2021

Afghan opiate production in 2021 was the third highest recorded since surveying began in 1994, according to a report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released this quarter.²⁶¹ The report, *Drug Situation in Afghanistan 2021: Latest findings and emerging threats*, said estimated opium production in 2021 increased 8% over 2020 figures, to 6,800 tons—even though the area under opium-poppy cultivation contracted 21% from 224,000 hectares to 177,000 hectares (one hectare is about 2.5 acres). This was the fifth consecutive year in which production exceeded 6,000 tons.²⁶²

According to the report, the gross output of the Afghan opiate economy was between \$1.8 and \$2.7 billion in 2021, comprising the equivalent of 9–14% of Afghanistan’s GDP and exceeding the value of all of Afghanistan’s officially recorded licit exports for 2020 (estimated at 9% of GDP).²⁶³ The largest share of this economy benefited Afghan opiate manufacturers and exporters. A much smaller share was captured by farmers (\$425 million) and the domestic-use/street-level market (\$43 million).²⁶⁴ UNODC gave no specific cause for the 2021 increase, although it did continue to note a variety of socioeconomic and security factors, including poverty and corruption.²⁶⁵

The State Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) has disbursed \$24.2 million since 2006 for Afghanistan Opium Surveys.²⁶⁶ According to INL, the *Drug Situation in Afghanistan 2021* report was partially funded by the Afghan Opium Survey project, but the report was not produced in collaboration with either the former Afghan Ministry of Interior or the former National Statistic and Information Authority. Therefore, it was exclusively a UNODC product that is a derivative of what had been the collaborative opium-survey projects.²⁶⁷

Status of the State Department’s Counternarcotics Programs

The State Department’s current policy prohibits direct assistance to the Taliban or any part of the government of Afghanistan.²⁶⁸ While some programs remain active indirectly—administered through implementing partners and NGOs—other programs have been terminated or paused following the Taliban takeover in August 2021.²⁶⁹

According to INL, the “Taliban has not impacted the ability for alternative development partners to implement projects,” citing ongoing activities by UNODC through its Afghanistan Opium Survey and its Afghan Opiate Trade Project (AOTP). The AOTP publishes occasional reports on trends in the global Afghan opiate trade to support international counternarcotics efforts. INL has obligated and disbursed \$10.3 million for AOTP since 2011.²⁷⁰

INL also reported four programs that have already been or are scheduled to be terminated this quarter.

The first is the Drug Interdiction Operations and Management program that was implemented by PAE, with \$311 million disbursed out of \$316 million in obligations. This program supported ANDSF interdiction operations to cover life- and mission-support services to the National Interdiction Unit (NIU), a component of the former Counternarcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA). Specifically, the support was provided to the NIU compound in Kabul, to the adjacent Counter Narcotics Justice Center, to three leased villas in the International Zone that supported DEA and its wire-intercept program with the Sensitive Investigation Unit (another CNPA component), as well as three NIU base camps in Kandahar, Herat, and Kunduz. The

support varied, but generally included building maintenance, meals, generator or other power assistance, network connectivity, and well water.²⁷¹

Additionally, the Governor Led Eradication (GLE) program, which reimbursed provincial governments for every hectare of eradicated opium poppy, is being terminated. The GLE program had been paused since the dissolution of the former Ministry of Counternarcotics (MCN) in 2019. The CNPA was to resume the GLE program once INL approved and certified the CNPA's improved financial accountability mechanisms. According to INL, by April 2021, a U.S.-Afghanistan Letter of Agreement between INL and the CNPA had been drafted that would have reimbursed the CNPA for costs associated with poppy eradication at the rate of \$250 per verified hectare of eradicated poppy (the same rate that had been paid to the MCN when it had implemented the GLE program). State was never able to sign the agreement because the ongoing effort to improve CNPA financial accountability had not been completed in time for the 2021 eradication season. When GLE was actively implemented by the former MCN, all obligations had been disbursed (\$6.9 million).²⁷²

The third project terminated was INL's MCN Capacity Building program. Started in 2008, this program had also been paused following the dissolution of the MCN in 2019. Jointly implemented by MCN and INL, \$27.4 million had been disbursed out of \$35.2 million in obligations.²⁷³

Finally, the interagency agreement between INL and DEA, through which DEA trained and supported the specialized units of the Afghan National Police, is scheduled to have all activity, including contract terminations on the DEA side, concluded by December 31, 2021. INL disbursed \$43.3 million through this interagency agreement, out of \$50.4 million in obligations. Formal termination and funds reconciliation will be completed in 2022.²⁷⁴

The Taliban and Opium Poppy Cultivation

On August 17, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told international media that the Taliban would not allow the production of opium or other narcotics. Mujahid said, "Afghanistan will not be a country of cultivation of opium anymore."²⁷⁵ However, SIGAR has seen no evidence that the Taliban are enforcing or can enforce such a ban. On the contrary, the opium trade in Afghanistan appears to be flourishing.

According to the BBC, opium dealers, who until recently operated on the black market, have set up stalls in village markets. Opium poppy farmers, a key constituency for the Taliban, are likely to resist a ban. According to one farmer, the Taliban have "achieved what they have thanks to opium. None of us will let them ban opium unless the international community helps the Afghan people."²⁷⁶

LESSONS LEARNED REPORT ON COUNTERNARCOTICS

SIGAR's 2018 Lessons Learned Program report, *Counternarcotics: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, examined U.S. counternarcotics efforts from 2002 through 2017. It found that despite the U.S. spending \$8.62 billion in that time, Afghanistan remained the world's largest opium producer, and that opium poppy was Afghanistan's largest cash crop.

GOVERNANCE, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ENDNOTES

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