

# AFGHANISTAN

## Humanitarian impact and trends analysis

The Taliban took control of the Afghan capital Kabul on 15 August and consolidated control over nearly all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces following a rapid military offensive that started at the beginning of May. Fighting between the Taliban and the Afghan government forces escalated after the April announcement that US and NATO troops would withdraw from Afghanistan. Following the partial withdrawal of the troops, the Taliban rapidly overran the majority of Afghanistan's provinces in the first half of August. This report aims to provide an overview of the recent developments related to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan against the key trends in conflict and humanitarian needs reported in 2021.

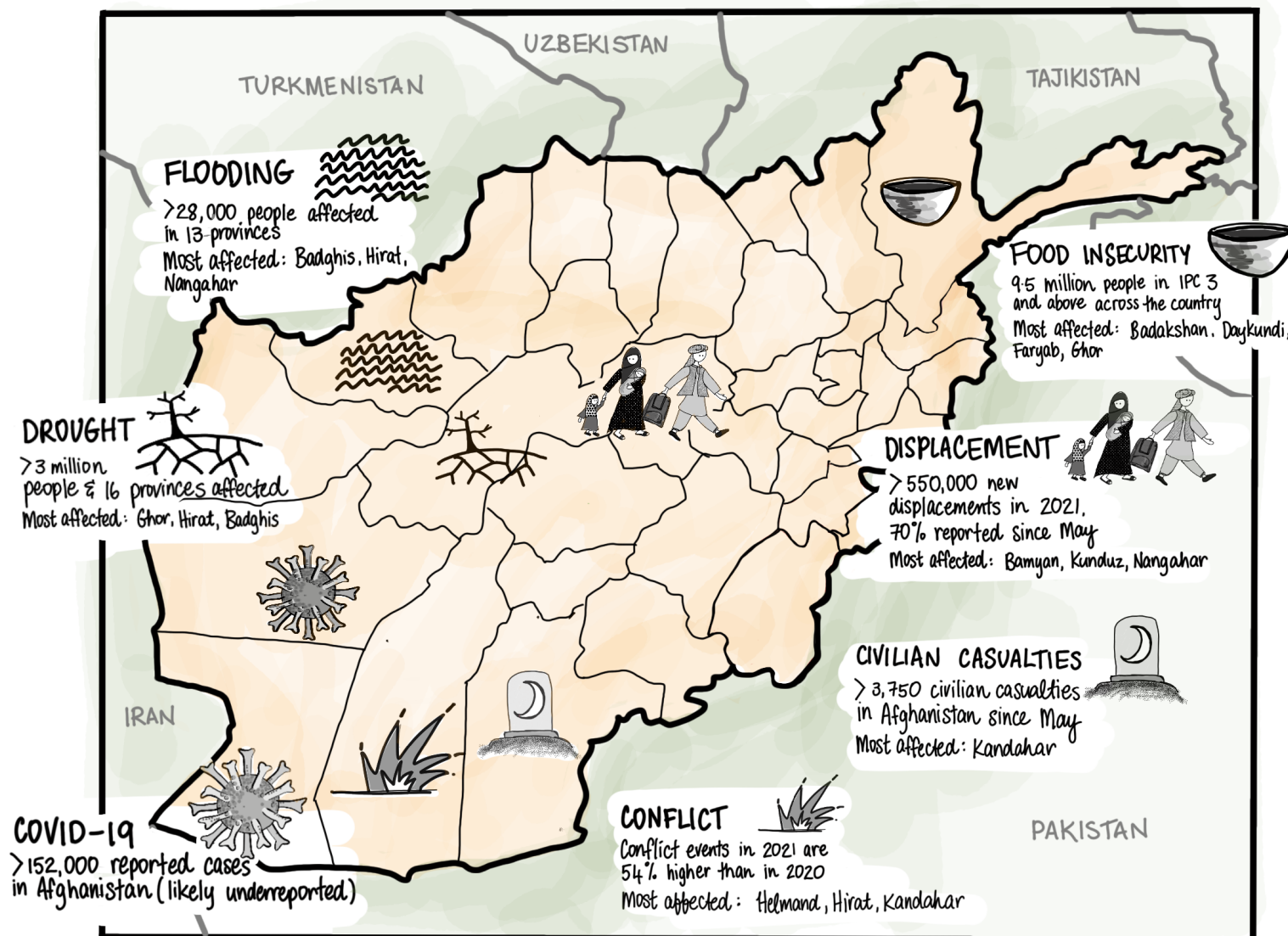


Illustration by Sandie Walton-Ellery

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

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### Aim

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This report aims to provide an overview of the recent developments related to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan against the key trends in conflict and humanitarian needs reported in 2021. The report outlines how various conflict and humanitarian dynamics have developed since the beginning of 2021 and presents key concerns about how the recent escalation and change of power in Afghanistan can impact the affected population and the humanitarian sector.

### Methodology

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The report was developed through:

- daily monitoring of media sources
- secondary data review of key humanitarian, political, and conflict analysis documents
- review and analysis of publicly available data on conflict, violent incidents, casualties, needs, displacement, and humanitarian access
- interviews with experts and key informants working in the humanitarian sector and focusing on the situation in Afghanistan.

### Limitations

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The political situation in Afghanistan is changing rapidly, and little information is available on the impact of the recent power takeover on the humanitarian situation so far. Verifying the existing information is a challenge. This report does not seek to provide a comprehensive analysis of the recent events but rather outline key concerns, analyse humanitarian trends observed in Afghanistan in 2021, and discuss how recent events might aggravate pre-existing humanitarian conditions.

### INFORMATION GAPS

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- impact of current events on existing humanitarian needs
- number and specific needs of displaced people (numbers are unclear and constantly changing)
- capacity of humanitarian organisations to reach IDPs
- accessibility of humanitarian services, number of humanitarian agencies remaining in the country, and number of humanitarian facilities that remain open
- direct and indirect impact of active conflict on those that live in the affected areas, particularly rural areas (there is little to no information on their needs and the protection concerns they face)
- data on civilian casualties is not disaggregated by location or date, which makes any in-depth analysis very difficult
- impact of violence on infrastructure
- humanitarian funding gaps and the capacity of organisations to respond.

# Key findings

## HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

The full impact of the recent takeover of power by the Taliban on humanitarian needs is not yet clear. Levels of conflict, civilian casualties, and displacement reported in Afghanistan in 2021 have been considerably higher than in recent years, which is likely to drive an increase in humanitarian needs. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan has already increased significantly in the past 18 months, reaching over 18 million people in need and reversing the decreasing trend reported since 2014. The main trends that are expected to drive humanitarian needs in the coming months are:

- The intensification of conflict over the past months and the volatile security situation have resulted in many civilian casualties. Over 3,700 civilian casualties have been reported between the beginning of May and mid-August as a result of rapid conflict escalation between the Taliban and Afghan armed forces.
- Internal displacement has increased significantly. More than 400,000 people were registered as newly displaced since the beginning of May, bringing the total number of people displaced by conflict in Afghanistan in 2021 to over 550,000.

## SECTORAL PRIORITIES

With the country under fragmented Taliban authority, it is likely that the provision of basic services will be disrupted and prices of basic commodities will increase. Key priorities for the response are likely to be:

- **Health:** months of violence resulted in disruptions to health services and increased health needs among injured and displaced people. 14.5 million people (about 33% of the population) were in need of health assistance before the recent escalation.
- **Food:** the combined effects of drought, the coronavirus pandemic, conflict escalation, and humanitarian access constraints after the change of power may further worsen the food security situation in the country. 9.1 million people were already projected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or higher levels of acute food insecurity between June–November 2021.
- **Protection:** increasing protection concerns have been emerging since May, including targeted killings, enforced disappearances, violence against women and children, forced marriages, access and mobility constraints, and attacks on civilian infrastructure, including homes, schools, and health clinics. 12.8 million people were estimated to be in need of protection assistance at the beginning of 2021.

## HUMANITARIAN ACCESS CONSTRAINTS

After the rapid takeover of power by the Taliban, humanitarian access constraints are extremely high, and gaps in assistance may lead to further deterioration of humanitarian needs. Humanitarian organisations are likely to pause or delay operations to ensure staff safety, obtain access approvals from the Taliban, and reassess priorities. While the Taliban have made official statements about welcoming humanitarian presence and operations, several factors are likely to hamper humanitarian activities, including uncertain access conditions, existing risks around violence against humanitarians, lack of available information, concerns around data collection, and interference in humanitarian operations.

## PRE-EXISTING CRISES

Recent developments add to a number of pre-existing crises, including drought, flooding, and COVID-19. Coupled with an economic downturn in the country, this pushed the health system to the brink and severely depleted people's mechanisms to cope with increasing needs.

# Overview of recent developments

The Taliban took control of the Afghan capital Kabul on 15 August and consolidated control over nearly all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces following a rapid military offensive that started at the beginning of May. Fighting between the Taliban and the Afghan government forces escalated after the April announcement that US and NATO troops would withdraw from Afghanistan. Following the partial withdrawal of the troops, the Taliban rapidly overran the majority of Afghanistan's provinces in the first half of August (Long War Journal accessed 20/08/2021, GCRP 19/08/2021, ISPI 17/08/2021). The escalation of conflict between the Taliban and Afghan government forces since May resulted in a rapid increase in civilian casualties, displacement, and protection concerns.

## CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

Over 3,750 civilian casualties have been reported between 1 May and mid-August, compared to less than 2,800 civilian casualties reported in the first four months of 2021. Increased armed conflict resulted in over 23,000 conflict-related fatalities between May–July – almost double what was reported between January–April (GCR2P 17/08/2021; ACLED accessed 20/08/2021; UNAMA 26/07/2021).

The highest impact of the conflict on civilians was reported in Kandahar, where most civilian casualties were verified by humanitarian actors, as well as Bayman province and Kunduz, which registered the highest conflict-related displacement rates. Kandahar and Helmand provinces were most affected by violent conflict between May–July (ACLED accessed 21/08/2021; OCHA accessed 20/08/2021; OCHA Situation Reports 05–08/2021).

## DISPLACEMENT

**More than 400,000 people were registered as newly displaced by conflict since the beginning of May**, bringing the total number of people displaced by conflict in Afghanistan

in 2021 to 550,000 (OCHA accessed 20/08/2021). People often fled to Kabul and other cities, seeking safety from conflict and other threats. A displacement movement towards Kabul has been reported since July, but exact numbers cannot be verified (OCHA 19/08/2021). Displacement patterns are likely to be fluid, with some people deciding to return following the Taliban taking control of most of the country and others fleeing to neighbouring countries.

## PROTECTION

Reports of increasing protection concerns have been emerging since May, despite Taliban leadership statements pledging inclusiveness and respect towards human rights. Targeted killings, enforced disappearances, violence against women and children, forced marriages, increasing access constraints, and attacks on civilian infrastructure, including homes, schools, and health clinics, have been reported in areas seized by the Taliban (GCR2P 18/08/2021). Excessive use of force on people protesting against the Taliban or attempting to flee Afghanistan is a growing concern (HRW 18/08/2021). The Taliban have imposed strict controls outside the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, blocking many included in the lists of those who can be evacuated. Gunshots have been reported around the airport, with at least 12 people killed as at 19 August (Reuters 19/08/2021). Protection concerns are great, especially for women, minorities, people in rural areas, and those affiliated with foreign entities (OHCHR 17/08/2021; UN Women 18/08/2021).

## VOLATILE SECURITY AND POLITICAL SITUATION

**Anti-Taliban protests reported in Kabul and other cities were met with violence** (The New York Times 19/08/2021; Al Jazeera 18/08/2021). Localised conflict is likely to continue as anti-Taliban opposition and armed groups attempt to retake areas seized by the Taliban (VOA 20/08/2021).

**The security and political situation in the country is rapidly evolving.** A Coordination Council was formed as a transitional government consisting of Afghanistan's former president Hamid Karzai, a government official from Kabul, and a former militant leader (Gandhara 15/08/2021; The New York Times 15/08/2021). Senior officials of the Taliban Political Commission arrived in Kandahar on 17 August and are expected to start negotiations soon on behalf of the Taliban with the members of the Coordination Council (IOM 19/08/2021). It is unclear whether the Taliban will recognise any transitional government.

On 15 August, the US administration froze Afghan government's reserves held in US bank accounts to prevent the Taliban from accessing billions of dollars. Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world and is heavily dependent on American aid, which is now in jeopardy (The Washington Post 17/08/2021).

**Lack of a central authority and country fragmentation:** The rapid collapse of the Afghan government and power takeover by the Taliban has left the country fragmented, with an unstable administration and civil servants fearing retribution. Taliban authority is likely to lack the technical capacity to successfully deliver basic services; their ability to govern will depend on the collaboration of existing civil servants. The Taliban extended statements of amnesty in many areas in an attempt to convince local government employees to continue working. On the other hand, reports of abuses, detention, and targeted executions have emerged from some areas seized by the Taliban, showing that there is no unified approach in areas governed by different leaders. To date, the Taliban have not presented a common political vision for the entire country. Different approaches towards governance and politics seem to be emerging within the movement, and multiple other militias and tribal groups are still retaining control over their respective areas (ICG 14/08/2021; CFR 19/08/2021).

# Key concerns for the affected population

## Lack of access to basic services

By the start of 2021, the UN estimated 18 million people in need in Afghanistan. Almost half of the Afghan population is in need of humanitarian assistance, while about 80% needs social assistance to prevent the development of worse humanitarian needs (OCHA 19/12/2020, 09/01/2021, and 9/05/2021). The increased displacement and the impact of COVID-19, drought, and flash floods have all aggravated needs. It is likely that the delivery of basic services will fall even more on humanitarian organisations, as the Taliban authority may lack technical capacities to successfully deliver them.

## Availability & accessibility of basic commodities

Commodities remained available as at mid-August, but prices of food and diesel fuel have increased following insecurity and access constraints reported since May (WFP 29/06/2021, 31/07/2021, and 10/08/2021). Shops and markets that had closed temporarily because of insecurity have reopened in some areas as the security situation has improved (OCHA 19/08/2021). The Taliban are in control of border crossings. Import activities are likely to continue but with disruptions, affecting the availability of basic commodities and increasing prices (Reuters 19/08/2021; Institute of Export and International Trade 16/08/2021). People's access to basic commodities is likely to be limited by the lack of operating banks and ATMs, which prevents them from accessing their savings, as well as insecurity and mobility restrictions (KII 20/08/2021).

## Insecurity

It is difficult to anticipate the levels of insecurity and conflict following the Taliban takeover. As at mid-August, the Taliban controlled the majority of provincial capitals, but the extent of their control over vast rural territories is unknown. Exerting control over the entire country will require significant resources. While the US administration has frozen Afghan government's reserves held in US bank accounts, the Taliban are likely to access resources through other channels (The New York Times 18/08/2021; Financial Times 20/08/2021; The Wall Street Journal 05/07/2021). Hotspots of resistance such as Panjshir province and protests against Taliban rule are highly likely to occur. Localised conflict is likely to continue, as anti-Taliban opposition and armed groups are trying to capture areas that were seized by the Taliban (VOA 20/08/2021). This is likely to prompt violent retributions against resistance, triggering more civilian casualties, displacement, and protection concerns. The sense of insecurity, fear, and uncertainty will prevail among the Afghan population even in the absence of active conflict (Long War Journal 18/08/2021; National Geographic 15/08/2021).

## Position and protection of women

Despite statements guaranteeing women's ability to work and study, there are reports that the Taliban have started to reimpose patterns of restrictions on women in some areas, including forced marriages (especially concerning young girls) and severe limitations on freedom of movement (The Wall Street Journal 12/08/2021; GCR2P 17/08/2021). Women are at risk of facing severe mobility restrictions and lack of access

to services, livelihoods, and education. In some districts under Taliban control, women are not allowed to leave their homes without a male escort (mahram) and are required to wear the hijab outside their homes. There are fears that refusal to abide by such rules might imply severe consequences, including death (OHCHR 10/08/2021; India Today 09/08/2021). Lack of protection and gender-based violence services is pervasive in Afghanistan and is likely to be limited further under Taliban rule (The New Humanitarian 16/12/2020).

## Fear of ethnic retribution

There are 14 ethnic groups in Afghanistan, with the majority of Afghans belonging to the Pashtun ethnicity. The Hazara ethnic group accounts for 10–12% of the country's population, down from 65% in the past as a result of violence, oppression, and targeted massacres. They live mostly in central Afghanistan, particularly in the Bamyan province (DH 18/08/2021; The Indian Express 20/08/2021). During the Taliban rule in the 1990s, thousands of Hazara people were massacred because of different ethnicity and practising Shia Islam. Despite initial declarations of no discrimination against Shia Muslims, Taliban fighters brutally killed nine Hazara men after taking control of Ghazni province in July (Amnesty International 19/08/2021).

# Key concerns for humanitarian operations

## Impact on operations

The risk of a total suspension of humanitarian operations in Afghanistan remained low as at mid-August, with most operations resuming after a temporary suspension caused by the conflict. Humanitarian agencies are likely to pause or delay operations to ensure staff safety, obtain access approvals from the Taliban, and reassess priorities (OCHA 19/08/2021; BBC 16/08/2021). Taliban representatives have visited humanitarian organisations in some areas to ask about their operations and request continuous aid delivery, but the risk of violence against humanitarians remains high, with reports of armed men seizing some NGO offices in areas where clashes with Afghan government forces were more severe (The New Humanitarian 16/08/2021; KII 17/08/2021).

## Staff safety

Many NGOs were not operating at full capacity as at mid-August to ensure the safety of their staff. The safety of female aid workers and their ability to move safely and work under Taliban rule is a concern for humanitarian organisations (Devex 16/08/2021). While several humanitarian organisations implemented plans to evacuate international workers, national staff (who make up the majority of humanitarian workers) face the most severe risks. Many Afghan aid workers chose to flee provinces that fell under control of the Taliban out of fear for their personal safety – not necessarily because of their work with humanitarian organisations but for being associated with the international military or belonging to a tribe targeted by the Taliban (The New Humanitarian 16/08/2021).

## Logistical constraints

Neighbouring countries' response to the Taliban taking over and potential border closures are likely to increase logistical challenges and lead to the disruption of supply chains (KII 17/08/2021). Emergency services (such as food, shelter, and health assistance) will likely be delayed or suspended if supply chains are disrupted. Some NGOs are taking pre-emptive measures by storing supplies in warehouses across the country or at border points in Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Other NGOs are identifying alternative corridors and establishing logistical hubs at border posts with neighbouring countries to avoid supply chain disruptions (UNHCR 16/08/2021, WFP 17/08/2021). However, movement restrictions inside the country might hinder supply for NGOs' warehouses and increase the risk of aid diversion. The Taliban established checkpoints throughout Kabul, and NGOs need to sign agreements with them to facilitate access, transportation, and safe passage (The Wall Street Journal 16/08/2021; KII 17/08/2021).

## Declining resources

Some donors are likely to impose comprehensive control over aid resources to manage the risk of aid diversion. In late July, funding was already low, with a \$1.3 billion appeal less than 40% funded (UN News 15/07/2021). On 12 August, Germany – one of the country's biggest donors – announced it would stop providing financial aid to Afghanistan if the Taliban started implementing Sharia law (Devex 16/08/2021; Politico 12/08/2021).

## Levy requests

Levy requests are likely to increase under Taliban control and affect the delivery of aid. Limited data indicates that Taliban levy requests may be shifting from in-cash to in-kind requests. Instead of asking for an in-cash percentage of a certain operation's budget, the Taliban have requested a percentage of distributed items from people after they receive aid from NGOs. Such a shift makes it harder for humanitarian organisations to prevent post-distribution taxation despite monitoring policies implemented in some locations. Most aid recipients are reluctant to share such information with aid providers, concerned they could lose the assistance altogether (OCHA 22/07/2021). The Taliban continue to be the source of most levy demands, even though Taliban leaders confirm that levies on humanitarian goods and services are not part of their official policy (OCHA 08/06/2020).

## Information management

In the past, humanitarian responders in Taliban-controlled areas had raised challenges regarding data collection, lists of aid recipients, and use of technology. The current Taliban position on data collection is not yet clear, but disruptions to assessments and assistance delivery are expected to occur (KII 20/08/2021). Loss of baseline information about the population's needs and whereabouts is likely during the process of power transfer. NGOs should pay attention to the need for coordination processes, information sharing, and continuous monitoring between organisations and active government ministries (KII 17/08/2021).

## HUMANITARIAN IMPACT AND TRENDS ANALYSIS

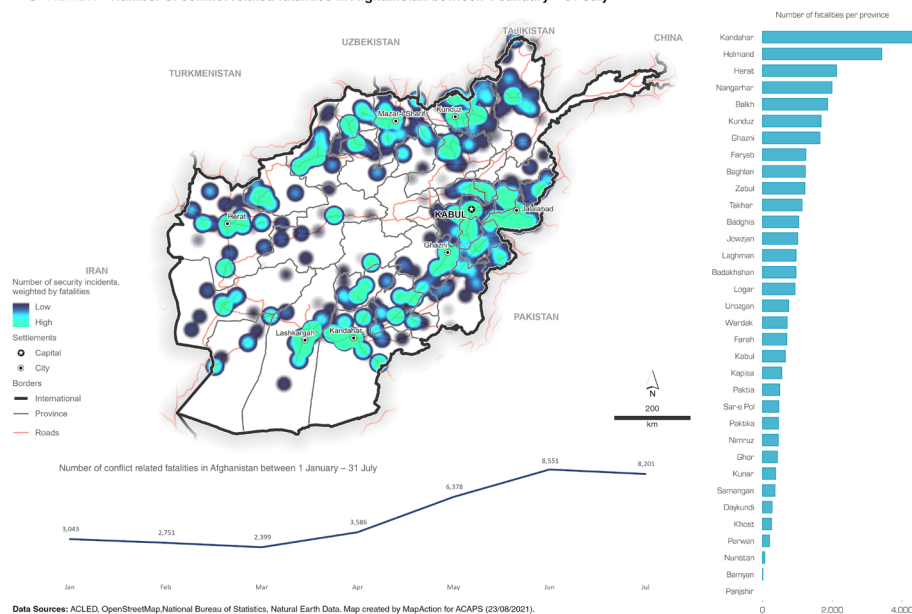
### Conflict trends

Violence and conflict between Taliban and government forces increased progressively during 2021 and escalated between May–August. By July, the Taliban were controlling most rural territories; by mid-July, they had launched an offensive to gain control of the provincial capitals. They managed to capture most of Afghanistan’s provinces by mid-August. The conflict led to a high number of fatalities among fighters and civilians. On 15 August, the Taliban took control of the Afghan capital Kabul. Since then, the conflict seems to have decreased, but the security situation remains extremely volatile.

**Violent conflict rapidly escalated in Afghanistan between May–August.** More than 3,910 violent incidents between pro-government forces and the Taliban and other armed groups were reported in Afghanistan from the beginning of the Taliban offensive in May until the end of July. The escalation resulted in over 23,000 conflict-related fatalities (including combatants and civilians) between May and the end of July – almost double what was reported in the first four months of the year (ACLED accessed 19/08/2021).



Number of conflict related fatalities in Afghanistan between 1 January – 31 July



See full map on page 19

The number of violent incidents reported from January–July reached around 8,180 and was over 54% higher than the number of incidents in the same time frame of 2020 (5,306 incidents) and 16% higher than in the same time frame in 2019 (7,060). Helmand, Herat, and Kandahar reported most conflict events between May–July, mainly because of fighting between the Taliban and the Afghan army (ACLED accessed 19/08/2021).

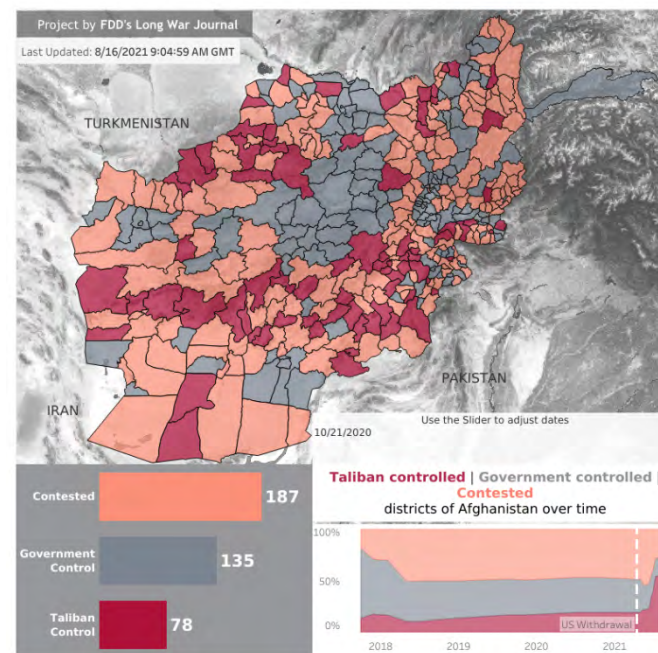
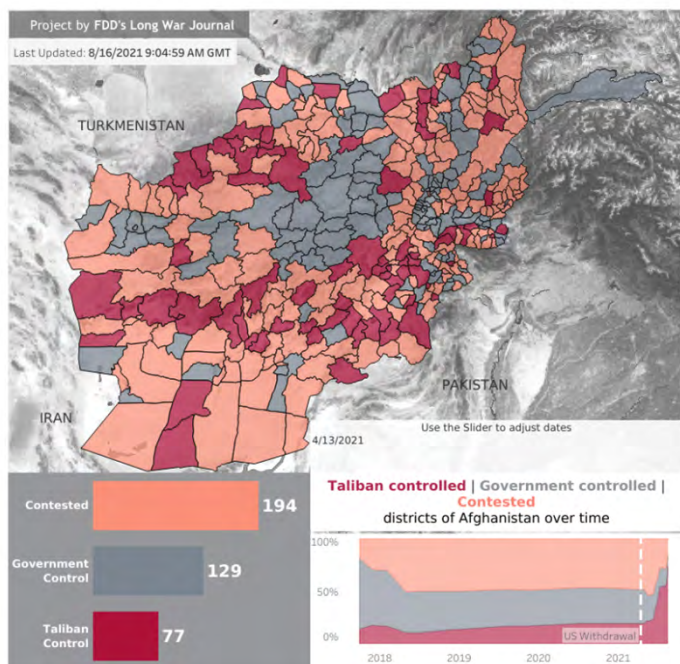
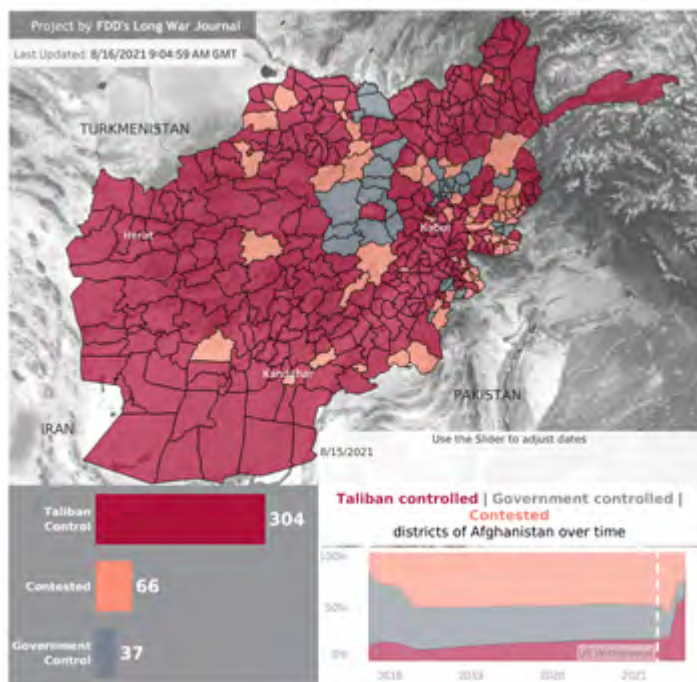
**There was an increasing trend in the number of recorded conflict events between January–June and a slight decrease in July.** This could be attributed to an overall Taliban strategy. Between May–July, they focused on overrunning multiple districts and district administrative centres, mostly in lightly defended and rural territories, to extend their control over a broader geographical scale. In June, Afghan forces surrendered in many districts and, without prospects of further supplies or reinforcement, started to abandon checkpoints, allowing the Taliban to further extend their control. From mid-July onwards, the Taliban changed their tactics and refocused efforts on provincial capitals while concentrating most of their resources and firepower on geographically focused areas (The New York Times 14/08/2021; OCHA 14/08/2021; ACLED accessed 19/08/2021).

**The Taliban controlled most of Afghanistan’s provinces as at mid-August. Localised fighting and volatile security environment are highly likely to persist,** with attacks and attempts to recapture some of the seized areas reported. Current capacity of the opposition connected to the government and other armed groups is not considered strong enough to challenge the Taliban. Large-scale conflict does not seem likely without further international support (VOA 20/08/2021; Financial Times 21/08/2021).

**The escalation of fighting in 2021 is much more severe than what was reported in past years during spring offensives.** Conflict-related fatalities between April–July 2021 reached a total of 26,760 – around 50% more than the average reported in the same time frame in the last three years (13,570) (ACLED accessed 19/08/2021).

**Conflict-related fatalities between January–July reached around 34,900 and were 52% higher than those reported in the same time frame in 2019 (23,000).** Most of the reported violence incidents that caused the highest fatalities counts were battles between pro-government forces and anti-government groups, including the Taliban, followed by explosions and remote violence (ACLED accessed 19/08/2021).

Map: Territorial shifts as at 15 August 2021, 13 April 2021, and 21 October 2020.



Source: Long War Journal accessed 16/08/2021

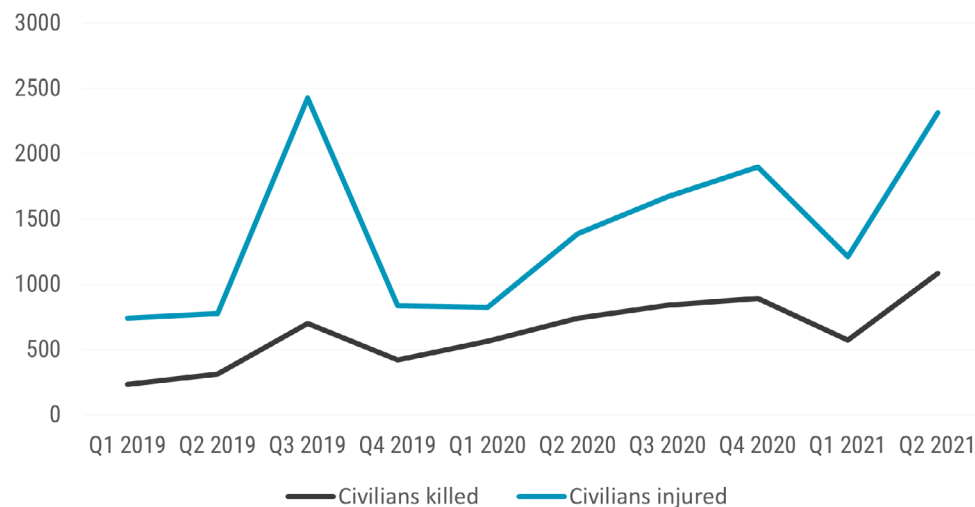
### Civilian casualty trends

During the first half of 2021, civilian casualties increased by 47% compared to the first half of 2020. The majority of them (over 3,750) were reported between May and mid-August. The most concerning trend is the increase of female and children casualties by 82% compared to 2020. Targeted attacks against civilians were focused against human rights defenders, media workers, religious elders, civilian government workers, and members of the Hazara ethnicity and other Shia Muslim groups. The majority were attacks by non-suicide improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and ground engagements.

**More than 5,180 civilian casualties were reported between 1 January and 30 June 2021** – 47% more compared to the first half of 2020 and 30% more compared to the same time frame in 2019. Around 1,660 civilians were killed and over 3,520 injured. Civilian casualties increased particularly in the second quarter of 2021, following the announcements and commencement of withdrawal of the international military forces from Afghanistan and the consequent escalation of violence across Afghanistan since May. The number of civilian casualties reported between May–June was the highest since UNAMA started monitoring the situation in 2009 (UNAMA 26/07/2021).



Civilians killed and injured between January 2019 and June 2021 by quarter



Sources: UNAMA 23/02/2021; UNAMA 22/02/2020; UNAMA 14/04/2021; UNAMA 26/07/2021

**The escalation of conflict between the Taliban and Afghan government forces since May has caused a rapid increase in civilian casualties. Over 3,750 civilian casualties have been reported between 1 May and mid-August** – a 35% increase compared to less than 2,800 civilian casualties reported in the first four months of 2021 (GCR2P 17/08/2021; ACLED accessed 20/08/2021; UNAMA 26/07/2021). The highest impact of the conflict on civilians was reported in Kandahar, where most civilian casualties verified by humanitarian actors have been reported (OCHA Situation Reports 05–08/2021).

**The increase of female and child casualties is particularly concerning.** Women comprised 14% of all civilian casualties between January–June, with 727 casualties recorded – an 82% increase compared with the same time frame in 2020. Boy casualties comprised 20% and girl casualties 12% of all civilian casualties reported between January–June. Overall, child casualties increased by 55% compared to the same time frame in 2020. Adult male casualties increased by 35% (UNAMA 26/07/2021).

**Deliberate targeting of civilians is a concern, particularly the targeting of human rights defenders, media workers, religious elders, civilian government workers, and members of the Hazara ethnicity and other Shia Muslim groups,** who are increasingly targeted by sectarian attacks, nearly all claimed by the Islamic State. Targeted killings were the third leading cause of female casualties between January - June, but girls and women were often accidentally affected by killings targeting men. Children were directly targeted on at least

one occasion – the 8 May attack on a school in Kabul, which killed 85 civilians (mostly girls and young women) and injured at least 216 (UNAMA 26/07/2021).

**Most of the civilian casualties in 2021 were caused by non-suicide IED attacks and ground engagements, with ground engagements being the lead cause for female and children casualties.** The number of civilian casualties resulting from non-suicide IED attacks by anti-government groups increased nearly threefold compared to 2020 and reached the highest level since UNAMA started monitoring the situation in 2009. Ground engagements between the Taliban and Afghan National Security Forces caused a third of all reported civilian casualties in 2021 (UNAMA 26/07/2021; UNHCR 16/08/2021; UNHCR 13/07/2021). During the first six months of 2021, there was a sharp increase by 63% in the number of civilian casualties attributed to anti-government groups compared with the same period in 2020, while the number of civilian casualties attributed to pro-government forces increased by 30% (UNAMA 26/07/2021).

### Displacement trends

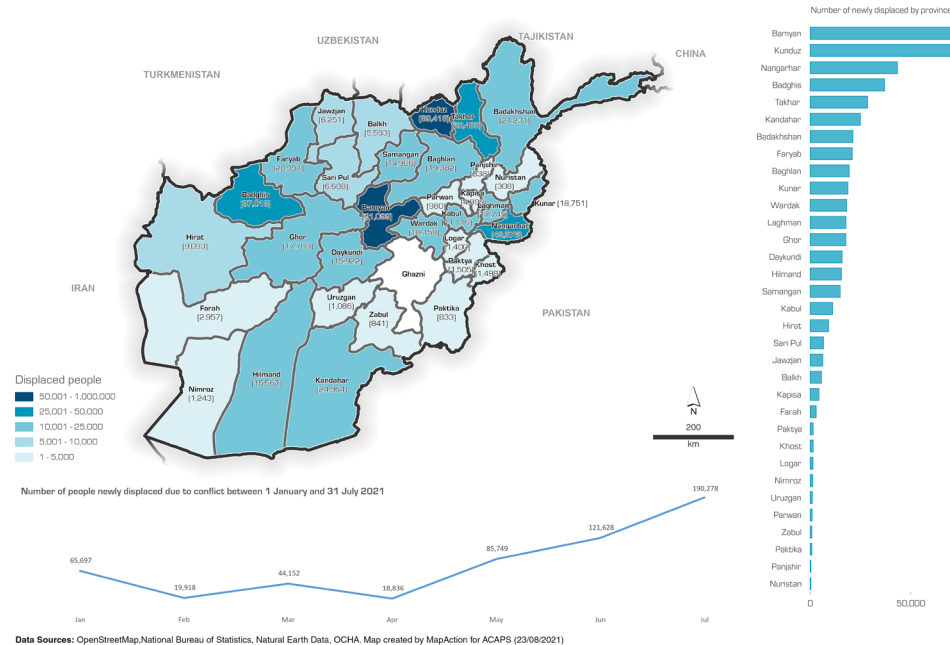
Internal displacement is a significant issue in Afghanistan resulting from conflict, insecurity, and natural disasters. Almost 4.8 million people have been displaced since 2012 and have not returned to their homes. Over 550,000 people have been displaced so far in 2021 – more than 70% of them since the beginning of May, following the Taliban offensive. Most displacements in 2021 have been recorded to and within Bamyan, Kunduz, and Nangahar provinces. At least 17,500 people have arrived in Kabul since July. Field reports indicate increasing health issues among IDPs. Displacement is likely to remain fluid over the next weeks.

As at 15 August, land borders were mainly closed. Most Afghans are currently unable to leave the country through regular channels, except for the borders with Iran and Pakistan, which are open on a sporadic basis. In Kabul, many people are trying to flee through the international airport, which remained partly under US control as at 22 August. An increase in the number of Afghans trying to flee to other countries, including Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan, was reported in the weeks leading up to the Taliban takeover, and the number of people seeking to apply for asylum in the EU has increased since May.

Until the eruption of violence in 2021, an increasing number of Afghans have been returning to Afghanistan from other countries, mainly owing to the lack of documentation of refugees, restrictions in the asylum space of many countries, and forced returns from Iran, Pakistan, and the EU. On 17 August, the UNHCR released a non-return advisory for Afghanistan, calling for a ban on forced returns of Afghan nationals, access to territory for civilians fleeing Afghanistan, and respect for the principle of non-refoulement at all times.

## Internal displacement

**MAP ACTION** Afghanistan  
Conflict induced displacements between 1 January and 31 July 2021



See full map on page 20

More than 400,000 people were registered as newly displaced by conflict since the beginning of May, bringing the total number of people displaced by conflict in Afghanistan in 2021 to 550,700 as at 9 August. This total is around 250% higher than the same time frame in 2020 (159,000) and double the number of people displaced in the same time frame in 2019 (274,500) (OCHA accessed 20/08/2021). The fluid displacement situation and current constrained access make it difficult to assess the newly displaced population and fully understand the scale of the crisis.

A displacement movement towards Kabul has been reported since July, but exact numbers cannot be verified (OCHA 19/08/2021). In areas where people have recently fled, including Kabul, field reports indicate increasing health issues, including cases of diarrhoea, malnutrition, COVID-19-like symptoms, and reproductive health complications (WHO 18/08/2021). Displacement patterns are likely to be fluid. There are indications that some people displaced to Kabul have started to return to their places of origin, including the northern region. Some IDPs residing in informal settlements in Kandahar have also begun returning (UNHCR 20/08/2021).

Most displacements in 2021 have been recorded to and within Bamyan, Kunduz, and Nangarhar provinces. Kunduz district was most affected, with more than 86,000 new displacements reported in 2021. Provinces that most displacements originated from are Badghis, Bamyan, and Kunduz (OCHA accessed 20/08/2021). Displacement caused by the conflict between the Afghan National Security Forces and anti-government groups was recorded across the entire country, with 32 out of 34 provinces and 194 out of 401 districts reporting displacement (OCHA 15/08/2021).

Conflict, insecurity, and natural disasters make Afghanistan one of the countries with the most severe internal displacement crises. 2.9 million people were displaced across Afghanistan at the end of 2020 (UNHCR 20/08/2021). Data collected on internal displacement dynamics and trends suggests that two in three IDPs who were displaced in 2020 moved within their home provinces, from rural areas to the provincial capital (IOM 02/05/2021).

Almost 4.8 million people have been displaced since 2012 and have not returned to their homes (UNHCR 20/07/2021). 87% of non-recent IDPs intend to remain in their current location in the short term, and more than half never intend to return to their place of origin (REACH 07/02/2021). In 2020, the majority were staying with host families, and many were renting or squatting in insecure housing, including informal settlements on private land on the fringes of major cities (IOM 02/05/2021).

Afghanistan: People affected by flood events from 26 January to 28 July 2021



See full map on page 21

## International displacement

**With land borders mainly closed, most Afghans are not currently able to leave the country through regular channels, except for the borders with Iran and Pakistan, which are open on a sporadic basis for commercial and trade purposes.** Large-scale cross-border movement has not yet been observed (UNHCR 20/08/2021). The suspension of civilian flights in and out of Afghanistan has prompted desperate attempts to leave the country, with more than 20,000 people gathered in and around the airport in Kabul as at 22 August. Violent crowd control and shooting resulted in several deaths, with some people dying while attempting to cling to departing aeroplanes (AOAV 16/08/2021). There are serious concerns over family separation, as reports of families being divided and evacuated to different countries emerge (CNN 22/08/2021).

**An increase in the number of Afghans trying to flee to other countries, including Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan, was reported in the weeks leading up to the Taliban takeover.** Around 100,000 people have crossed through Iran and into eastern Turkey, with an estimated 500–2,000 people arriving in Turkey every day since the beginning of July (Save the Children 19/08/2021; The New York Times 31/07/2021; Gandhara 26/07/2021). Irregular migration has also been reported, with a 30–40% increase in people trying to cross the border at unofficial points since May, amounting to around 30,000 people a week (The New York Times 19/08/2021).

**The number of people seeking to apply for asylum has increased since May.** Afghan applications for asylum in the EU have been increasing since March, with unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan applying in disproportionate numbers in June (EU 18/08/2021).

**Around 2.2 million Afghan people were refugees or asylum seekers in other countries as at 31 December 2020 – one of the highest numbers globally (UNHCR 20/08/2021). Pakistan is home to 1.4 million Afghan refugees, while Iran hosts nearly a million (UNHCR accessed 22/08/2021). The number of undocumented Afghans in both countries is estimated to be much higher.**

## Returns

**On 17 August, the UNHCR released a non-return advisory for Afghanistan, calling for a ban on forced returns of Afghan nationals, including asylum seekers whose claims were rejected (UNHCR 17/08/2021).** In August, some European countries announced a suspension of deportations to Afghanistan (Euronews 12/08/2021). **Many Afghan refugees are undocumented and have no legal status, which makes them highly vulnerable to forced returns.** With an increasing number of countries tightening their migration laws, it is likely to be challenging for Afghans to flee to other countries (RFE/RL 01/12/2020; Open Democracy 15/07/2021).

**A total of 708,950 returns were reported from Iran and Pakistan between January–August 2021.** There were around 700,000 undocumented returnees reported from Iran and 7,000 from Pakistan, while a small number also returned from Europe (IOM 16/08/2021). Despite the increasingly insecure situation in Afghanistan, among the total returnees, 313,000 Afghans were deported from Iran and 524 from Pakistan (IOM 29/06/2021).

**Despite movement restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 registered the highest number of undocumented Afghans returning from Iran and Pakistan.** 865,000 people returned in 2020, and the trend continued to increase in 2021 in spite of the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan (IOM 16/08/2021, IOM 31/12/2020). The reported drivers of return include the economic decline in the region and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially on job loss (UNHCR 22/07/2021, Mix Migration Centre 04/06/2021).

## HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Humanitarian access constraints in Afghanistan have been historically extremely high and further deteriorated in 2021 following escalating violence, as the Taliban sought to increase their territorial control and the Afghan National Security Forces conducted military operations and airstrikes (ACAPS 19/07/2021). **Humanitarian operations in Afghanistan were disrupted by the rapid power takeover, with most organisations undertaking evacuations and pushed to renegotiate new access conditions with the Taliban.**

**The active conflict continued to obstruct the delivery of aid in 2021 and generated short-term and protracted displacements, hampering people's access to humanitarian aid. IDPs, returnees, women, and undocumented people face the highest access constraints.** Violence and bureaucratic interference have limited humanitarian operations and access. Access constraints include interference in the implementation of activities, increased taxes, military operations, movement restrictions, violent attacks and threats against humanitarian personnel and assets, and the presence of landmines. Humanitarian operations are often temporarily suspended because of violence. Checkpoints imposed by the Taliban often restrict the movement of people and goods. Recurrent flooding and landslides increased movement restrictions in 2021, particularly in the northern and northeastern provinces.

## Access of humanitarian organisations to the affected population

Following the conflict escalation since May, some humanitarian agencies temporarily suspended their activities as a result of insecurity, with most operations resuming as at mid-August. After the rapid takeover of power by the Taliban, humanitarian agencies are likely to pause or delay operations to ensure staff safety, obtain access approvals from the Taliban, and reassess priorities (OCHA 19/08/2021; BBC 16/08/2021; Devex 16/08/2021; UNICEF 22/08/2021). While the Taliban have made official statements about welcoming humanitarian presence and operations, concerns remain around the access of humanitarians to the affected population, access of the population to aid, and general insecurity impacting humanitarian operations (Devex 16/08/2021). In some areas, Taliban representatives have visited humanitarian organisations to ask about their operations and request continuous aid delivery. In other areas where clashes with the government were more severe, armed men took control of some NGO offices (The New Humanitarian 16/08/2021; KII 17/08/2021).

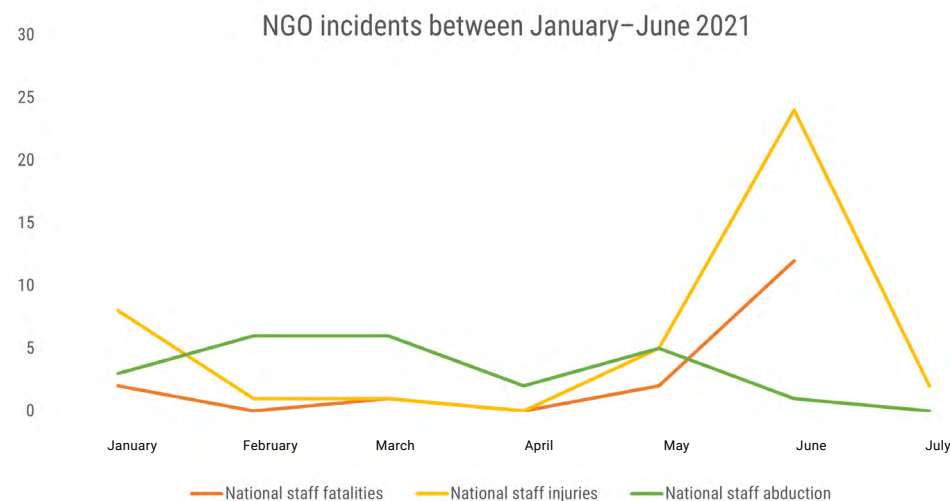
Many NGOs were not operating at full capacity as at mid-August to ensure the safety of their staff. The safety of female aid workers and their ability to move safely and work under Taliban authority remain key concerns for humanitarian organisations. In the past, the Taliban were known to reject female aid workers, control who should benefit from assistance, and demand levy or taxation to allow access (The New Humanitarian 16/08/2021; Devex 16/08/2021). Interference by the Taliban, armed criminal groups, and government authorities were the most frequently recorded access constraints in 2020 (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021). 15 incidents resulting from interference with humanitarian activities and 21 incidents related to blockage at checkpoints were reported in July 2021 (OCHA 15/08/2021).

Over 1,290 humanitarian access impediments were reported from January–July, more than double compared to the same time frame in 2020 (515 incidents) and well above the three-year average (OCHA 15/08/2021 and 16/08/2020). The highest number of access-related incidents was reported in June as a result of movement restrictions and military operations, with the Taliban responsible for the majority of those incidents.

Restrictions on the movement of humanitarian personnel and goods within Afghanistan have been the most reported type of constraint in 2021, mostly caused by the Taliban offensive, road blockages, and checkpoints. Humanitarian organisations were forced to reduce the scale of their operations and the number of staff travelling in the country because of the overall deterioration of the security situation (OCHA 15/08/2021).

Humanitarian staff are at risk of targeted violence in Afghanistan (UNAMA 26/07/2021). According to INSO, about 131 safety and security incidents against humanitarian actors were reported in January–July 2021 – the same number reported in January–July 2020.

In 2021, those incidents resulted in the deaths of 18 NGO workers, versus eight in 2020. Another 41 people have been injured, and 29 have been kidnapped. In 2021, Afghan national staff were the primary victims of the reported abductions, injuries, and death incidents (INSO accessed 02/08/2021).



Source: INSO accessed 16/08/2021

## Access of people in need to humanitarian aid

Access of people in need to humanitarian aid following the Taliban takeover might be challenged by restricted mobility, fear, and uncertainty among the affected population regarding safety of accessing aid. As the Taliban establish control, women and girls are expected to be the ones struggling the most to access assistance. Before the Taliban takeover, IDPs, returnees, ethnic minorities, and undocumented people were likely to face the highest access constraints. Civilians fleeing Afghanistan are currently not given access to safe passage to escape violence (UNHCR 17/08/2021; AP 16/08/2021; The Guardian 18/08/2021).

Increased fighting, the displacement of people towards Kabul and other cities, return movements, and the change of power are leading people away from services and putting additional pressure on the already strained aid provision systems (DRC 17/08/2021; OCHA 19/08/2021). Fighting in recent months has impacted basic services, including health facilities, limiting people's access to these services. The national polio vaccination campaign was halted after the killing and injuring of multiple health workers. The lack of proper

communication and transportation infrastructure hampers the ability of people to access humanitarian assistance, while the lack of civil documents is limiting access of Afghans to healthcare, formal education, statutory justice systems, mobile phone services, and banking services (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021).

## Security and physical constraints

**Violence escalated as the Taliban sought to increase their territorial control and the Afghan National Security Forces conducted military operations and airstrikes. The active conflict obstructed the delivery of aid and generated short-term and protracted displacements, hampering people's access to humanitarian aid.** The volatile situation is making it hard for humanitarian workers to continue programming and planning. While most organisations have decided to stay in Afghanistan and continue delivering assistance, some were forced to suspend or relocate non-essential staff because of the security situation deterioration (OCHA 15/08/2021).

**Mine contamination and the presence of explosive remnants of war are widespread across Afghanistan,** which is considered the worst-impacted country in terms of civilian casualties caused by explosive weapons (AOAV 14/04/2021; UNAMA 26/07/2021). Residents and IDPs may be exposed to mines and IEDs when fleeing conflict areas, returning to their home areas, or during their daily transportation, potentially resulting in death, injury, and trauma. Humanitarian workers might be exposed to IEDs and mines as well, along main roads and rural areas. In the first half of 2021, there was a nearly threefold increase in civilian casualties caused by exposure to non-suicide IEDs. This has surpassed all the recorded figures of civilian casualties by non-suicide IEDs since 2009 (UNAMA 26/07/2021).

**Poor infrastructure continues to hamper access to services across Afghanistan as a result of underfunding and recurrent damage caused by conflict and natural disasters.** Limited transport and communications infrastructure remains a challenge. Phone coverage is available only in about 200 of Afghanistan's 402 districts, with frequent interruptions reported, and 34 districts have no phone coverage at all. About 60% of IDPs and women-headed households reported not having sim cards in areas where cellular services are available. Only between 30–65% of Afghans have access to electricity (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021).

**As conflict increased, and the Taliban gained more territories across Afghanistan since May, basic infrastructure came under frequent attack.** 28 telecommunication antennas were destroyed, and 23 were partially damaged (Al Jazeera 15/07/2021). A key power pylon bringing electricity from Tajikistan blew up in the Salang area in June, resulting in the loss of 400 megawatts and depriving the provinces of Kabul, Maidan Wardak, and Parwan and their

surrounding areas of critical supply. About a dozen power transmission towers in northern parts of Kabul have been destroyed (Anadolu Agency 08/06/2021).

## HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

**The full impact of the recent takeover of power by the Taliban on humanitarian needs is not yet clear. Health, food, and protection are likely to be key priorities for the response** based on how existing needs have been aggravated by (1) the disruption of basic services, including health services, (2) the increase in prices of basic commodities, including food, and (3) emerging reports of increasing protection concerns in Taliban-controlled areas.

**Levels of conflict, civilian casualties, and displacement reported in Afghanistan in 2021 have been considerably higher than in recent years. Coupled with the impact of COVID-19, drought, and flash floods, this is likely to drive an increase in humanitarian needs.** The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has increased significantly in the past 18 months, reversing the decreasing trend reported since 2014. By the start of 2021, the UN estimated more than 18 million people in need, up from 14 million in 2020 and six million in 2019. Almost half of the Afghan population is in need of humanitarian assistance, while about 80% needs social assistance to prevent the development of worse humanitarian needs (OCHA 19/12/2020, 09/01/2021, and 09/05/2021).

## Health

**The COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with an economic downturn in the country, has pushed the health system to the brink. 14.5 million people (about 33% of the population) were projected in need of health assistance in 2021.** Compared to 2020, this number has increased by 235% (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 17/12/2019).

**After the recent conflict escalation, trauma injuries have increased, in addition to an increase in cases of diarrhoea, malnutrition, high blood pressure, COVID-19-like symptoms, and reproductive health complications among newly displaced people.** Disease outbreaks are likely if delays and disruptions to healthcare services increase. The months of violence have heavily impacted Afghanistan's already fragile health system, which continues to face shortages of essential supplies (UN 18/08/2021).

**Attacks on healthcare workers and facilities remain a major challenge,** with 26 facilities and 31 workers affected between January–July 2021, including the death of 12 healthcare workers (UN 18/08/2021).

**Access to health services:** about seven million people lack or have limited access to essential



health services as a result of low public health coverage and conflict-related interruptions. Afghans struggle to access health services because of the insufficient number of health facilities, high costs, and safety issues related to accessing available ones (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021).

**Women face additional challenges, as their access to life-saving services (e.g. emergency obstetric services) is limited owing to a shortage of female medical staff and cultural barriers such as women needing to have a male escort.** Only about 50% of pregnant women deliver their children in a health facility with a professional attendant; this rate is far lower than in other low-income countries (70–80%) and increases the risk of complications in childbirth.

**Returnees and IDPs are exposed to a variety of health risks, as they face inadequate access to health services** and unfavourable living conditions. About 35% of IDPs have no access to trauma services (OCHA 19/12/2020).

**COVID-19:** as at 20 August, there were 152,448 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Afghanistan and 7,054 COVID-19-associated deaths (WHO accessed 21/08/2021). **The confirmed cases and associated deaths are likely to be underreported,** considering the limited number of tests being performed, community stigmatisation, fear of income loss, reluctance to go to hospitals, and lack of a national death register (NPR 02/07/2021). Afghanistan has administered at least 1.8 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine as at 22 August (WHO accessed 22/08/2021).

**Polio:** Afghanistan is also one of two countries where wild polio remains endemic. 56 new cases of polio were reported in 2020 – an increase from 29 in 2019 (UN 15/06/2021; The Lancet 09/01/2021). **Polio vaccination campaigns in Afghanistan were halted multiple times in 2020–2021.** The campaign was suspended between March–August 2020 as the country went into COVID-19 lockdown (Lancet 09/01/2021). Attacks that resulted in casualties of health workers were reported during the national polio vaccination in 2021. Three female health workers were killed by an unidentified gunman on 30 March in Jalalabad while providing polio vaccinations. The attack interrupted the vaccination campaign in three districts (UNICEF 30/03/2021; VOA 30/03/2021; The New York Times 30/02/2021). Other attacks against polio health workers took place in five different locations in Nangarhar province on 15 June. Five health workers were killed and four were injured, leading to the suspension of the polio vaccination campaign in the eastern region (OCHA 15/06/2021). **Conflict, insecurity, and incidents affect the polio immunisation campaign and efforts, making children more vulnerable. Given that 40% of the polio campaign workers are women, incidents have raised concerns about their safety and could impact the scale of the campaign across the country.**

## Food security and nutrition

**The combined effects of drought, the coronavirus pandemic, conflict escalation, and humanitarian access constraints after the change of power may further worsen the food security situation in the country** (WFP 17/08/2021).

**9.1 million people are projected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or higher levels of acute food insecurity between June–November (the post-harvest period), and the situation is expected to deteriorate further during the 2021–2022 lean season.** Former president Ghani declared drought in 23% of Afghanistan's districts on 22 June (IOM 02/05/2021; WFP 30/06/2021).

**At the start of 2021, an estimated 17.6 million people were in need of food and livelihood assistance – double the 8.21 million in need a year earlier** (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 17/12/2019). Food insecurity is widespread across Afghanistan, but the highest numbers of food-insecure people are in Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Balkh, Faryab, Helmand, Kandahar, Badakhshan, Ghazni, Ghor, and Takhar provinces (OCHA 19/12/2020).

**Food availability:** the agriculture sector, which is the primary income source for about 75% of Afghans, has been severely impacted by COVID-19-related movement restrictions and drought (USAID 07/05/2019). Although Afghanistan has seen relatively stable wheat production in 2019 and 2020, it remains almost 1.5 million metric tonnes below its annual requirement of 6.49 million metric tonnes. The overall harvest for 2021 is expected to be 12% lower, leaving a deficit of two million metric tonnes. This forces people to rely on alternative external sources to meet their food needs, including saving depletion, the sale of productive assets and livestock, borrowing food, working for food, and immigration (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021; MAIL Agriculture Prospects Report 2020).

Following the recent conflict escalation, transportation of food items has been affected by irregular closure of roads in the country, especially in Helmand and Kandahar provinces (OCHA 13/08/2021). Food prices are likely to be affected by possible disruptions in trade regulations, imports, and currency stability. The currency reserves of Afghanistan are held in foreign accounts and will likely be inaccessible to the Taliban (The Times of India 18/08/2021).

## Nutrition

**Half of all children under 5 and one-quarter of pregnant and lactating women are anticipated to face acute malnutrition in 2021.** 21 provinces have pre-existing high malnutrition and low access to nutrition services. Of these, seven provinces have very poor treatment coverage for severe acute malnutrition compared to other provinces with low access to nutrition services (Afghanistan Nutrition Cluster 20/06/2021). The high malnutrition rate is attributed to the surge of acute food insecurity over recent years, which is linked to worsening economic conditions, low access to health services, displacement, poor access to water and sanitation,



poor maternal nutrition, low rate of immunisation, and poor feeding practices for infants and young children (OCHA 19/12/2020).

**Among the 2.2 million children under 5 who are projected to have acute malnutrition in Afghanistan in 2021, about 29% are expected to be severely malnourished,** a condition requiring additional specialised medical and nutrition interventions (OCHA 19/12/2020).

## Protection

**After the overtake of power by the Taliban and despite their pledges to respect human rights, there have been reports of serious human rights violations,** such as summary executions, enforced disappearances, reprisal attacks against government officials and their families, and attacks on civilian objects, including homes, schools, and health facilities. Reports from 16 provinces recently overrun by the Taliban indicate that women are now enduring a similar pattern of human rights violations as experienced under Taliban rule 20 years ago, including forced marriage and harsh restrictions on freedom of movement. The ethnic Hazara population is also at extreme risk of further persecution (GCR2P 19/08/2021; HRW 18/08/2021). **Before the recent escalation and Taliban takeover, there were already 12.8 million people estimated to be in need of protection assistance in 2021** (OCHA 19/12/2020).

**Child protection: children accounted for more than half of all civilian mine casualties in the first half of 2020,** including those caused by improvised devices and explosive remnants of war. Hundreds of children have been killed or maimed in recent weeks. They are also at risk of being recruited into armed groups, abducted, or sexually abused (OSRSG Children and Armed Conflict 16/08/2021).

The socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 has made it harder for families to protect children and increased the uptake of harmful coping mechanisms, including those particularly detrimental to children, such as child labour, early marriage, and children's recruitment as combatants (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021). **Since June, over 120,000 children have been displaced by the conflict. Many of them are living on the streets or in makeshift shelters** (Save the Children accessed 23/08/2021).

**Women and girls: armed conflict, economic deterioration, displacement, and the COVID-19 crisis have a disproportionate impact on girls and women in Afghanistan.** Women and girls are exposed to gender-based violence, including early/forced marriage, partner and family violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence (including rape), denial of resources, emotional/psychological violence, and physical abuse.

Violence against women and girls is an underlying concern in Afghanistan. An estimation projected that 87% of Afghan women will experience at least one form of gender-based violence in their lifetime, with 62% experiencing multiple forms. Older women, divorced and

widowed women and girls, and women and girls with disabilities are increasingly exposed to the denial of resources and economic violence. Violence against women and girls remains underreported owing to a lack of adequate survivor-centred services and stigma (OCHA 19/12/2020).

Despite having made statements guaranteeing women's ability to work and study, there are reports that **the Taliban have started to reimpose patterns of restrictions on women in some areas, including forced marriages (especially concerning young girls) and severe limitations on their freedom of movement** (The Wall Street Journal 12/08/2021; GCR2P 17/08/2021). **Women are at risk of facing severe mobility restrictions and lack of access to services, livelihoods, and education.** In some districts under Taliban control, women are not allowed to leave their homes without a male escort (*mahram*) and are required to wear the hijab outside their homes. There is fear that refusal to abide by such rules might imply severe consequences, including death (OHCHR 10/08/2021; India Today 09/08/2021). The lack of protection and gender-based violence services is pervasive in Afghanistan and is likely to worsen under Taliban rule (The New Humanitarian 16/12/2020).

**People with disabilities:** 80% of Afghan adults live with some form of disability – almost 14% with a severe form – and more women have a disability than men (The Asia Foundation 13/05/2020). There are insufficient services, centres, and support to care for people with disabilities or increase their access to mainstream services such as healthcare. **There are concerns that Taliban control over Afghanistan will see the suspension of existing programmes and funding, which will increase the vulnerability of this group.** In addition to pre-existing disabilities, conflict-related injuries causing disability may have increased. Although NGOs offer services for people with disabilities in Kabul, these are limited across the rest of the country, as access in rural areas was challenging even before conflict escalation. The situation is particularly concerning for people who do not have family members to take care of them (KII 17/08/2021).

**The Hazara ethnic minority: the fate of the Hazara ethnic minority is unclear with the Taliban taking over Afghanistan.** During Taliban rule in the 1990s, thousands of Hazara people were subjected to systematic discrimination, targeted attacks, and massacres because they belonged to a different ethnicity, had distinct Asiatic features, used a Persian dialect, and practised Shia Islam (The Indian Express 23/08/2021). **Despite initial declarations of no discrimination against Shia Muslims, Taliban fighters brutally killed nine ethnic Hazara men after taking control of Ghazni province in July** (Amnesty International 19/08/2021).

There are 14 ethnic groups in Afghanistan: Arab, Aymaq, Baluch, Brahwui, Gujur, Hazara, Nuristani, Pachaie, Pashtun, Qirghiz, Qizilbash, Tajik, Turkman, and Uzbek. The majority of Afghans (including the Taliban) belong to the Pashtun ethnicity. The Hazara ethnic group accounts for 10–12% of the country's population. They are concentrated in central Afghanistan, particularly in the Bamyán province. In the 18th and 19th centuries, they used to

constitute more than 65% of the population of the country; because of violence, oppression, and targeted massacres, that number has decreased drastically (DH 18/08/2021; The Indian Express 23/08/2021).

## Shelter and NFIs

**About 6.6 million people were in need of shelter and NFI assistance at the start of 2021**, up from 3.6 million in 2020. Shelter needs have been increasing, driven by the drought, floods, continuing insecurity, economic decline, and COVID-19 (OCHA 09/01/2021 and 17/12/2019).

**Shelter needs increase as more people are being displaced.** For newly displaced people, immediate shelter needs include cash-for-rent assistance, tents, and tarpaulins (OCHA 15/08/2021). Some have found shelter in public buildings and are in urgent need of additional aid (UN 19/08/2021).

**About one-third of IDPs live in significantly damaged or destroyed shelters.** There are more than 1,148 informal settlements characterised by congested conditions and limited access to WASH, health, and social services (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021). High rents and the constant threat of eviction by landlords are also factors leading people to live in unfit shelters. In Parwan province, 60% of households could not afford rent between July–December 2020 (IOM 02/05/2021).

## Education

**The main challenges related to education are availability of and access to facilities and attacks targeted against schools.** As the economic situation worsens, some families have resorted to negative coping mechanisms such as child labour and early and forced marriage, which cause children to drop out of school. **At the beginning of the year, about 1.6 million boys and one million girls were projected to need education assistance in 2021** (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021). **After the change of power, access to education for girls is a major concern** (UNESCO 18/08/2021).

**Access to education:** conflict, poverty, displacement, and COVID-19 have disrupted education for around ten million children across Afghanistan since October 2019. School closures, attacks on schools, absence of adequate remote learning tools, and the inadequate number of schools and teachers are limiting children's access to education. Education facilities are lacking, especially in higher population density areas. Helmand province has one school for every 3,800 school-aged children. Higher education schools, such as vocational training, literacy programmes, and universities, are concentrated in urban areas. Across the IDP, returnee, and refugee populations, 67% of school-aged girls and 55% of school-aged boys

were out of school prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. As at December 2020, the highest numbers of out-of-school children were found in Nangarhar (119,000 children), Kandahar (111,500), and Badghis (95,000) (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021; IOM 02/05/2021).

**Targeted attacks:** schools and public facilities are frequently the targets of armed groups, increasing humanitarian needs and decreasing the availability of and access to services (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021). About 70 attacks in 2019 and 62 attacks in 2020 included damage to school buildings, killing, injuring, or abduction of teachers, and threats against education facilities and personnel (IOM 02/05/2021; UN SC 16/07/2021).

## WASH

**Access to sufficient and affordable safe water, adequate sanitation, solid waste management, and/or hygiene supplies is a challenge for around 73% of the population living in rural areas.** IDPs, returnees, refugees, disaster-affected people, and those living in conflict-prone and rural areas are the groups most exposed to risks from unsafe water sources, lack of hygiene, and inadequate sanitation facilities. **The volatile security situation and the change of power may impose humanitarian access constraints that could further disrupt the delivery of WASH services.**

**Access to water:** only about **65% of the Afghan population has access to safe drinking water from improved sources** (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021; IOM 02/05/2021). Nearly 19% of the population gets drinking water from open wells, and more than 13% uses rivers, canals, or streams, increasing the risk of disease outbreaks (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021; IOM 02/05/2021). Zabul province has the most acute need for drinking water, with 70% of its population lacking access to it. Nimroz province is the most affected by shortages in overall water supply for drinking, agriculture, and livestock (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021; IOM 02/05/2021). In May 2021, the precipitation level in Hirat was 40.8mm, which is significantly below the normal range. In the Qadis district in Badghis province, a shortage of drinking water has been reported in May and is yet to be resolved (OCHA 19/08/2021).

**Sanitation: more than 70% of Afghanistan's population in rural areas lacks access to safe water and sanitation services.** About 45% of people in rural areas lack access to latrines, and open defecation is seven times more common than in urban areas. Afghans struggle to access health services because of an insufficient number of health facilities, high costs, and safety issues related to accessing available ones (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021). 45% of Afghans are unable to access proper latrines. Nuristan province, followed by Parwan and Jawzjan, have the highest needs for latrines, with the majority of the population lacking sanitation facilities and over one in four practising open defecation (IOM 02/05/2021).



## AGGRAVATING FACTORS

After decades of conflict, recurrent natural disasters, the economic crisis, and COVID-19, the coping capacity of the affected population is likely to be very low. Any further aggravation will have a significant impact on the humanitarian situation.

### Climate change

**Afghanistan is highly prone to natural disasters, and climate change is increasing their frequency and intensity.** The country is widely considered unprepared to deal with climatic shocks and extremely vulnerable to climate change. Drought was a major driver of humanitarian needs in 2018, early 2019, and again in 2021. Heavy rainfall caused unseasonal flooding in atypical locations in 2021. Chronic poverty and the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in further hardship (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021).

### Drought

**Afghanistan officially declared a drought emergency on 22 June 2021, after experiencing increasingly strained water resources as a result of below-average rainfall and snowfall since October 2020.** More than three million Afghans are likely to be affected, as people rely on rain-fed agriculture, livestock, and natural pastures as a source of livelihood. Cases of increased conflict over water were reported in various communities (IRC 16/06/2021; IFRC 12/07/2021; NRC 09/06/2021). **This is Afghanistan's second drought in four years.** In 2018, drought affected 22 out of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, and around 10.5 million people were severely affected out of the 17 million population of the 22 provinces (FAO 12/02/2020). Drought forced people to displace, accumulate debt, deplete coping mechanisms, and adopt harmful ones. Agriculture will be affected by the low precipitation and drought conditions, increasing food prices and food insecurity rates (IRC 16/06/2021; IFRC 12/07/2021; NRC 09/06/2021).

**People's livelihoods suffer as a result of drought, especially those associated with rain-fed and irrigated agriculture/livestock.** Below-average precipitation has deteriorated wheat production, plantation, pasture conditions, and fodder availability. The country's wheat crop will be reduced by nearly two million tons this year, and more than three million livestock are at risk of death because of the lack of fodder and water (IRC 16/06/2021; FEWS NET 07/2021). The current drought conditions are likely to have a significant impact on more than three million people in northern and western Afghanistan, with millions more affected across the country (NRC 09/06/2021).

### Flooding

**Despite the arid, low-precipitation nature of Afghanistan, flood risk is common because of poor infrastructure** (The Washington Post 29/07/2021). Flooding regularly affects various parts of Afghanistan, with the northern and eastern regions affected the most. Flash flooding and land and mudslides are of particular concern. About 334,700 people are estimated to be annually affected by flooding in Afghanistan, with a USD 411.1 million impact on gross domestic product (World Bank 08/12/2020). Heavy rainfall caused unseasonal flooding in atypical locations in 2021.

**As at 28 July, floods have affected more than 28,000 people in Afghanistan in 2021; the most affected areas are Badghis, Herat, and Nangarhar provinces** (OCHA 15/08/2021). Recent flooding affected the eastern province of Nuristan. About 110 deaths were reported, and many people are still missing (Al Jazeera 01/08/2021). The needs of people affected and the extent of damage are unclear. In May, heavy rains and flash floods affected several provinces – especially Badakhshan, Baghlan, Bamyán, Daikundi, Ghor, Herat, Khost, Maidan Wardak, and Samangan. At least 37 people were killed and 100 injured, 163 houses were damaged or destroyed, and 1,000 people were displaced. Roads and irrigation canals were destroyed, and livestock lost (ECHO 05/05/2021; AP 04/05/2021; India Today 05/05/2021).

Flooding affected about 274,500 people between January–November 2019, compared to 76,600 people during the same period in 2020 (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021).

### COVID-19

COVID-19 spreads in the time of increasing violence, which is posing significant challenges to containment efforts and preventative measures. Health organisations have been deeply concerned about the violence escalation and its impact on people's ability to access health services and assistance, particularly among displaced people, returnee and nomadic populations, and people living in hard-to-reach areas (OCHA and WHO 29/07/2021).

**Afghanistan's fragile healthcare system has been heavily affected by the unprecedented spread of the pandemic.** The third wave of the outbreak that started in mid-June impacted the country gravely because of low testing rates, shortage of oxygen supplies, hospital beds, and medical supplies, the low number of health workers and medical staff, and low vaccination rates. As at 20 August, there were at least 152,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 7,000 COVID-19-associated deaths (WHO accessed 21/08/2021). At least 93 deaths have been reported among healthcare workers. Only around 700,000 tests have been conducted and 1.8 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine administered (WHO accessed 22/08/2021). Numbers might be underreported, as testing capacity is low, and there are no accurate death registers (NPR 02/07/2021).

More than ten cases of black fungus – a rare infection that is triggered by COVID-19 treatments and has a 50% mortality rate – have been reported in the country as at the end of July (Wiley 31/07/2021; NPR 02/07/2021; BBC 09/05/2021).

## Endemic poverty

**Poverty rates will likely increase as the Taliban take over the country.** Between 2012–2017, while the security situation deteriorated and the Taliban insurgency grew in Afghanistan, the proportion of Afghans living on the poverty line increased from 38% to 55% (Reuters 07/05/2018). In 2020, about half of Afghanistan's population was living below the national poverty line, roughly equivalent to \$1 per day (ADB accessed 23/08/2021). The figure might be underreported because of conflict and lack of proper resources in Afghanistan, which have prevented the government from conducting a nationwide census and compromise efficient poverty planning (CEGA accessed 03/08/2021). About 93% of the population is predicted to be living on less than \$2 per day in 2021 (OCHA 19/12/2020).

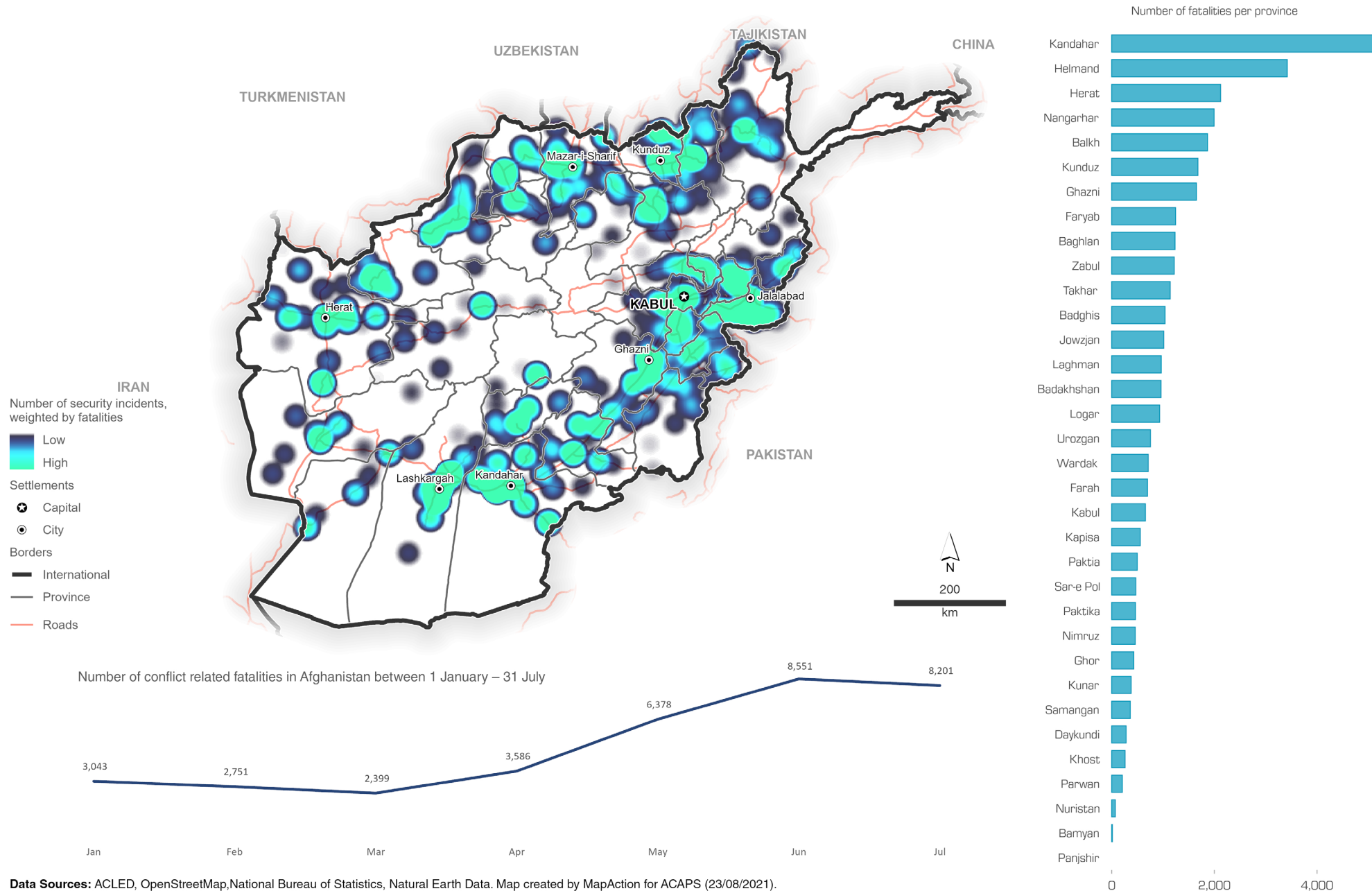
**More than 30 million people require social assistance to prevent the development of more acute humanitarian needs.** Armed conflict escalation, climatic disasters, and the COVID-19 pandemic have aggravated the poverty situation. People in rural areas, women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities are the most vulnerable to falling under the poverty line. People in urban areas, where movement restrictions were more strictly enforced, were disproportionately affected by COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020. In the same year, 42% of Afghan households adopted emergency-level livelihood coping strategies (compared to 16% in 2019) such as child labour and early marriage to offset financial burdens, putting children at increased risk (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 09/01/2021).

## Narcotics

**The risk of drug-related incidents and violence might increase again in the region, with the Taliban coming into power.** Trafficking in narcotics surged in 2020 in areas under Taliban control. Opium cultivation increased and expanded in 2020. It has been estimated that 6–11% of Afghanistan's gross domestic product is contributed by the opium economy (UNODC 03/05/2021; Money Control 14/08/2021). The expansion of Taliban control will likely lead to narcotic trade activities increasingly becoming a source of income as the country faces an economic and humanitarian crisis (Al Jazeera 16/08/2021).



## Number of conflict related fatalities in Afghanistan between 1 January – 31 July

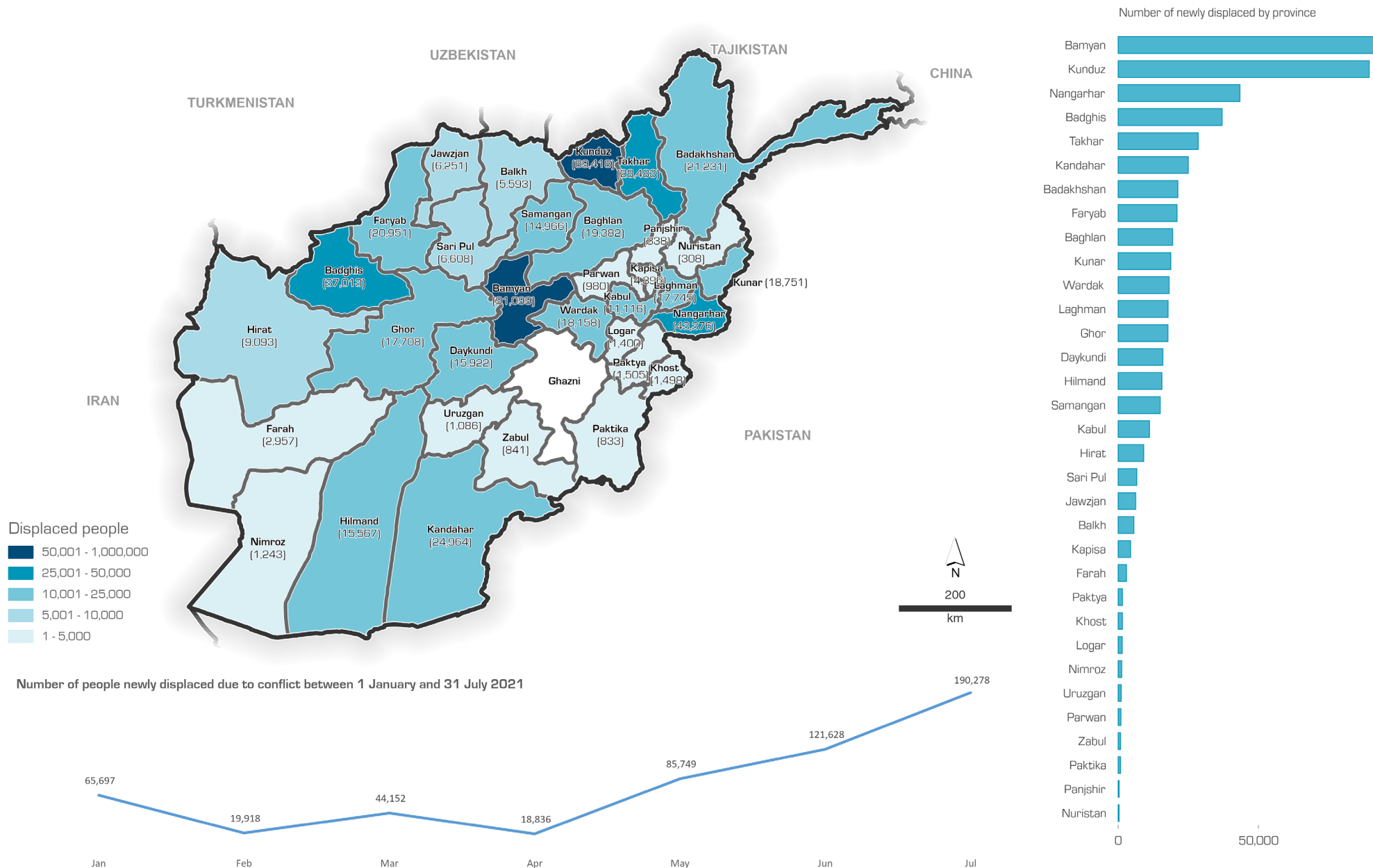


Data Sources: ACLED, OpenStreetMap, National Bureau of Statistics, Natural Earth Data. Map created by MapAction for ACAPS (23/08/2021).



# Afghanistan

## Conflict induced displacements between 1 January and 31 July 2021



Data Sources: OpenStreetMap, National Bureau of Statistics, Natural Earth Data, OCHA. Map created by MapAction for ACAPS (23/08/2021)

**Afghanistan: People affected by flood events from 26 January to 28 July 2021**

